

Public value, citizen expectations and user commitment



A literature review

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Aims of The Work Foundation project

Building on existing academic and policy work around public value, The Work Foundation's project aims to help policymakers, public managers and institutions understand the concept of public value and see how it can be applied in practice.

Public value addresses many of the contemporary concerns facing public managers. These include problems of securing legitimacy for decision making, resource allocation and measuring service outcomes. This research project draws together different strands of the current debate around public value, clarifies its elements and seeks to further understanding of this topical and important conceptual innovation in public service delivery.

The project's objectives are to:

- provide a clear definition of public value
- provide public managers with a set of guiding principles that orient institutions to the creation of public value
- use sector and case studies to illustrate how organisations might understand where gaps occur in achieving public value
- clarify the components and processes of public value in order to facilitate its future capture and measurement.

Sponsors

The project is sponsored by the following organisations:

- BBC
- The Capita Group plc
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- Home Office
- London Borough of Lewisham
- Metropolitan Police
- OfCOM
- Quality and Improvement Agency (formerly the Learning and Skills Development Agency)
- Royal Opera House.
- The NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement (formerly the NHS Modernisation Agency)

About this paper

This paper is one of several background reports being prepared for the public value sponsor group. The research outputs include:

- *Public Value, Politics and Public Management: A literature review*
- *Public Value and Local Communities: A literature review*
- Sector papers, seminars and presentations on how public value applies to different sectors like local government, policing, skills, broadcasting, arts and culture, and health

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- Case studies examining how public value applies to different institutions, ranging from Lancashire Constabulary to the V&A Museum, and as a way of understanding particular local policy issues, such as recycling in Lewisham
- Papers on measurement, exploring how social scientists have operationalised the concept of public value and applied it in a variety of diverse settings. These also examine how public managers are currently measuring public value, the gaps in information, difficulties around decision making, and how a public value framework can resolve these issues.

Please note that the views expressed in this report represent those of the authors and may not necessarily represent those of the project's sponsors.

Executive summary

- This paper reviews the existing evidence on user satisfaction with and citizen expectations of public services. It highlights the so-called 'delivery paradox', where satisfaction with services is not rising in line with delivery improvements. The paper explains why the delivery paradox exists across many services before concluding with an analysis of how a public value approach can help policymakers and public managers overcome it.

Section 1: Public views of public services

- What do we know about what the public thinks? Research shows that satisfaction with public services has remained static, despite service improvements. Expectations of improvement remain low, as does the public's trust in politicians and public managers to deliver such improvement. Yet the public remains committed to the basic values of universality, equity and accountability even if people want public services to treat them more like consumers.
- With the exception of the police and the education service, the public is consistent in its expectations that services will not improve under the current government.
- There is an overwhelming perception among the public that public services need to improve. Ninety per cent of those surveyed in July 2004 for an ICM poll agreed strongly with the statement that: 'We urgently need to improve the quality of public services'. Eighty per cent agreed with the statement that: 'I will only believe that public services are improving if I see it with my own eyes.' However, perceptions do not match real delivery improvements. Of the following facts about public service, only:
 - 20 per cent agreed that crime is falling
 - 22 per cent agreed that there are thousands more teachers
 - 36 per cent agreed that there is faster access to treatment in NHS hospitals than in previous years.
- Satisfaction with most services has remained static over the last few years. Eighty-four per cent of recent patients, 58 per cent of crime victims and 84 per cent of parents of primary school-age children say that they are satisfied with the services they receive from their GP, the police or their local school. Satisfaction with public services is higher locally than nationally for all public services. In a MORI poll in 2004, 78 per cent of the public were 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with their GPs in their local area, compared with 70 per cent in Britain as a whole.
- The public remains committed to the core values of public services: universality, equity and accountability. Eighty-five per cent agree that public services should be funded by the taxpayer and free at the point of use. Only 34 per cent agree strongly or tend to agree that what matters is the quality of services in their local area and that they are not interested in what is

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happening elsewhere. Sixty per cent tend to disagree or strongly disagree with this view.

- The most important drivers of trust in public services are whether services meet individuals' needs (55 per cent) and how staff treat them (53 per cent). The least important drivers are what is said about public services in the media (16 per cent) and what family and friends tell you about the service.
- Opinions are formed via a number of sources. People claimed that they got a lot of information about public services – compared with a little or none at all – from national TV news (52 per cent) and TV documentaries (49 per cent) compared with relatives/friends' experiences (34 per cent) or their own experiences (43 per cent).
- Thirty-six per cent of the public felt that high-profile incidents that raised questions about the quality and reliability of public services undermined their trust in the specific public services involved, compared with 28 per cent that considered them to be rare, one-off events that did not affect their trust.
- Only 48 per cent of the public trust their council, compared to their local police force (74 per cent) and hospital (79 per cent). With regard to individuals, trustworthiness and honesty are the most highly rated qualities of public officials, but only 22 per cent believe that they are actually trustworthy and honest.
- The public is strongly in favour of having choice over specific services; principally a choice of school for children with special needs (43 per cent) and choice of support for elderly people living in their own home (42 per cent). However, most people are not prepared to pay more for choice. Only 23 per cent said that they would be happy to pay more tax to allow people a greater choice of school compared with 70 per cent who said they would not.
- The evidence on the demand for greater voice in public services is mixed, inconsistent or contradictory. For example, some surveys found that only 17 per cent of the public would help their council plan and deliver its services, whereas another found that 70 per cent of the public would be likely to get involved in a meeting where they could set local council budgets with councillors. Research also concludes that the public says they are keen to participate in the design and delivery of services, but reluctant to do so through existing mechanisms.
- Thirty-seven per cent of the public interviewed in a MORI poll for BBC Radio 4 agreed that private companies should not be involved in providing public services under any circumstances, compared to 42 per cent who believe they should. However, 81 per cent wanted public services to start treating users as consumers, and 79 per cent wanted public services to start treating them as consumers in the same way that the private sector does.

Section 2: Delivering responsiveness

- The orientation of public services to the user as 'consumer' raises questions about the relationship between the citizen and the state, as well as about the mechanisms for overcoming the delivery paradox like choice, exit, voice and the role of the private sector in service provision.
- One explanation for this paradox may be the lack of belief or objective knowledge of service improvements among the public. Yet this cannot be overcome by simply communicating these facts better to an unknowing public. How the public evaluates a public service is determined by existing knowledge, experience, perceptions and impressions of local and national services, by the individuals delivering those services, as well as by an individual's own values and opinions about government in general.
- That said, policymakers and public managers should treat this paradox with some caution before worrying unduly about why the paradox exists. The reasons for this are two-fold:
 - Satisfaction measures are not entirely reliable as drivers of service responsiveness or improvement indicators. This report finds much evidence to support this. For example, surveys often focus on how well a service is received rather than on what that service should provide. Service characteristics can also affect perceptions of that service. For example, increased satisfaction does not correlate with improvements in services that are used frequently by the same users, such as with public transport. The public can be ostensibly satisfied with an organisation, despite a large number of complaints about the kinds of public services it provides. Research also shows that how well informed people feel about an institution is correlated with higher satisfaction, but this does not say anything about objective service improvement or the institution's effectiveness.
 - Satisfaction may be an inappropriate goal when service reforms are aimed at increasing safety, efficiency or redistribution, or when reforms are unpalatable or seeking to dampen demand, eg in the case of benefit reform. Instead, research suggests that it is more appropriate to use satisfaction data when an organisation is seeking to understand user priorities for service improvement, to benchmark performance and to help set targets. A more subtle, nuanced understanding of satisfaction is clearly required before public managers sit too comfortably – or rest uneasily – on service satisfaction ratings.

Section 4: Managing public expectations

- Satisfaction is not the only indicator of what the public values. Other indicators – such as public expectations of a service before it is delivered – could help public service providers see where expectations are likely to exceed available provision or lead to an under-supply of that service.
- Many factors shape an individual's expectation of what a service should provide, including need, previous experience, values and reputation of a service and government. These are similar to satisfaction drivers. However, as indicators of public value, satisfaction and expectations tend to behave differently, as well as having their own complex inter-relationship.
- As with satisfaction, managing the public's expectations of a service can become an agenda all of its own. For example, the 'reassurance' agenda in policing, which seeks to reduce the fear of crime rather than levels of actual crime. The context for each situation is crucial when considering the direction in which expectations need to be managed. If expectations are too low, then they can reinforce disillusionment with a service provider. If they are too high, then they can be dashed by poor experiences. Service improvement, satisfaction and expectations, and the story they tell between them, all require a public manager's attention if they are to be used more effectively to help reform services.

Section 5: Mechanisms for responsiveness

- Choice and voice, alongside target setting and contracting-out services to the voluntary or private sector, are all mechanisms currently being used to improve public services; with service improvement, satisfaction and expectations potential indicators of their relative success.
- In theory, choice in public services should allow users to exert an influence over who, what, when or how a service is provided and to 'exit' if it does not meet their needs. Examples of choice in operation include choice-based letting, direct payments in social care and the choose-and-book system for NHS appointments. In practice, choice has to be specified tightly because people are bound by money, location or information, or even their physical or mental wellbeing. Moreover, scarce public resources are unable to meet unlimited public wants.
- Improving the opportunities for users to have a voice in how services are delivered is a further mechanism for improving services and one that shifts accountability towards local service providers. Improving voice also helps to reconnect people with the institutions providing services. Examples of enhanced voice for service users include consultation exercises and forums, eg community safety forums that work with under-represented groups, local authorities and the police, as well as workshops with local communities and user/interest group campaigns, such as the Putting Breast Cancer on the

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Map campaign that gave women suffering from breast cancer a voice on the relative neglect of research into the illness.

- However, while voice may have democratic validity in its own right, it may also have limits as a mechanism for addressing poor performance. Where voice accords no real power or weight to what users have to say, it can result in consultation fatigue. Equally, where voice does have power and weight, it may result in unrepresentative groups taking control of the decision-making process. Improved complaints systems often favour the educated and articulate, and not necessarily those whose complaints are more serious. Achieving workable mechanisms that allow users' voices to be heard and acted on can thus be a time consuming challenge for public managers. As a result, choice increasingly appears to be the preferred mechanism of the government for improving services.

Conclusion

- The report concludes that the delivery paradox between satisfaction, expectations and performance cannot be explained or overcome by reducing service users to mere consumers. The paradox exists because users are also citizens, who derive value from a service because of how others are using it and how it is provided. A public value approach regards these as key sources of value on which service reform should be based, and signals the need for a significant shift away from a narrow pre-occupation with satisfaction ratings.

Introduction

Public value holds that public services should provide what the public values and do so efficiently. By carefully interacting with the authorisation environment – the public, politicians, stakeholders such as trade unions and other organisations on which delivery depends – in which the service operates, providers discover and orient to the citizen/consumer. In this way, goals and plans, delivery and evaluation all draw on a richer understanding of public preferences than is afforded by other approaches to public service reform.

Current attempts to orient services to public wishes and needs concentrate on increasing user satisfaction. In the choice agenda for reform, the relation between service users and providers is increasingly one of consumer and producer. The relative lack of public service responsiveness when compared to the private sector leads to the expanded use of consumer power as a driver of public sector change. Empowered consumers are intended to make choices and to exit unresponsive services, thereby forcing providers to change.

As this research review shows, consumer satisfaction is a powerful driver of change. However, it can also deliver confusing messages. Chief among them is what is here termed the 'delivery paradox,' in which objective improvements in service provision fail to register change in consumer satisfaction. Other anomalies appear when we constrain our understanding of the relationship between the individual and the state to that of a consumer. For example, satisfaction differs in regard to services actually received and overall service quality. Service improvements also sometimes stimulate expectations in such a way as to decrease consumer satisfaction. Finally, local service evaluations seldom accord with more global attitudes to governance generally. One of the most consistent findings in this review is that individual attitudes to government regularly contaminate a clear understanding of individual satisfaction with services. Anticipated consumer satisfaction is clouded by volatile public expectations, by the complex ways in which people form opinions and by a seemingly intractable mistrust of government.

Service reform will certainly require empowered consumers, but the public value approach would combine this with empowered citizens. As this review shows, a citizen/consumer cannot be reduced to consumer alone, nor can satisfaction be easily increased merely by improving service quality. This requires both an improvement in service quality and an increased trust in government. With its far greater contact with the authorisation environment, public value is able to combine these elements of consumer and citizen, and so ensure responsiveness of public services to what the public values.

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This review presents survey data on how the public rates the services it receives. Against a backdrop of a general shift to the consumer, customer satisfaction is now the golden metric. Yet problems with the concept and its measurement give rise to contradictory outcomes. This is also the case with public expectations. Finally, we examine choice and voice individually and then as combined levers of change.

1. Public views of public services

This section presents empirical survey data on public views of public services. It begins with general perceptions of public sector organisations. It then goes on to cover:

- satisfaction
- the perception and realities of service delivery and improvement
- expectations of future service delivery and of the principles of public services
- attitudes relating to trust in government and public services
- views on choice, voice and private involvement in public services.

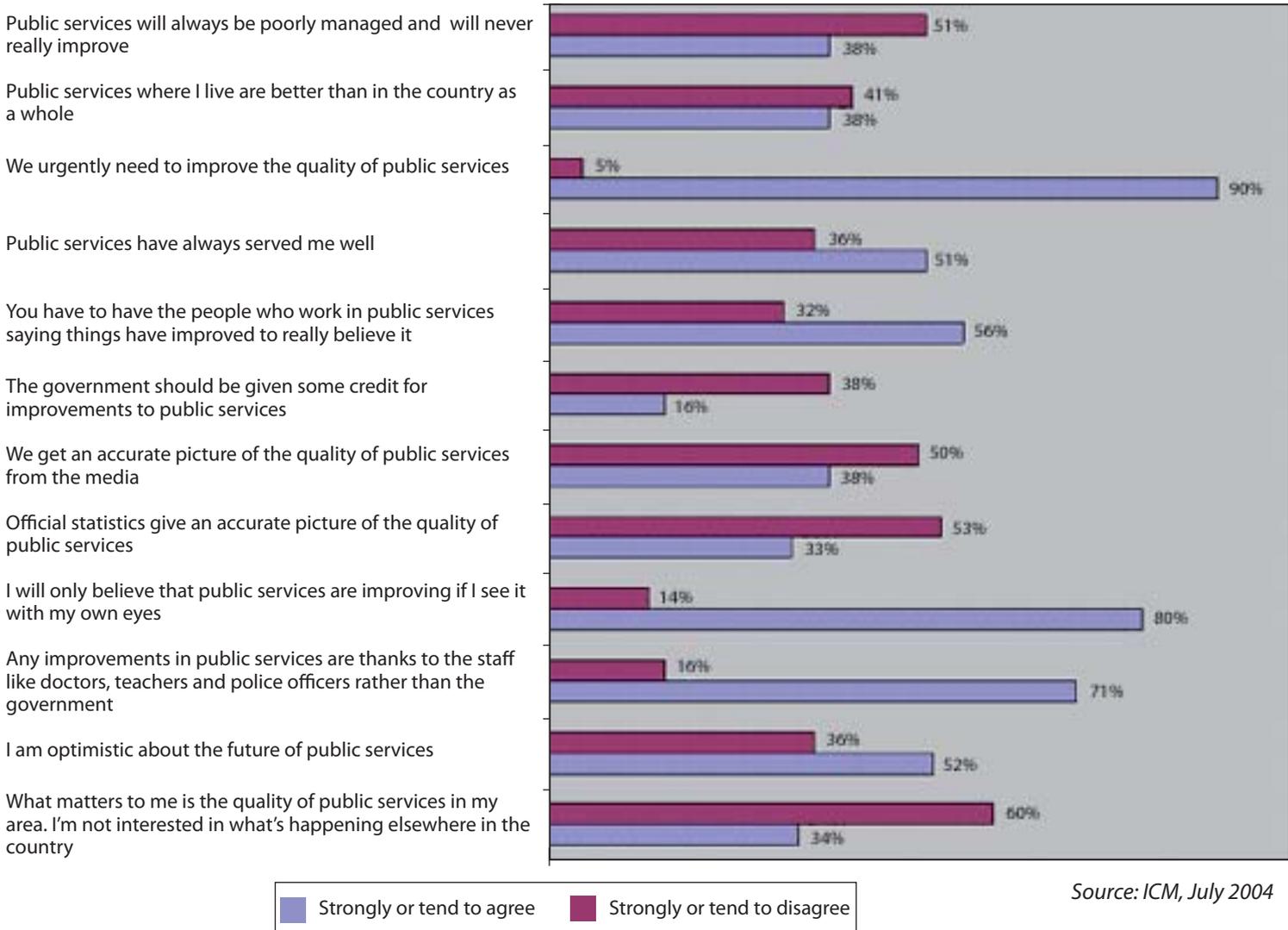
This data is intended to give a general picture of how the public views public services and is analysed in subsequent sections of the review.

1.1 Public attitudes to public services

Of particular note in respect of the public's general attitudes to public services is:

- the overwhelming perception of the need for improvement in service delivery
- a general lack of trust in official, political and media sources of information about the state of public services
- a discrepancy between users' personal experiences of services and their more general appraisals of service quality
- the high esteem in which the public still holds those who work in frontline delivery roles.

Figure 1: Public attitudes to public services



1.2 Satisfaction

Recent research by the Cabinet Office makes clear that satisfaction levels for most public services have remained static, as shown in Table 1 on page 15. Moreover, it suggests levels of satisfaction (and dissatisfaction) correlate to differences in gender, age, ethnicity and educational attainment. Those most satisfied with public services tend to be women, older people and whites, while those most dissatisfied with public services tend to be men, younger people and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

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Table 1: Satisfaction with public services

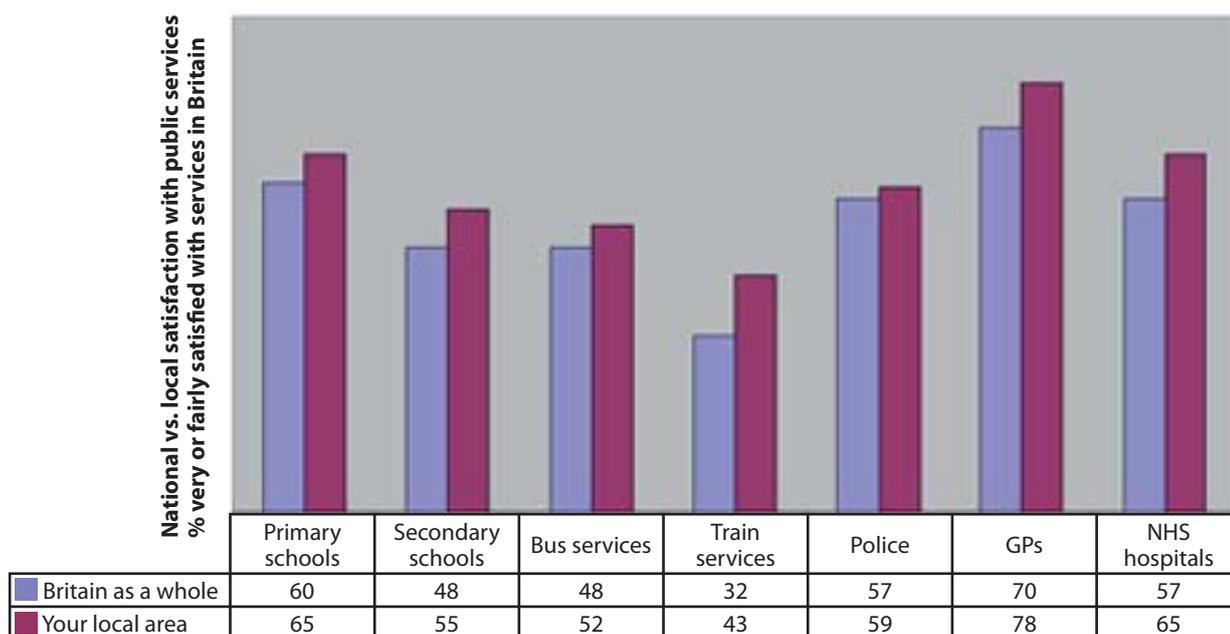
Public service	Customer satisfaction	Direction of change	Key drivers	Most satisfied	Least satisfied
Police a) General public rating	75% think that police are doing a good job (BCS 2002/03)	Down to 2001/2002 level since then ↔		• Older • Women • White	• Unemployed • Men • Younger • BME • Social renters
b) Public initiated contact	66% of members of public who initiate contact are satisfied with contact overall (MORI 2002)	↔	• Quality of treatment by staff • Timelines of appropriate responses • Provision of information	• Older • Women • White	• Younger • Men • BME
c) Victims of crime	In 58% if incidents victims are satisfied (BCS 2003/04)	Down to 2002, broadly level since then ↔		• Older • Women	• Younger • Men • Black • Social renters • Victims of violence & vandalism
Schools a) Parents – primary schools	84% of parents of children at primary school rate primary school education as good (DfES STS Nov 2003)	Some rises in 2002, but plateauing since ↔		• Women	• Men
b) Parents – secondary schools	68% of parents of children at secondary school rate secondary education as good (DfES STS Nov 2003)	Perhaps some rises but less clear cut ↔	In London: • Quality of teaching • Pupil behaviour • Heads and deputies	• C2DE	• ABC1
c) Children	84% Of 7-11 year olds and 72% of 11-16 year olds 'like learning in school' (DfES Jun 2003)			• Girls • Primary • AB	• Boys • Secondary • DE
d) Further education	90% of FE learners satisfied with learning experience (National Learner Satisfaction survey 2002/03)	↔	• Teaching/ training • Choice of course • General facilities	• Women • White • With disabilities • With children	• Younger • Indians/Asians • Those taking GNVQ/A/AS levels
Transport a) Trains	73% of passengers satisfied with their previous journey (SRA NPS Spring 2004)	↔	• Reliability • Delays • Journey time	• Female • Older • DE	• Commuters • London/South East
b) Buses	Average evaluation of previous journey 80 out of 100 (DfT BQIs Q3 2003/04)	↔	• Reliability • Frequency • Vehicle quality	• Female • Older • C2DE	• Younger • ABC1 • Full-time workers • London
c) London underground	Average evaluation of previous journey 78 out of 100 (LU Customer Satisfaction survey Q4 2003/04)	↔	• Journey time • On-train security • Station security		
Health a) GP patients	84% of recent patients satisfied with service on last visit to GP (DH 2003)	↔	• Quality of care • Dialogue with GP's • Appointments	• Older • White British • Left education at 16	• Younger • London BME • Post 16 education
b) In-patients	77% of recent patients satisfied with service on last visit to in-patients (DH 2003)	↑ Small improvement in rating of care	• Quality of care • Admissions arrangements • Explanations	• Older • Men • White British • Left education at 16	• Younger • BME • Women • Post 16 education • London
c) Out-patients	81% of recent patients satisfied with service on last visit to out-patients (DH 2003)	↔		• Older • Men • White British	• Younger • BME • Women • London
d) A&E	71% of recent patients satisfied with service on last visit (DH 2003)	Possible improvement in 2002, plateauing since then ↔		• Older • Men • White British • Left education at 16	• Younger • BME • Women • Post 16 education • London
Local government	55% satisfied with their local authority overall (2003/04 BVPs) Range in terms of satisfaction with services: • 84% satisfied with waste collection • 60% satisfied with cleaning – keeping land free of litter (2003/04 BVPs)	↓	ODPM currently scoping an annual survey to test key drivers of satisfaction with local government	• Older • Female • District council	• Younger • BME • Residents in London boroughs

Source: OPSR, 2004

1.3 National versus local satisfaction with public services

Satisfaction with different public services is higher locally than it is nationally. This finding is true of all public services asked about in a 2004 survey for MORI/the Cabinet Office, and expressed in Figure 2 below.¹

Figure 2: National versus local satisfaction with public services



Source: MORI/Cabinet Office, December 2004

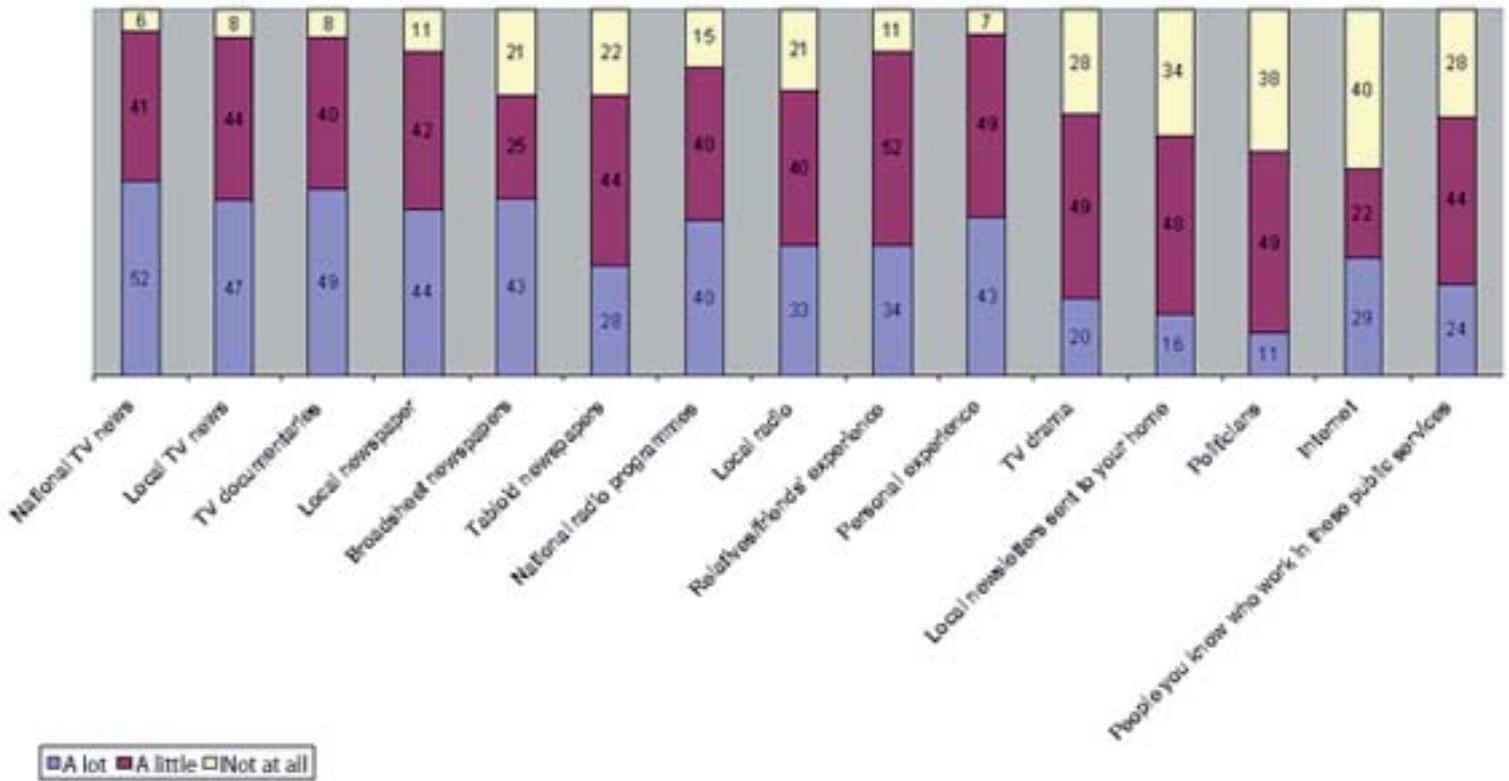
¹ Mortimore R and Gill M, *New Labour and Delivery*, London, MORI, 2004

1.4 Sources of information about public services

The main sources of information about public services reflect a clear emphasis on locality and close experience. Local media is preferred over and above national media, while the most important sources of information remain one’s own experiences or those of close friends and family. The least important source of information about public services is politicians.

Figure 3: Sources of information about public services

How much information would you say you get from each of the following public services?

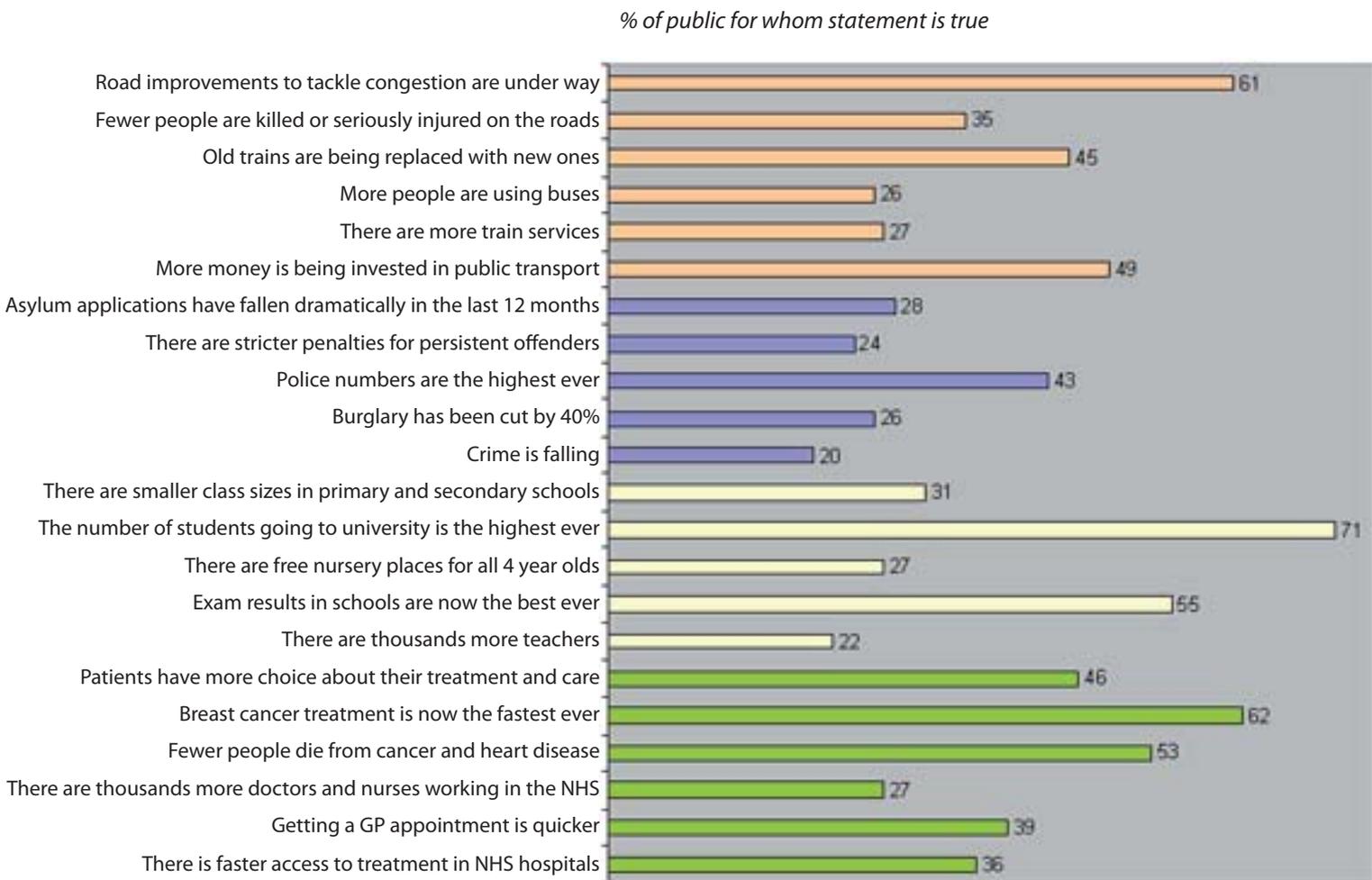


Source: ICM, June 2004

1.5 Perceptions and realities of public service improvement

Most delivery facts about public services are not widely believed by the general public. Seventeen of the 22 'positive' delivery facts presented in Figure 4 are believed by less than half of the public.

Figure 4: Perceptions of public service improvement



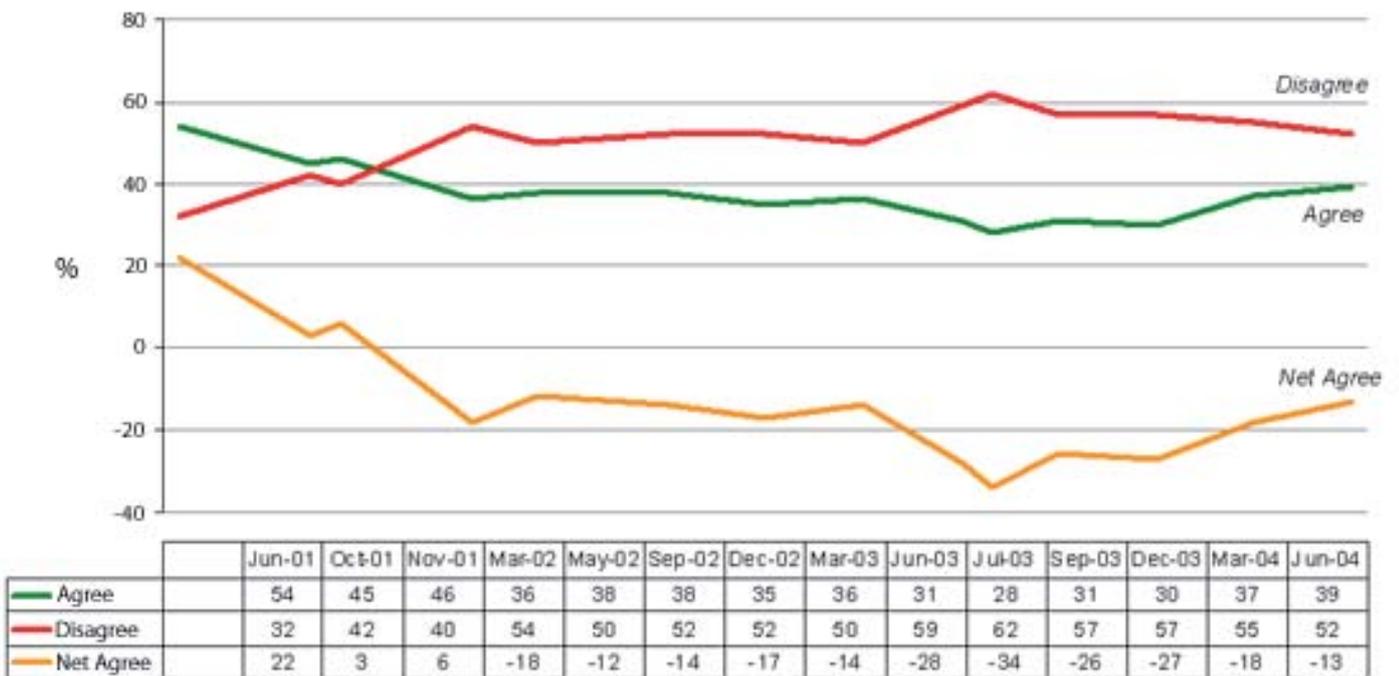
Source: MORI/Cabinet Office, December 2004

1.6 Service delivery expectations

When asked about expectations of future public service delivery, the public has been consistent in its view that public services in the UK are unlikely to improve under the current government.

Figure 5: Service delivery expectations

On balance, do you agree or disagree with the statement that ‘in the long term, this government’s policies will improve the state of Britain’s public services?’

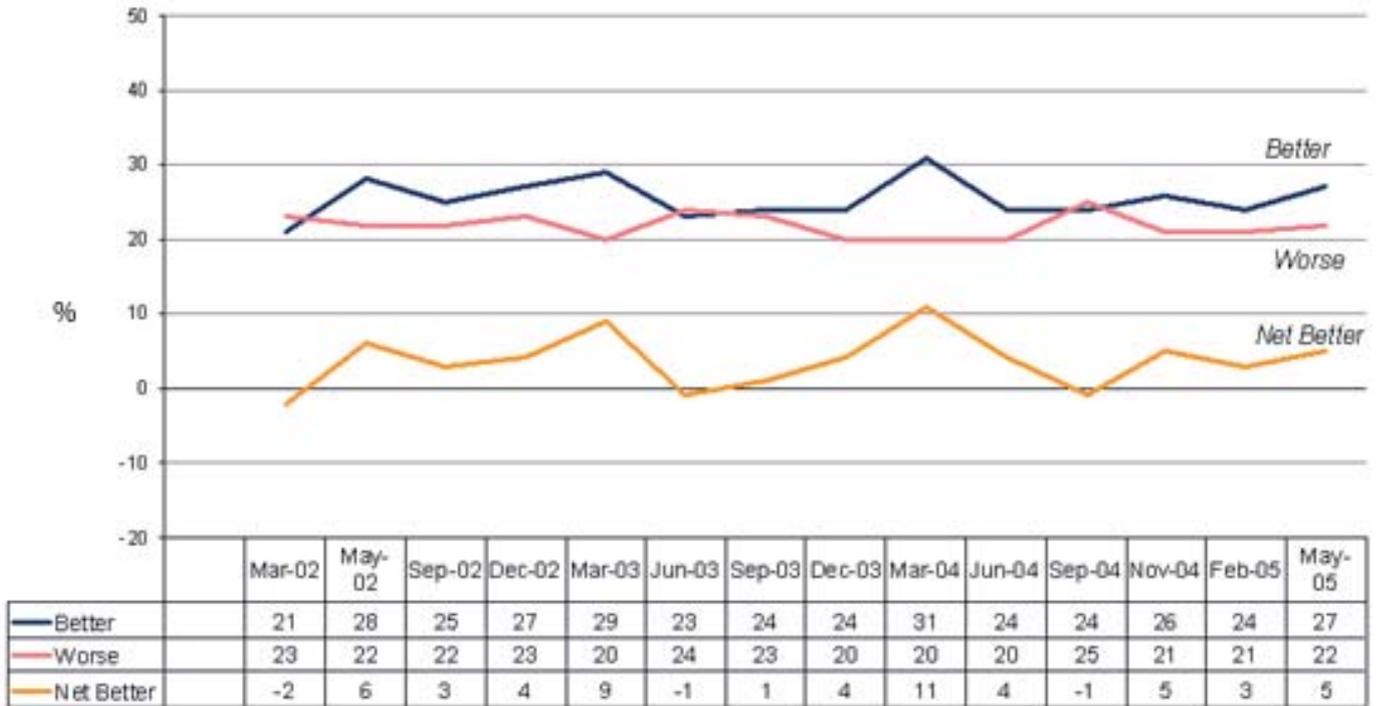


Source: MORI/Public Services Delivery Index

This general view is reflected across a range of individual public services, with only policing and education receiving a relatively consistent level of net positive agreement about service delivery, as the following figures show.

Figure 6: Service expectations around policing

Thinking about the way your area is policed over the next few years do you expect it to be...?



Source: MORI/Public Services Delivery Index

Figure 7: Service expectations around education

Thinking about the quality of education over the next few years do you expect it to be...?



Source: MORI/Public Services Delivery Index

Figure 8: Service expectations around the NHS

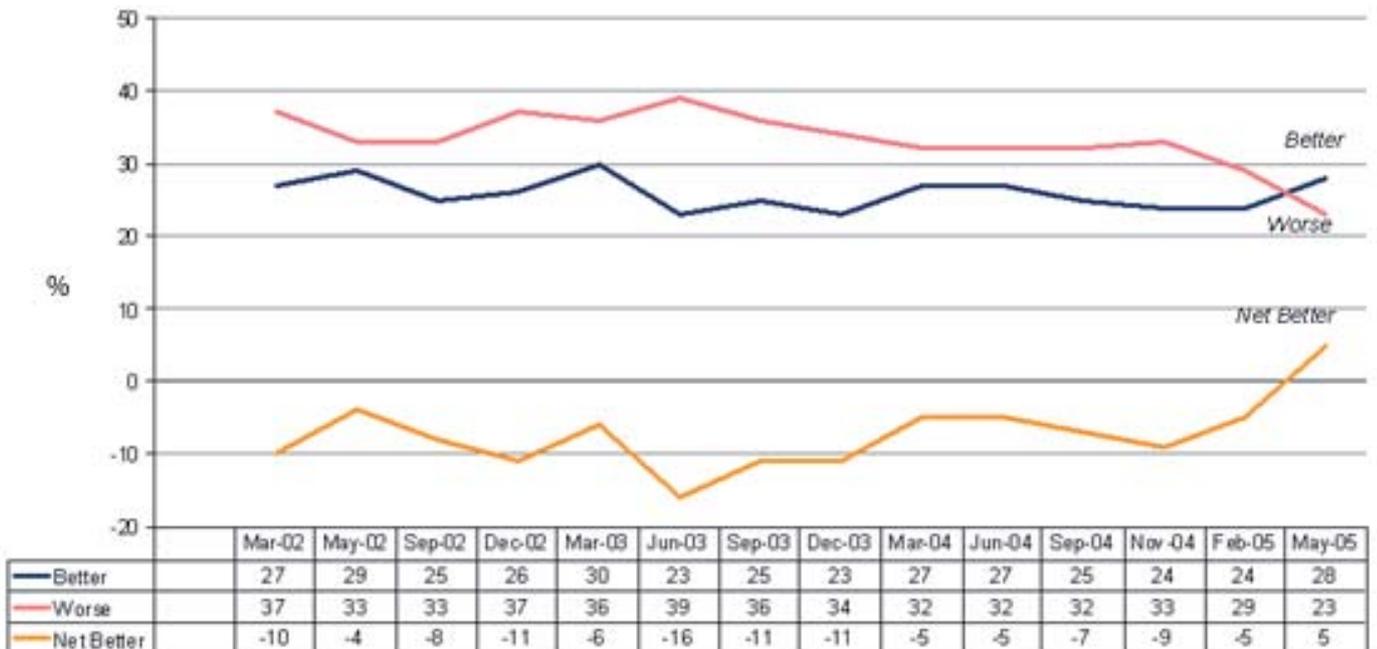
Thinking about the NHS over the next few years do you expect it to be...?



Source: MORI/Public Services Delivery Index

Figure 9: Expectations around public transport

Thinking about public transport over the next few years do you expect it to be...?

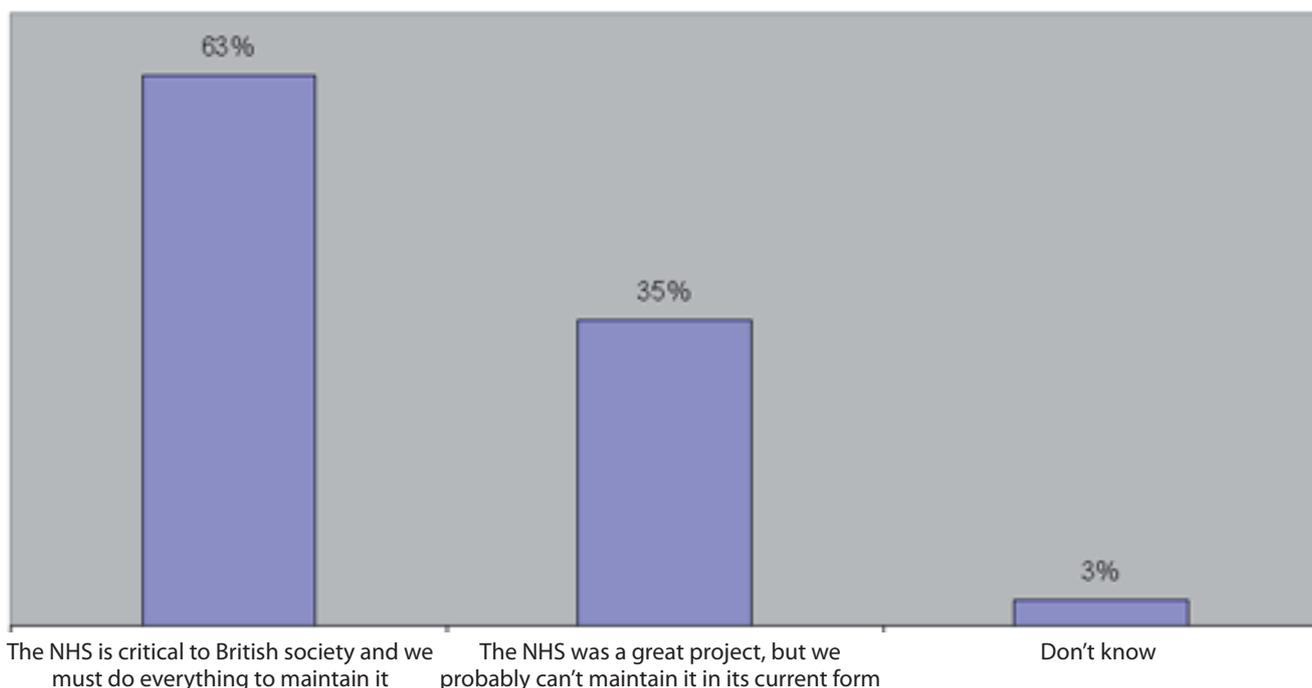


Source: MORI/Public Services Delivery Index

1.7 Commitment to the principles of public service

There is little in the way of recent survey work that directly addresses the public's commitment to the values that might underpin public services. However, it is possible to extract some indicative data from recent surveys that suggests the public remains committed to the core institutions of public service – particularly the NHS – and to the principles of equity and universality.

Figure 10: The public's commitment to the NHS

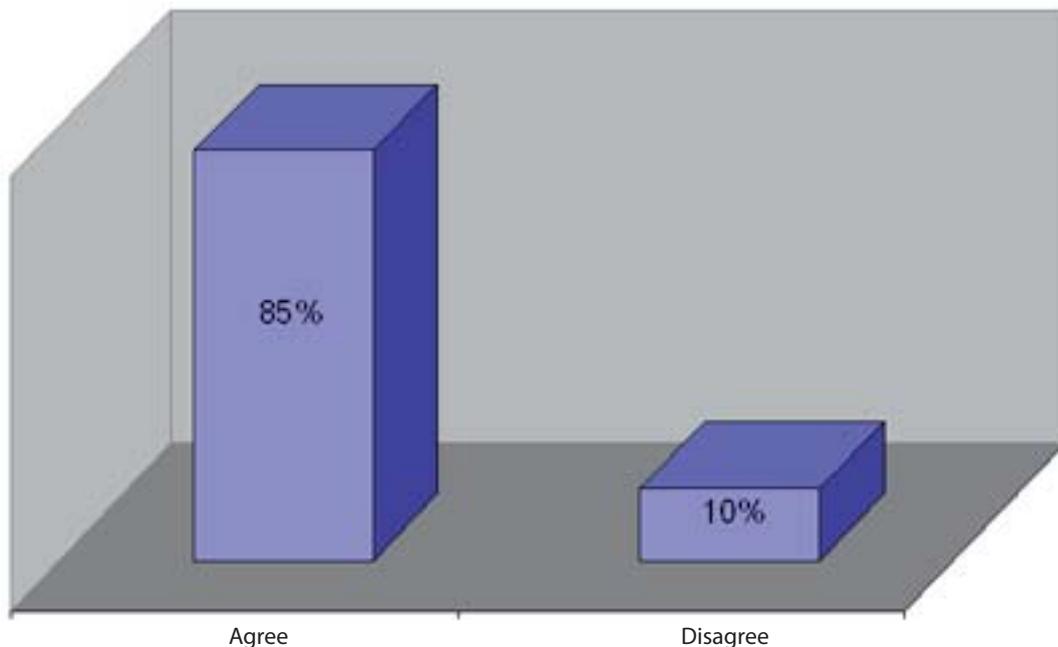


Source: MORI/BBC, Radio 4, July 2004

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Figure 11: The public's commitment to universality and equity

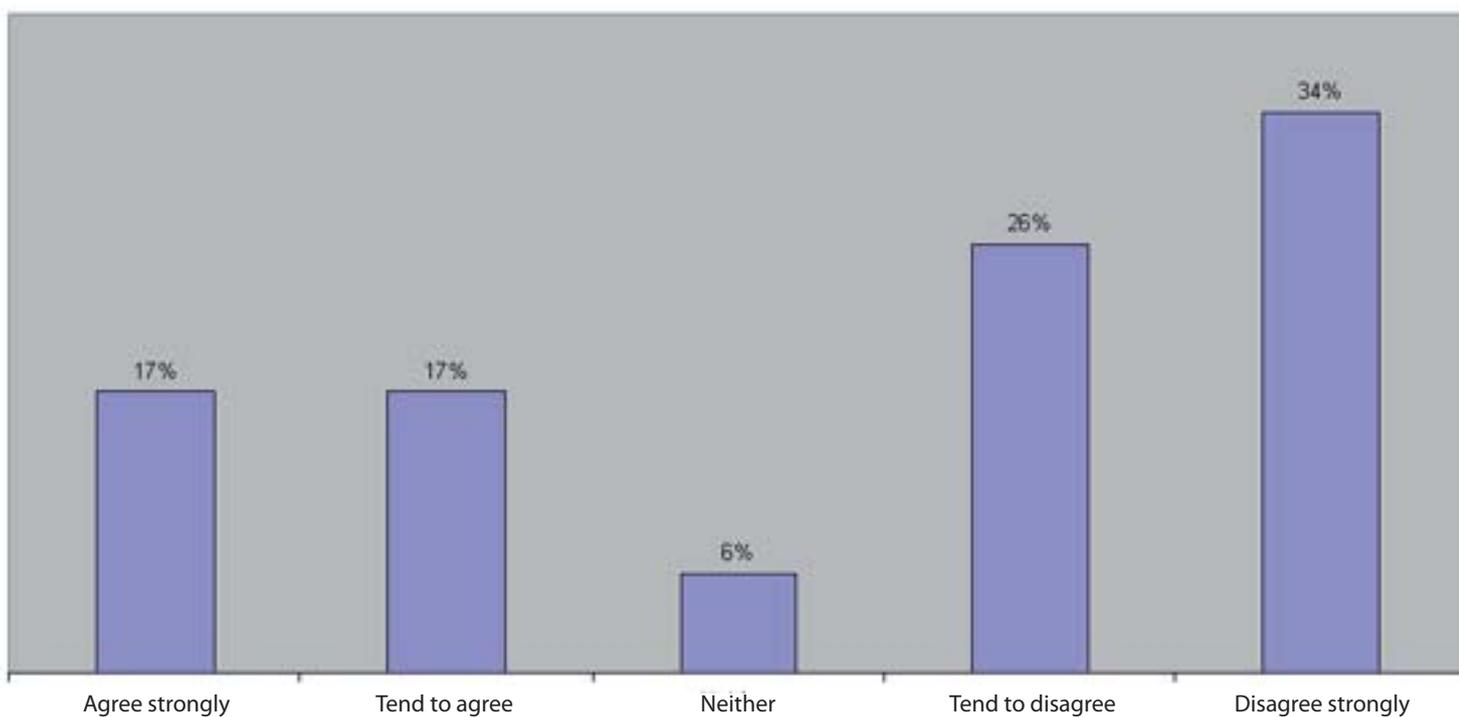
Public services like health and education should be funded by the taxpayer and should be free at the point of use for all citizens



Source: MORI/BBC, Radio 4, July 2004

Figure 12: The public on individual versus collective interest

What matters to me is the quality of public services in my area; I'm not interested in what's happening elsewhere in the country



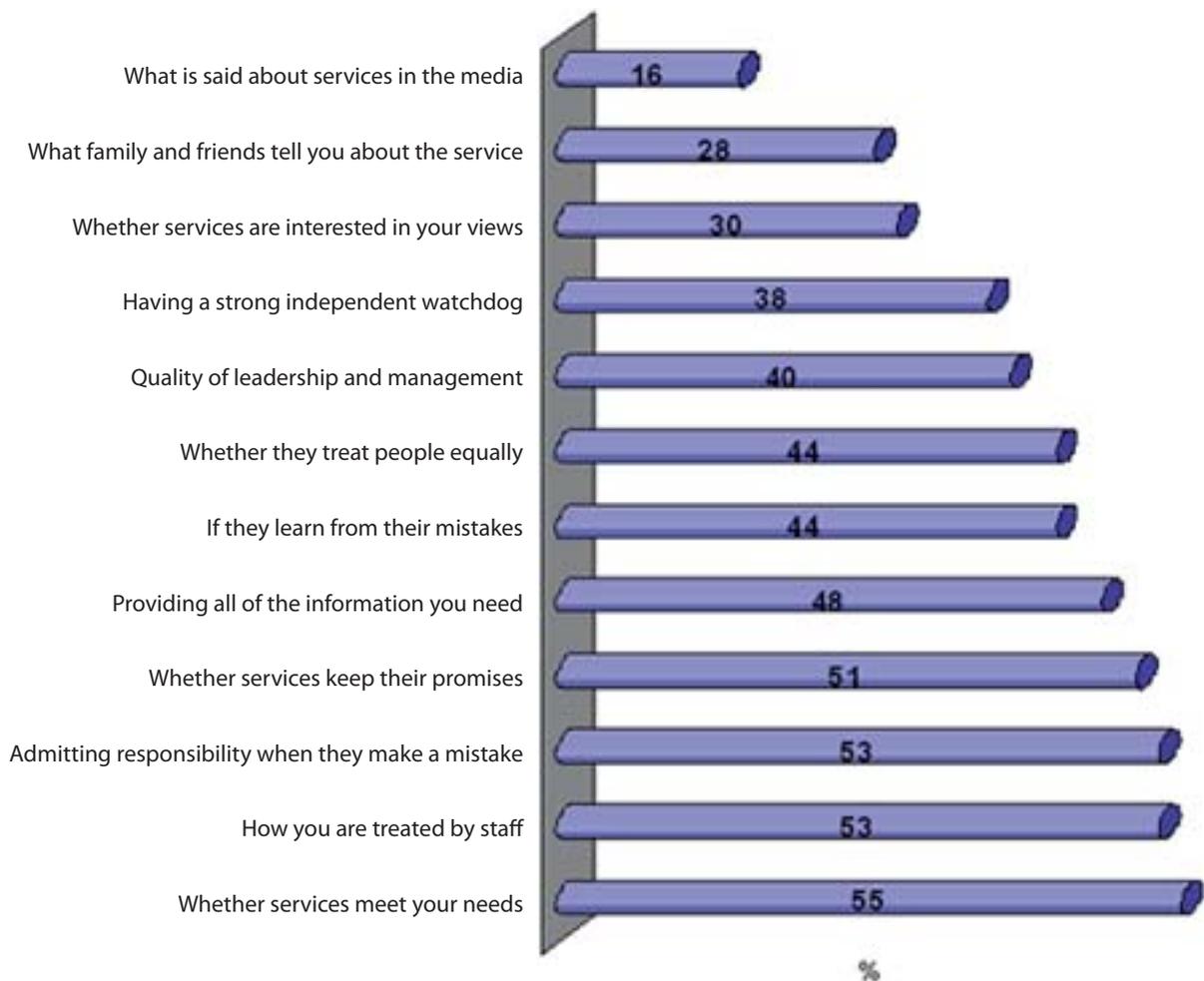
Source: ICM, June 2004

1.8 Drivers of trust in public services

The UK public has a very clear sense of what determines the trust it has in public services. While responsiveness remains the most important driver, many others directly relate to the ability of public services to deliver positive experiences for the user.

Figure 13: Drivers of trust in the public sector

Which of the following factors, if any, are most important in determining how much trust you have in public services?



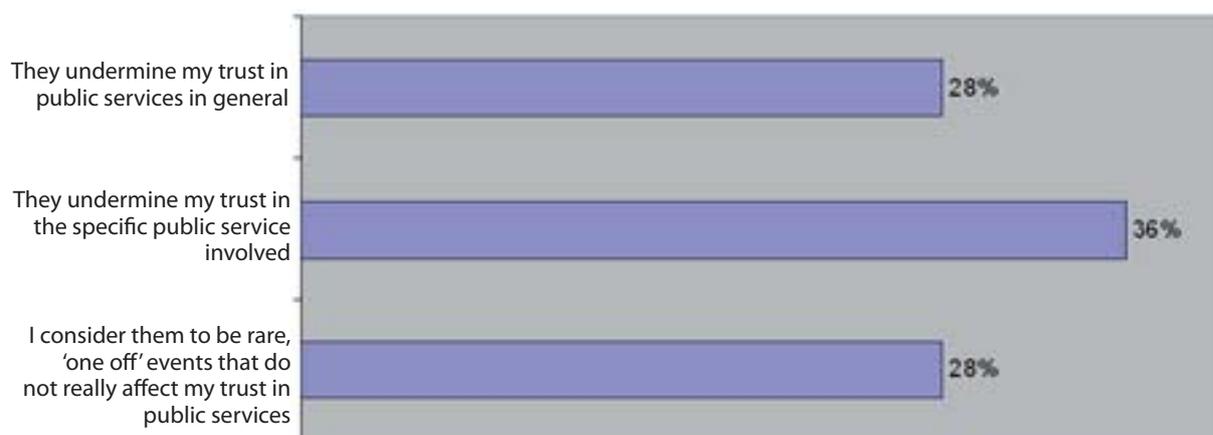
Source: Audit Commission/MORI 2003

1.9 The impact of high profile incidents

Almost two-thirds of the public suggest that their trust is undermined – in either a specific service or in public services more generally – by high profile incidents that raise questions about quality and reliability. This finding emphasises the role of indirect experience and communications in determining levels of trust in public organisations.

Figure 14: The impact of high profile incidents

Thinking about high profile incidents that raise questions about the quality and reliability of public services, which of the following best describes the impact they have on you?



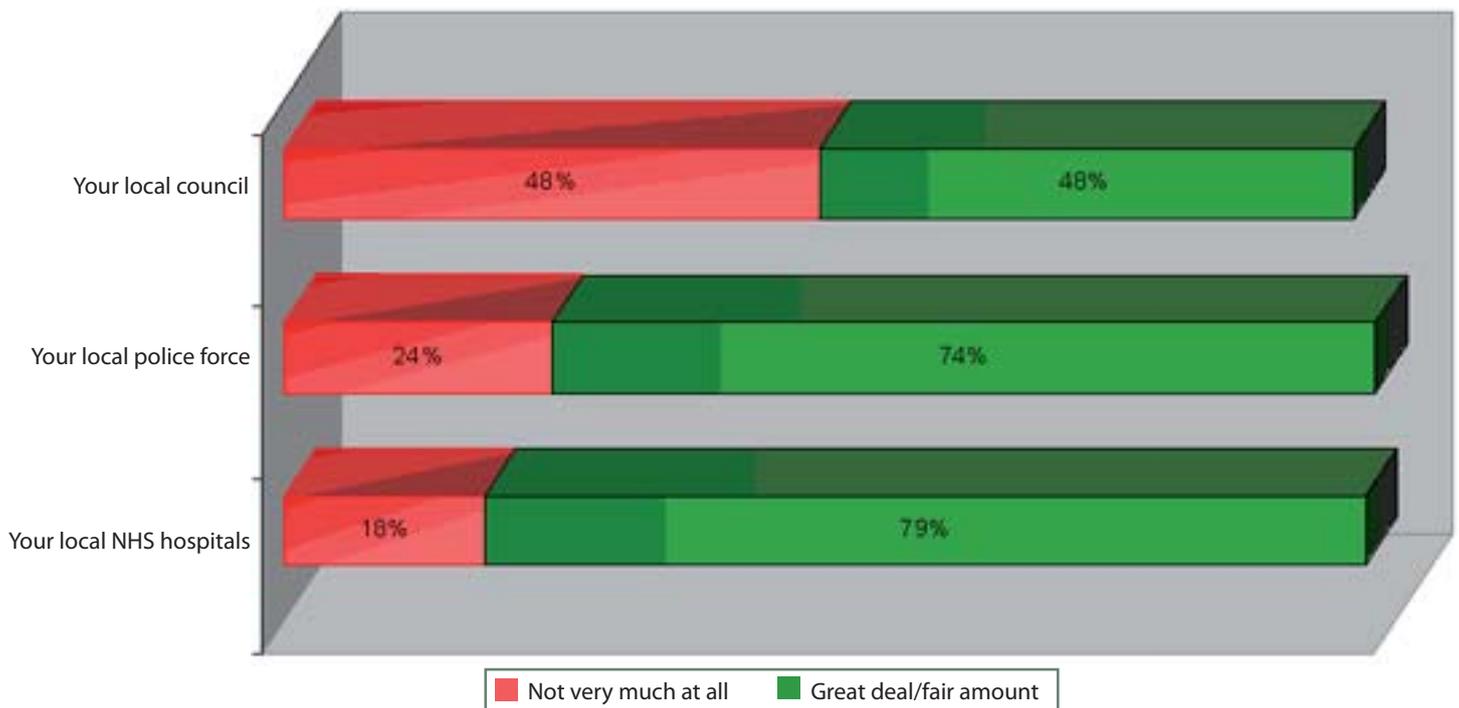
Source: Audit Commission/MORI, 2003

1.10 Trust in public agencies

Reflecting the more general positive expectations of service delivery above, a majority of the public retains trust in the police and the NHS. However, levels of public trust in local government are considerably lower.

Figure 15: Trust in public agencies

How much, if at all, do you trust the following institutions?



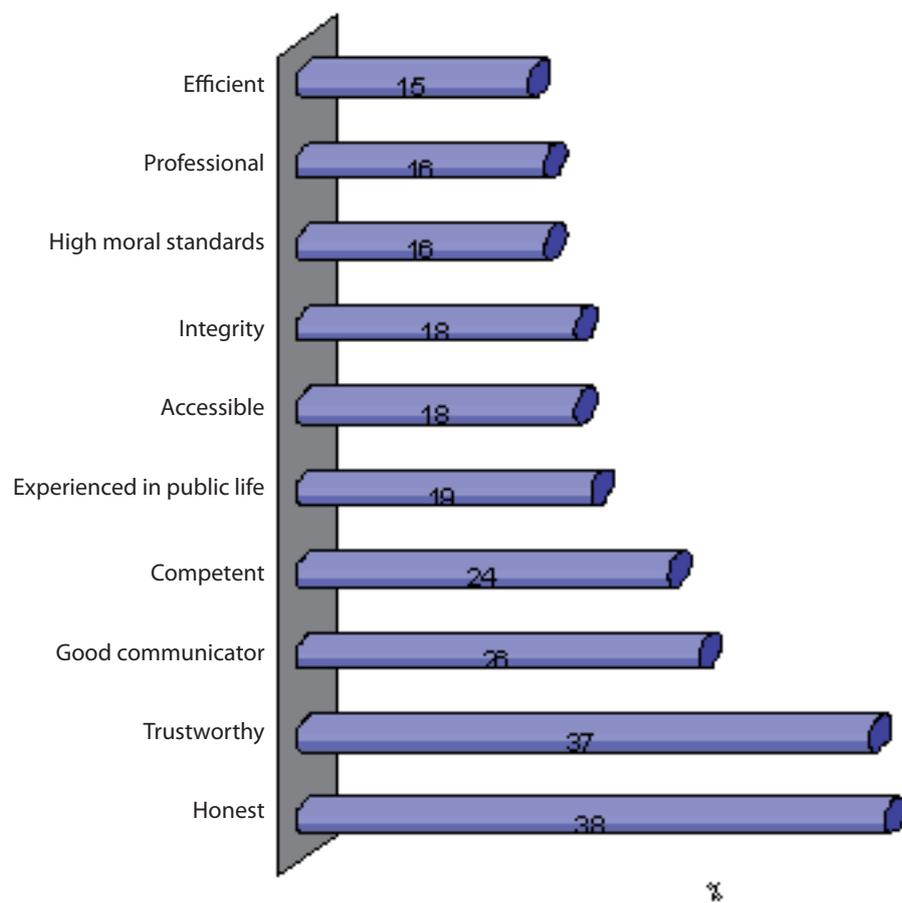
Source: Audit Commission/MORI, 2003

1.11 Public views of public leaders

Trust in public officials is primarily driven by perceptions of honesty and trustworthiness. Professionalism and efficiency are held to be the least important drivers of trust in the minds of the public.

Figure 16: The qualities the public wants in its public leaders

Which of the following factors, if any, are most important in determining how much trust you have in public leaders?



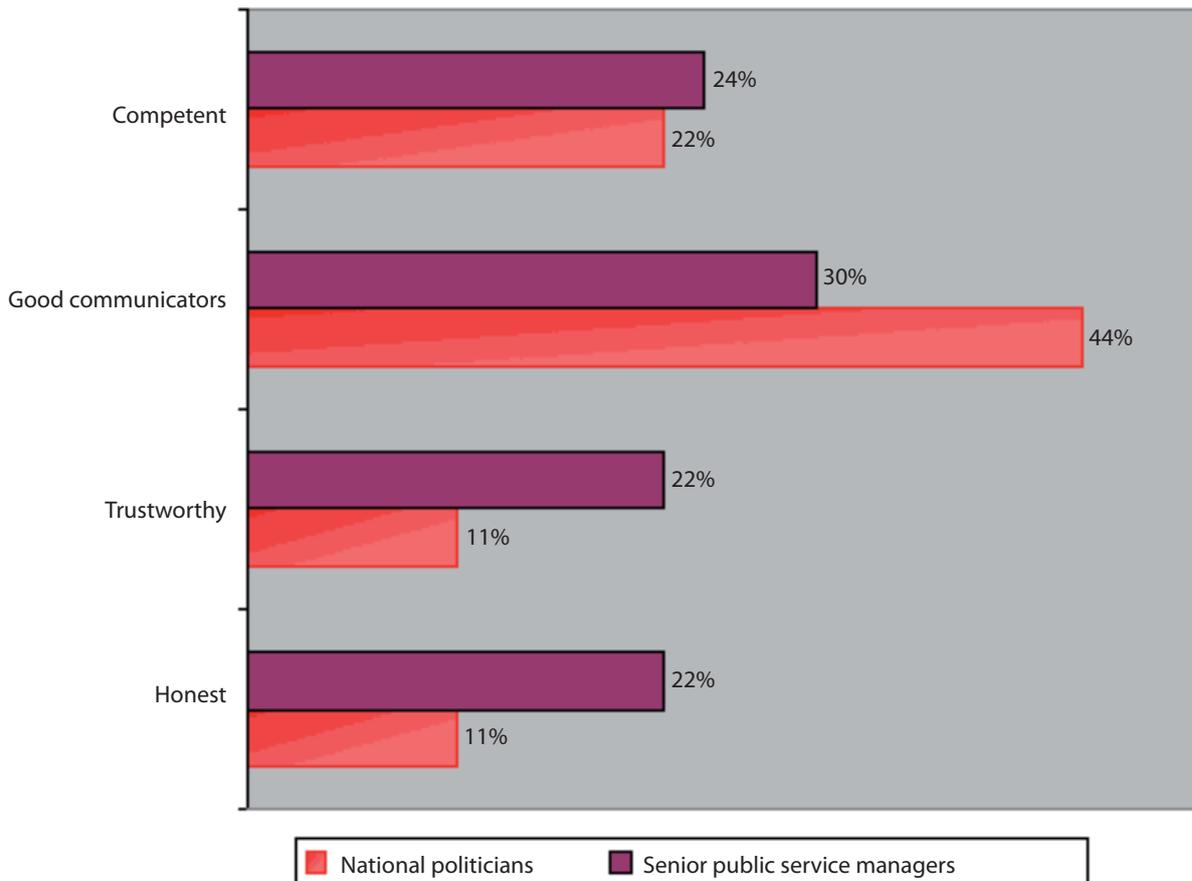
Source: Audit Commission/MORI, 2003

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While the public may want its public leaders to be honest and trustworthy, the perceived reality is very different. Only one in ten people thinks that politicians are honest and trustworthy, and only two in nine think the same of senior public service managers.

Figure 17: The perceived qualities of public leaders

Tell me whether, or how much, you agree that national politicians and senior public service managers are:



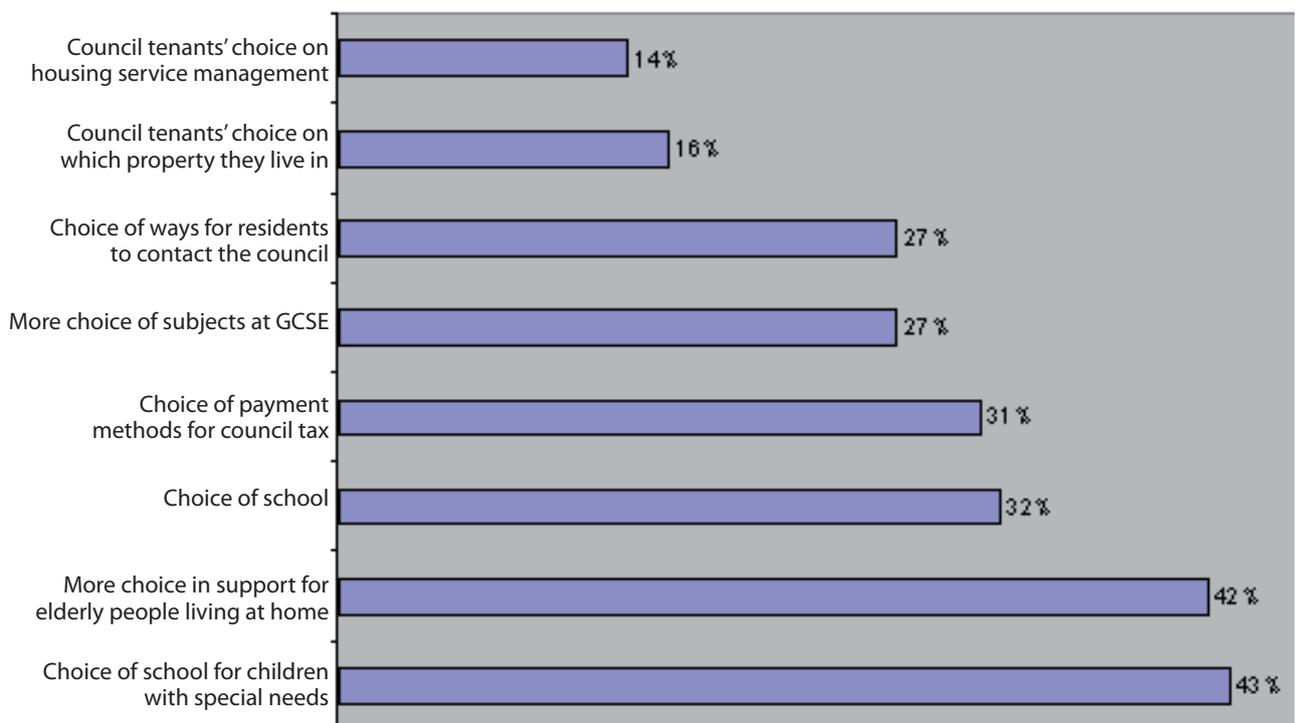
Source: Audit Commission/MORI, 2003

1.12 Choice and voice

The public is strongly in favour of choice, but some choices were clearly seen as more important than others. The public also does not, on the whole, think that taxpayers should have to pay more for users to have more choice – even in the cases of greater need.

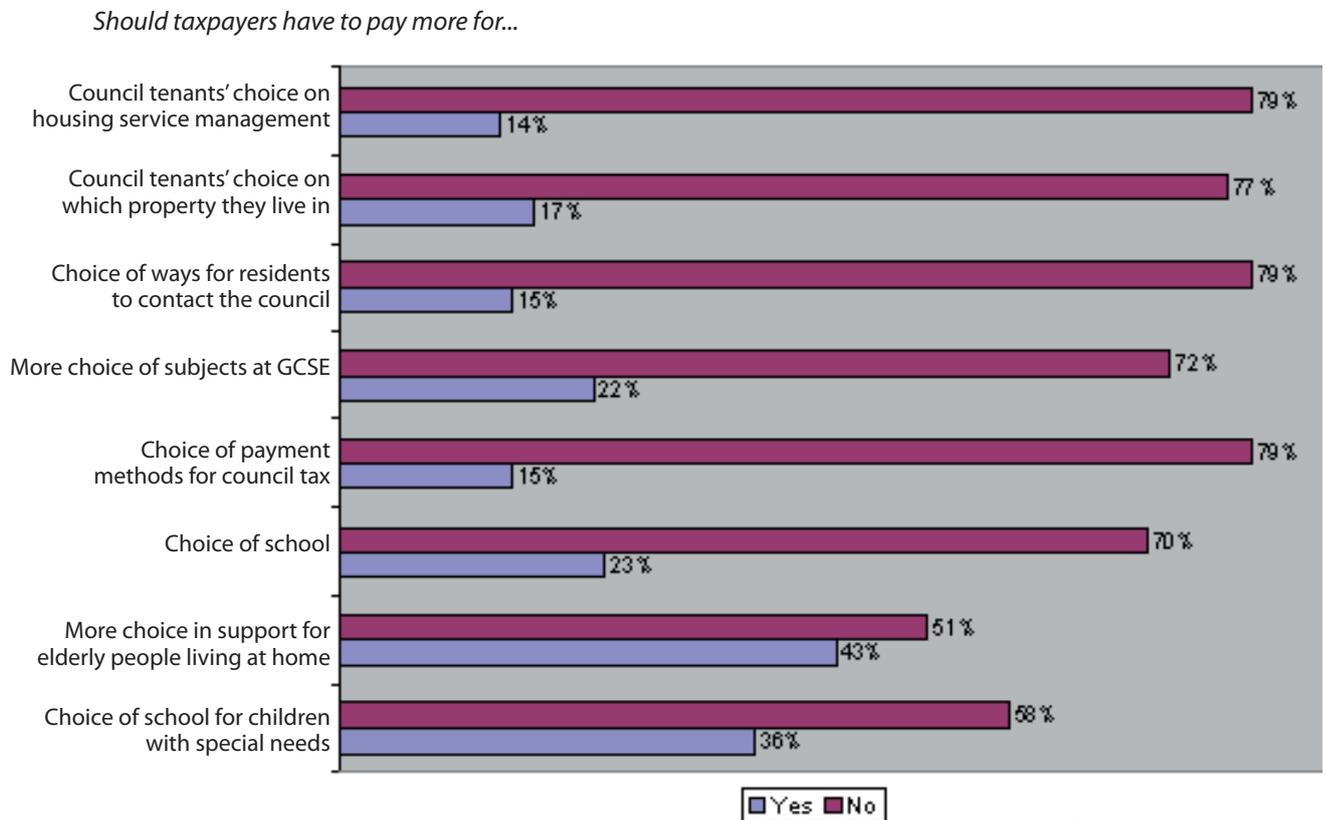
Figure 18: The public on choice: essential choices

Percentage of respondents saying that it is absolutely essential to have this choice



Source: Audit Commission/MORI, 2004

Figure 19: The public on choice: should taxpayers have to pay more?



Source: Audit Commission/MORI, 2004

Research that directly addresses the issue of voice in public services is limited. What evidence there is suggests that demand for voice in existing institutional structures is extremely low. For example, when asked whether they would like to get involved in helping their council plan and deliver its services, only 17 per cent of respondents said they would, while 60 per cent said they would not. In respect of the NHS, the figures were 2 per cent and 51 per cent respectively.²

However, there is other survey data that does not seem to support the view that there is negligible demand among the public for greater voice. For example, the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust's *State of the Nation* poll (conducted by ICM in 2004) provides evidence of latent demand among the public for a more active voice in the design and delivery of public services.³ When asked whether ordinary people should be selected at random from the electoral register and invited to serve on the boards of foundation hospitals and local police authorities, 66 per cent of

² Audit Commission/MORI, *Trust in Public Institutions: New findings*, London, Audit Commission, 2003

³ JRRT, *State of the Nation: Public attitudes to government and constitutional reform in the UK*, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd/ICM, 2004

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respondents thought that this was a good idea (compared to 33 per cent who thought it was a bad idea) and 56 per cent said that they would accept such an invitation (compared to 43 per cent who said they would decline). Furthermore, when asked whether ordinary people should be selected at random from the electoral register and invited to serve on boards such as those that decide on the safety of drugs, or health and safety at work, 61 per cent thought that this was a good idea (compared to 38 per cent who thought it was a bad idea) and 50 per cent said that they would accept such an invitation (compared to 49 per cent who said they would decline).

Together, these findings suggest that the public is keen to participate in the design and delivery of public services, but is reluctant to do so through existing mechanisms of engagement. These figures also suggest that we should take care not to assume that the current reluctance to participate in the design and delivery of public services reflects a wider and systemic apathy among the public to the possibilities afforded by political engagement.

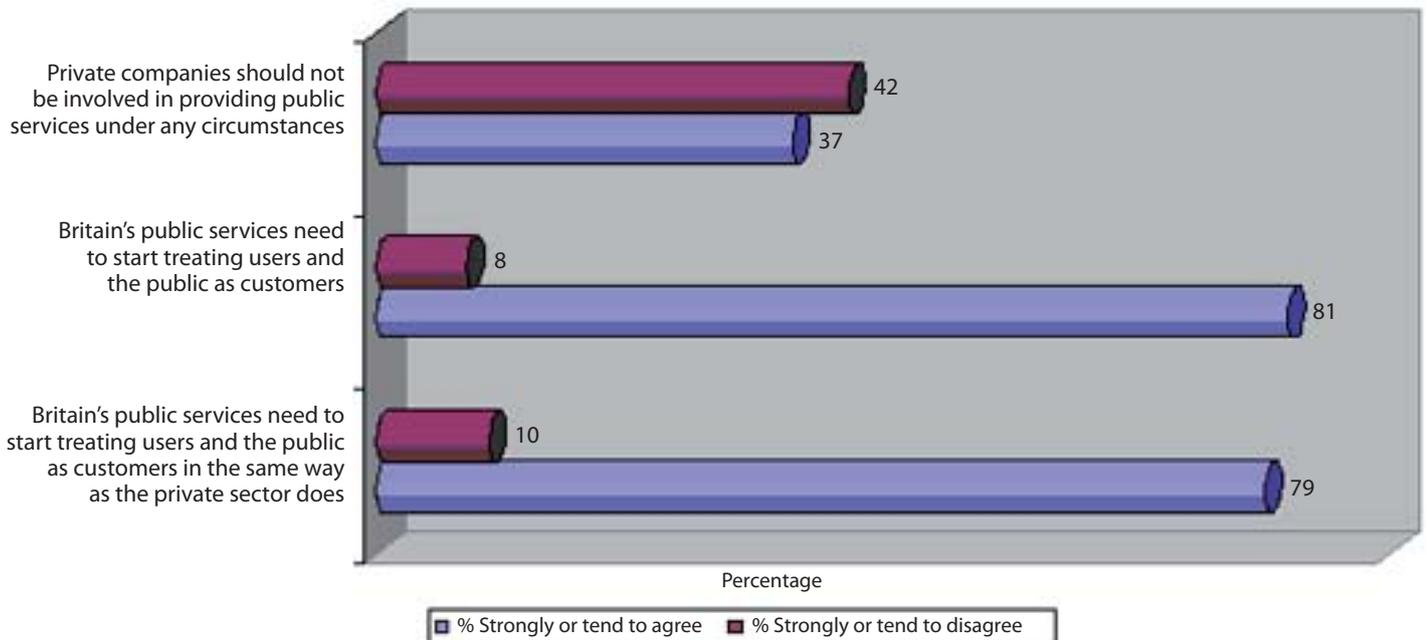
In a recent poll of non-voters at the 2005 general election, apathy was a much less significant factor in the decision not to vote (19 per cent) than a lack of trust in politicians (54 per cent of all respondents and 72 per cent of 18-24 year olds).⁴ Moreover, when offered alternative means of participating in decision-making processes, 72 per cent of non-voters said that they were likely/very likely to get involved in a referendum, while 70 per cent said that they were likely/very likely to get involved in a meeting where they could set local council budgets with councillors.

1.13 Private involvement in public services

The public is equivocal about whether private companies should be involved in public services. This perhaps reflects a more deep-rooted concern about the perceived threat that private sector involvement poses to the principles of equity and universality – to which the public remains overwhelmingly committed. Nevertheless, the public does want public services to orient themselves in a more focused way to user needs and to learn from the private sector to that end.

⁴ Power Inquiry, *National Poll of Non-Voters*, May 2005

Figure 20: Views of private involvement in public services



Source: MORI/BBC Radio 4, July 2004

This section has reviewed empirical survey data on public views of public services. It is in this framework that debates about satisfaction, responsiveness and expectations are enacted. From the above, a number of headline issues emerge:

- Satisfaction with public services has remained broadly static in recent years, despite service improvements
- Expectations among the public of the capacity of public services to improve remain low, both generally and in respect of any specific service areas
- Low levels of trust among the public – in respect of public service managers and politicians, and in terms of the information they receive about public services – feature strongly in their relationships with public services
- The public wants public services to be oriented to people's needs as service consumers
- The public remains committed to a number of basic values – universality, equity and accountability – that it wants to underpin public service provision.

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The research presented above has drawn on a variety of sources, often with different concerns and methodologies. The complex and sometimes contradictory nature of public responses presents significant interpretative problems. Clearly, distinguishing between views, perceptions and attitudes can cause difficulties, and concepts like satisfaction, commitment, expectation, responsiveness and trust require clarification. Also, how these concepts relate and impact on each other is an issue of some contention. In the following sections, conceptual clarification will inform the analysis of this data, first in regard to responsiveness, then for satisfaction and expectation.

2. Delivering responsiveness?

Of all the changes that have taken place in the political context of public services, perhaps the most important is the general shift towards the consumer. Imported from the private sector, this reconception of the relationship between those who provide services and those who use them now carries high expectations. Public service reform is now oriented towards the user as an empowered consumer – one who can exercise choice and exit. It concentrates on using this new role to pry services away from the needs of providers and to improve service responsiveness to what the public values. This shift is nothing short of a renegotiation of the relationship between the citizen and the state, and its causes are complex. In this section, we examine research on what is driving this shift and how it has translated into current approaches to public service reform.

In this section we also begin an examination of the apparent dilemmas highlighted in Section 1. In particular, the orientation to the consumer suggests that satisfaction with service delivery will rise as the quality of service improves. The fact that this does not occur is a significant concern and has prompted much research.

2.1 The shift to the consumer

Clarke identifies a number of drivers in the shift to the consumer as the focus of public services reform.⁵

- **Markets versus states:** Traditional state provision is now seen as tending strongly towards monolithic and monopolistic bureaucracy, high public spending and a collectivist orientation away from the individual. The public sector 'cannot any longer ignore' markets. Indeed, the relationship between individual and state is increasingly being understood as one of consumer and producer. Furthermore, Clarke notes that: 'This relationship is an antagonistic one in which the interests of producers and consumers are opposed and the problem of public services is that market disciplines do not control public service producers.'⁶
- **Changing consumer expectations:** Widespread cultural and social change tends towards 'consumer societies' in which expectations generated in the market are now expected of public services. In the public sector, this 'commodification' has 'changed the conditions and forms of what is consumed'.
- **The decline of deference:** The shift to the consumer may also be because society is moving away from 'cultural formations of deference that supported forms of hierarchical authority and social order.'⁷ Perhaps fuelled by the rise of consumerism, the decline in 'respect' for traditional authority is occurring at the same time as the belief that 'everyone is entitled to consume and to consume what they want' is growing.⁸ The decline of

⁵ Clarke J, 'A Consuming Public?'; lecture in ESRC/AHRB Cultures of Consumption series, Royal Society, 22 April 2004

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid; see also Giddens A, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity, 1990

⁸ Clarke J, 'A Consuming Public?'; lecture in ESRC/AHRB Cultures of Consumption series, Royal Society, 22 April 2004

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deference thus exhibits a decidedly 'populist shift'. Where it empowers those typically excluded from traditional hierarchies, it seems to do so through the market rather than politics.⁹

- **Refusal by the subordinated:** Claims like 'professionals know best' are 'concealed forms of power and control – and rested on a view that users could not be knowledgeable (either about their own condition or its possible remedies)'. However, the women's health movement has questioned male-centred medicine; people with disabilities have challenged the medical model; black and ethnic minorities have revealed the bias in educational models of 'cultural deficit'; and mental health users have developed theories and practices of anti-psychiatry. This, Clarke states '...is partly a refusal to be deferential to authority, but it is also a process of making forms of power visible and contestable.'¹⁰

This combination of broad social tendencies has unsettled the public realm. New Labour's reaction is an approach to reforming public services that orients services to the consumer. 'The challenge for public service', the prime minister declared in 2003, 'is to provide universal services that are also personalised to individual need, in a consumer driven age...we won't have a fair society if we don't face up to these challenges.'¹¹ The intention here is to 'engage public demand...construct political support...address political doubt...and embrace "modern" conceptions of diversity, equity and service.'¹²

The consumer model of delivery is now seen as addressing problems of equity, diversity and choice. As the prime minister put it:

'The Tories' "opting out" reforms of the 1980s encouraged...the affluent and well educated...to buy their way out of failing or inadequate provision. It was a choice for the few, not for the many. It is therefore by extending choice to all consumers that inequalities will be addressed. The public wants services that respond to their individual needs and aspirations. They want the consumer power of the private sector, but the values of the public service.'¹³

Clarke suggests that New Labour's conception of choice has been 'thoroughly colonised by the market model' in that it sees people as having 'wants, needs or desires' and then 'choosing the (commodified) goods or services that satisfy

⁹ Frank T, *One Market Under God: Extreme capitalism, market populism and the end of economic democracy*, New York, Anchor Books, 2001

¹⁰ Clarke J, 'A Consuming Public?', lecture in ESRC/AHRB Cultures of Consumption series, Royal Society, 22 April 2004

¹¹ Blair T, 'Progress and Justice in the 21st Century', inaugural Fabian Society Annual Lecture, 17 June 2003

¹² Clarke J and Vidler E, 'The Contradictions of Consumerism: Remaking public services', paper presented to Political Studies Association conference, Lincoln, April 2004

¹³ Blair T, 'Progress and Justice in the 21st Century', inaugural Fabian Society Annual Lecture, 17 June 2003

them.¹⁴ Yet he questions whether 'choices can be realised (or enforced) through the medium of money'. He is concerned that when, as in the public sector, 'money is absent', there may be no equivalent 'mode of power' that can serve to enforce choice.

Nevertheless, the prime minister is adamant that the consumer should be put first: 'We are making the public services user-led; not producer or bureaucracy led, allowing far greater freedom and incentives for services to develop as users want.'¹⁵ Here, the shift to the consumer is being accelerated by the government's agenda for policy reform. The intention is to mobilise the consumer to deliver what central management could not: responsiveness to what the public values.

The success of this reform hinges on increasing customer satisfaction with service delivery as a marker of responsiveness. However, as we saw in Section 1, improvements in service quality have not been reflected in consumer satisfaction indices. This apparent paradox has generated a significant literature, to which we now turn.

2.2 The delivery paradox: improvement and dissatisfaction

Declining public trust in government is most often explained as a result of public services prioritising the interests of providers at the cost of responsiveness to user needs. The preferred treatment, therefore, is to instil trust through increasing service responsiveness. As we have noted, responsiveness is held to be delivered most effectively by empowering the consumer through choice. Increased responsiveness should be reflected in increased levels of customer satisfaction. Yet, as we saw in Section 1, satisfaction has not risen as expected. The metrics show that services have improved, but consumers are not satisfied.

The Office of Public Services Reform directly addresses this 'mismatch between perceptions and reality'.¹⁶ It points out that even where targets have been met, satisfaction remains stubbornly low and there is limited expectations that services will improve.

How is this paradoxical outcome to be explained? What is the source of the anomaly? Why is improved performance not reflected in rising satisfaction levels? Among the possible answers to these questions are that:

- communication of service improvements have been ineffective
- there is still not enough choice
- public expectations of services are unrealistic
- there is still insufficient orientation to consumer satisfaction.

¹⁴ Clarke J, 'A Consuming Public?', lecture in ESRC/AHRB Cultures of Consumption series, Royal Society, 22 April 2004; Clarke J, 'Consumerism and the Remaking of State-Citizen Relationships', paper prepared for ESPAnet conference, Oxford, 9-11 September, 2004

¹⁵ Blair T, prime minister's speech on public services reform, 16 October 2001

¹⁶ OPSR, *Building Customer Satisfaction into Departmental Performance*, London, Office of Public Services Reform, 2004

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Mortimore and Gill set out with some clarity the 'delivery paradox'.¹⁷ Here also we are offered an explanation. The paradox arises because the public does not believe in, or does not know about, objective improvements in service quality. The authors conclude that 'communication of success is politically as important as the policy success itself'.¹⁸ The failure here is not with service provision, which has objectively improved, but with the public's understanding.

The paradox is also well known in government:

'There is much scratching of the head in political circles over this apparent paradox: People feel personally optimistic in Britain; but collectively pessimistic. They say their own health care in the NHS is good; but the NHS in general is bad. Their schools are good; but education is bad. They are safer; but the country is less safe. Their future is bright; but the nation's is dark.'¹⁹

In part, the delivery paradox appears to be due to the complexity of how the public forms its evaluations of specific, used and local services. Indeed, evaluations are regularly clouded by more general attitudes to public services and by abstract notions of the quality of national provision. One opinion poll (*The Times, March 2004*) found that while 20 per cent of respondents thought that their own experiences of services were bad, 30 per cent reported a 'bad general impression'. For transport, 42 per cent reported bad experiences while 51 per cent reported a bad general impression. For schools, these figures were lower at 13 per cent and 26 per cent respectively, but they still diverged. Similarly for the NHS, good personal experience and bad general impression diverged by 10 per cent. However, perhaps the clearest example is with regard to the criminal justice system, where 'the way crime is dealt with' in the respondent's area achieved a net confidence score of +29. Yet when considering the whole of England and Wales, this figure was -4. As Mortimore and Gill put it: 'Contrary to received wisdom, the grass always seems greener on our own side of the fence.'²⁰

¹⁷ Mortimore R and Gill M, *New Labour and Delivery*, London, MORI, 2004

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Blair T, speech to Labour's spring conference, Manchester, 13 March 2004

²⁰ Mortimore R and Gill M, *New Labour and Delivery*, London, MORI, 2004

Box 1: The delivery paradox of improvement and dissatisfaction: The case of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda

A recent report commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) provides an initial assessment of the impact of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA) on service improvement in local government.²¹ It shows the paradox of service improvement and declining satisfaction levels as it affects local government.

Service improvement

Overall, the evidence suggests that there have been significant improvements in most services since 2000-01. The ODPM's basket of indicators suggests that overall performance improved by 12.5 per cent between 2000-01 and 2003-04. It shows improvement across all authority types, all Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) categories and most services. Improvement has been most marked in district councils and authorities rated 'poor' in the 2003 CPA.

Like the ODPM's basket of indicators, CPA scores suggest that local government performance has been improving, particularly among the poorest performers. Sixty per cent of upper tier and unitary councils moved up one or more CPA category between 2002-04, and most of the remainder achieved a net improvement in service scores. The greatest improvement was among those councils previously categorised as 'poor' or 'weak'.

Declining satisfaction

Public satisfaction with the overall performance of local authorities remains low compared to most other public service providers and has declined in recent years. User satisfaction BVPI surveys indicate that there was a decrease from 65 per cent to 55 per cent between 2000-01 and 2003-04. Fewer than half of residents believe that local authorities are efficient or provide good value for money, but net satisfaction with the overall quality of services is higher, particularly among service users.

Understanding the paradox

While there is strong evidence that some elements of the LGMA have played an important role in encouraging service improvement (in terms of BVPI, CPA scores and officers' perceptions), it is clear that it has had much less impact on public satisfaction. This is partly because not all of the public has an accurate view of how well services are performing, and partly because satisfaction with local authority performance is driven by a range of other factors in addition to perceptions of services.

User satisfaction BVPIs show that service users are more likely than non-users to be either satisfied or dissatisfied with the authority overall and with individual services. They are also more satisfied with the overall performance of local government. Regular users are more likely to be satisfied than irregular users, and the more services that residents have contact with the more likely they are to be satisfied. The fewer services they have contact with the more likely it is that they report being 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'. The number of contacts seems to have no impact on the proportion of respondents who are dissatisfied with their local authority's overall performance.

²¹ Martin S and Bovaird T, *Meta-Evaluation of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda: Progress report on service improvement in local government*, London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005

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Contd...

A number of studies has shown that there is widespread confusion and misunderstanding about the services local authorities actually provide and how they are funded. While the perceived quality of local service provision is a key determinant of public satisfaction, because relatively few people have direct contact with their council their perceptions are typically based on experiences of a small number of highly visible services.

Meanwhile, public perceptions of overall quality of life and how well the council runs its services are influenced by a range of cross-cutting issues, such as antisocial behaviour and levels of employment, over which authorities have little direct control.

There is also evidence that the level of customer care has been increasing in many services. But again this is important only to the minority of residents who have direct contact with council staff and is not therefore reflected in perceptions of overall performance.

At the whole authority level there is only a weak correlation between public satisfaction and the actual levels of council tax charged by an authority or the level of recent increases.

The combination of relatively large and widely publicised increases in council tax, the lower priority given to services that are most important in driving public satisfaction with local government, and a decline in trust in government at national as well as local level have therefore driven down satisfaction at a time when there have been real improvements in many services.

Source: Martin and Bovaird, 2005

The delivery paradox extends to the public being 'more satisfied with the performance of their own MP than with MPs as a whole' and 'more optimistic about the financial prospects for their own household in the near future than for the economy as a whole'. This paradox: 'Gives New Labour a real problem in convincing the public that it is delivering improvement in public services. Nor are they helped by a lack of any public confidence in official statistics.'²²

Government acceleration of the shift to the consumer uses the consumer as a means of forcing public services to reform. Consumer dissatisfaction will have real consequences for service providers, and consumer satisfaction, it is argued, will rise as services improve. Yet service improvements are not accompanied by the expected increases in customer satisfaction. We have explored this anomaly in terms of a delivery paradox and seen how this paradox might be explained.

The customer is not satisfied and doggedly refuses to give due credit for objective improvements in service quality. This anomaly constitutes a significant challenge to the view that consumer dissatisfaction can drive service responsiveness. Yet

²² Mortimore R and Gill M, *New Labour and Delivery*, London, MORI, 2004. This is also a view confirmed by the Statistics Commission (2004), which argues that: 'The level of public trust [in statistics] is currently lower than is desirable in a modern democratic state in which so much of policy and operational decision-making rests on an evidence base largely composed of statistics.'

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far from reconsidering, explanations for the anomaly have tended to read it as requiring more of the same. The problem, it is asserted, is that reforms are not sufficiently advanced nor sufficiently well communicated. To see what does, in fact, explain the delivery paradox, we must first gain greater clarity about consumer satisfaction, its uses and its prospects as a driver of responsiveness.

3. What is consumer satisfaction?

Consumer satisfaction is defined, used and measured in a wide variety of ways. Current research is particularly concerned with issues of accurate measurement and with the relationship between satisfaction and other indices, such as trust in service providers and expectations. Consumer satisfaction may be a highly developed means of service reform, but it turns out to be a hard metric to interpret. As we shall see, wider issues and values constantly intrude, not least trust in governance itself.

3.1 Definitions and uses of consumer satisfaction

Stipak highlights the increasing use of satisfaction surveying in the late 1970s and early 1980s – particularly with regard to local services.²³ Bouckaert et al show that the 1990s saw developments in university economic and marketing departments, increased attention to customer orientation in the public sector and the availability of new information technologies, all of which served to stimulate the use of satisfaction surveying.²⁴ The resulting data was increasingly used to create benchmarks, to evaluate management and allocate resources. An important landmark in the use of such data was SERVQUAL, a means of measuring customer satisfaction in service industries.²⁵ Bouckaert et al also cite others, such as the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) and the Canadian Common Measurements Tool²⁶, and in Europe, Sweden's Customer Satisfaction Index²⁷, the Netherland's Court of Audit²⁸, fiscal monitor²⁹, local authority initiatives³⁰ and Belgium's Quality Barometer³¹.

3.2 Measuring satisfaction

Bouckaert et al stress that aggregating data on customer satisfaction can be a problem when instruments are slightly different, and that the actual meaning of the results remains elusive.³²

²³ Stipak B, 'Citizen Satisfaction with Urban Services: Potential misuse as a performance indicator', *Public Administration Review*, Vol 39 No 1, pp46–52, 1979

²⁴ Bouckaert G and Van de Walle S, 'Comparing Measures of Citizen Trust and User Satisfaction as Indicators of "Good Governance": Difficulties in linking trust and satisfaction indicators', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol 69 No 3, pp329-343, 2003

²⁵ Zeithaml V A, Parasuraman A and Berry L L, *Delivering Quality Service: Balancing customer perceptions and expectations*, London, The Free Press, 1990

²⁶ Schmidt F and Strickland T, *Client Satisfaction Surveying: Common measurements tool*, Ottawa, Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1998

²⁷ SIGMA, *Public Opinion Surveys as Input to Administrative Reform*, Paris, OECD, 1998

²⁸ Algemene Rekenkamer, *Klantgerichtheid Publieke Dienstverlening*, The Hague, Algemene Rekenkamer, 1997

²⁹ Van Kruchten J C M and Peereboom S, 'De Fiscale Monitor, Wat Vindt De Belastingplichtige Van De Belastingdienst' in Hendriks A J M et al (eds), *Evaluatieonderzoek in De Rijksdienst: Toepassingen En Ervaringen in De Praktijk*, 1997

³⁰ Programmabureau Overheidsloket, *Monitoren Van Geïntegreerde Dienstverlening*, The Hague, Programmabureau Overheidsloket, 2000

³¹ Bouckaert G, Kampen J K, Maddens B and Van de Walle S, *Klantentevredenheidsmetingen Bij De Overheid: Eerste rapport burgergericht besturen*, Leuven, Instituut voor de Overheid, 2001

³² Bouckaert G and Van de Walle S, 'Comparing Measures of Citizen Trust and User Satisfaction as Indicators of "Good Governance": Difficulties in linking trust and satisfaction indicators', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol 69 No 3, pp329-343, 2003

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Often:

'A direct causal relation is presupposed between the quality of a certain service delivery and user satisfaction. If service quality increases, satisfaction is assumed to increase as well. In reality, however, this is not always the case.'³³

Producers and consumers often hold differing views and perceptions of quality, and services have different characteristics and are subject to different expectations.³⁴ In addition, surveys are not always methodologically sound and some fail to examine the importance the public attaches to a certain aspect of the service. Thus, the importance of satisfaction with the 'friendliness' of the fire service cannot be equated with satisfaction on the 'speed of response'. Surveys largely focus on how well a service is received rather than on what that service should provide. Such questions of importance change the meaning of what is being measured, and suggest that we still know remarkably little about precisely what aspects of service performance the public sees as important to be satisfied with.³⁵ Van de Walle highlights the influence of social interaction on citizens' expectations, and repeats the insight that the perception of how well a service is performing varies widely.³⁶

The particular characteristics of a service certainly affect how it will score on satisfaction surveys.³⁷ If a service is used frequently and contact is direct, satisfaction can vary independently of service quality.³⁸ Satisfaction is affected by variables such as sympathy with an agency and whether individuals see that agency as delivering a benefit for society.³⁹

Bouckaert et al add that because satisfaction surveys do not cover public discussions around a particular service organisation (the authorisation environment), they can show high satisfaction with an organisation despite the

³³ Ibid and Bouckaert G, 'Remodeling Quality and Quantity in a Management Context' in Halachmi A and Bouckaert G (eds), *Public Productivity Through Quality and Strategic Management*, Amsterdam, IOS Press, 1995

³⁴ Conroy D K I, 'Client Satisfaction Measures: What are their applications for public policy in privatisation and contracting out?', paper presented at the 1998 International Conference of the Australasian Evaluation Society, *Proceedings*, Vol 2, pp955–974, 1998

³⁵ Stipak B, 'Citizen Satisfaction with Urban Services: Potential misuse as a performance indicator', *Public Administration Review*, Vol 39 No 1, pp46–52, 1979

³⁶ Van de Walle S, 'Context-specific Images of the Archetypical Bureaucrat: Persistence and diffusion of the bureaucracy stereotype', *Public Voices*, Vol 7 No 1, pp3–12, 2004

³⁷ Roth V J, Bozinoff L and MacIntosh P, 'Public Opinion and the Measurement of Consumer Satisfaction with Government Services', *Canadian Public Administration*, Vol 33 No 4, pp 571–583, 1990

³⁸ Dinsdale G and Marson B D, *Citizen/Client Surveys: Dispelling Myths and Redrawing Maps*, Ottawa, Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1999

³⁹ Princeton Survey Research Associates and Pew Charitable Trust, *Customers Judge the Performance of Federal Government Agencies: Report on the findings*, Princeton Survey Research Associates and Pew Charitable Trust 2000

Box 2: Approaches to measuring customer satisfaction

The disconfirmation model

Satisfaction with a discrete transaction is conceived as: expectation of a service, minus perception of the service received.

The equity model

Satisfaction occurs where a customer feels that the outcome of a purchase of goods or services is in some way in balance with their inputs – such as cost, time and effort – and/or is proportional to the inputs of the seller.

The attribution model

The outcome of a purchase is thought of in terms of success or failure, and the cause of this outcome is attributed either to internal factors (such as a buyer's perceived buying abilities or efforts) or to external factors (such as the difficulty of the buying task, the impact of other's efforts such as people's advice to buyers on a specific product or service selection, or simply to luck).

The performance model

Satisfaction is directly related to the product or service's perceived characteristics which, preferably, can be determined objectively.

Source: Brookes R, 1995 in Donovan et al, 2001

number of complaints about those kinds of public services and the civil servants that manage them.⁴⁰

Satisfaction ratings and numbers of complaints are roughly similar between public and private organisations.⁴¹ Moreover, respondents also give both pragmatic answers (by evaluating their experience) and ideological answers (such as one sector is better than another).

The more specific the agency and the more concrete the questions asked about it, the higher satisfaction is likely to be.⁴² Rouban notes that 'a negative public perception of government in general' was often compatible with positive ratings of specific services.⁴³

⁴⁰ Bouckaert G and Van de Walle S, 'Comparing Measures of Citizen Trust and User Satisfaction as Indicators of "Good Governance": Difficulties in linking trust and satisfaction indicators', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol 69 No 3, pp329-343, 2003

⁴¹ Poister T H and Henry G T, 'Citizen Ratings of Public and Private Service Quality: A comparative perspective', *Public Administration Review*, Vol 54 No 2, pp155-160, 1994; Peckenpaugh J, 'Feds Top Private Firms in Customer Satisfaction', *GovExec Daily Briefing*, 17 December 2001; Servicebarometer AG, 'Kundenmonitor Deutschland 2001 – Qualität und Kundenorientierung', 2001

⁴² Goodsell C T, *The Case for Bureaucracy: A public administration polemic*, third edition, Chatham, NJ, Chatham House, 1994

⁴³ Rouban L, 'The Civil Service Culture and Administrative Reform' in Peters B G and Savoie D (eds), *Governance in a Changing Environment*, Montreal and Kingston, Canadian Centre for Management Development and McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995

Donovan et al confirm that: 'There is no simple relationship between increasing the performance and quality of services and increased level of user satisfaction.'⁴⁴ They go on to argue that where: '[A] user's expectations are exceeded by their perceptions of the service they have received, then the user is satisfied... If their perceptions of the service fall short of their expectations, then the result is dissatisfaction.'⁴⁵

One of many approaches to explaining popular perceptions of services is SERVQUAL, which lists the factors influencing perceptions:

Table 2: SERVQUAL – factors influencing popular service perceptions

Dimension	Description
Tangibles	Physical facilities; available equipment; staff appearance; ease of understanding; communication materials
Reliability	Delivery of promised service; dependability and accuracy
Responsiveness	Helping customers; providing a prompt service
Assurance	Inspiring trust and confidence
Empathy	Providing a caring and individual service to customers
Recovery	Putting things right when mistakes are made

As Donovan et al point out, there are other possible determinants, such as: 'Access, aesthetics, attentiveness, availability, care, cleanliness, comfort, commitment, communication, competence, courtesy, flexibility, friendliness, functionality, integrity, reliability, responsiveness, security.'⁴⁶ In the example of SERVQUAL, influences are weighted according to how they are valued by the consumer, with reliability weighted as being of highest importance, followed by responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Tangibles are seen as being the least important and so receive the lowest weighting.

The importance attached to these influential variables by various segments of society has also been much studied. Studies have shown that older people 'consistently rate their satisfaction with the health service higher'⁴⁷ Also: '[Although there is] little difference between the residents of deprived areas and more affluent areas in their attitudes to public services... those on high incomes or from higher social classes who live in deprived areas were far less satisfied than poorer residents in deprived neighbourhoods.'⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Donovan N, Brown J and Bellulo L, *Satisfaction with Public Services: A discussion paper*, Performance and Innovation Unit, 2001

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid; see also Judge K and Soloman M, 'Public Opinion and the National Health Service: Patterns and perspectives in consumer satisfaction', *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol 22 No 3, pp299-327, 1993

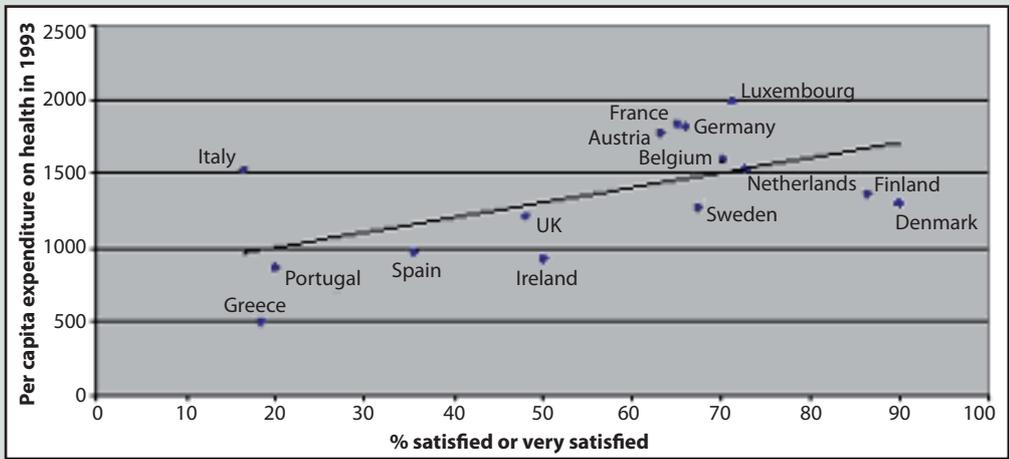
⁴⁸ Donovan N, Brown J and Bellulo L, *Satisfaction with Public Services: A discussion paper*, Performance and Innovation Unit, 2001; see also Duffy B, *Satisfaction and Expectations: Attitudes to public services in deprived areas*, ESRC Research Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, CASE Paper 45, 2000

Box 3: Is satisfaction related to objective measures of inputs or outputs?

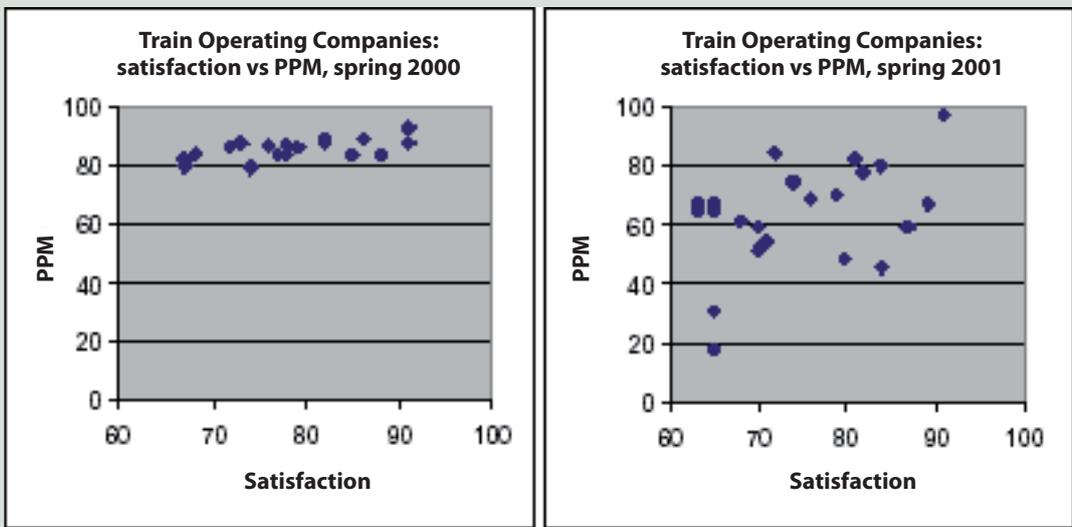
As satisfaction measurement covers a wide range of factors (including subjective impressions like friendliness), a clear relationship between satisfaction on the one hand and inputs of service quality and/or objective measures of service output on the other are difficult to determine directly. As the examples drawn on by Donovan et al suggest, these relationships are easier to establish in very general terms.⁴⁹ Where they focus on more specific factors, this can often give rise to inconsistencies.

For example, in respect of inputs, Donovan et al establish that there is a positive correlation (+0.57) between overall levels of satisfaction with public provision of healthcare in different countries and their respective expenditures on health per capita. However, while this might help to establish that customer satisfaction with healthcare is likely to rise if more resources are allocated to it, it does not help us to determine how to allocate these resources in a way that maximises their impact on customer satisfaction.

Levels of satisfaction with public provision of healthcare in different countries and their respective expenditures on health per capita



In the case of outputs, Donovan et al compare overall customer satisfaction with train services with an indicator that measures train arrival within 5 minutes of schedule. They show that in 2000, before the delays in the months following the Hatfield rail crash, the relationship between performance and satisfaction is strong with a positive correlation of +0.57. In 2001, in the aftermath of Hatfield, performance worsened significantly. However, satisfaction ratings did not move in tandem with performance – and the relationship between satisfaction and performance started to break down (correlation +0.34)



Source: Donovan et al, 2001

⁴⁹ Ibid

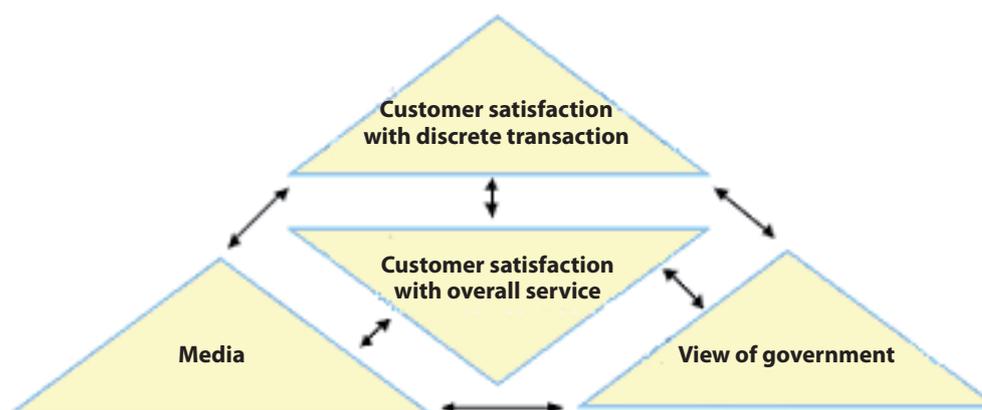
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One consistent difficulty is that overall satisfaction with a service is not a simple aggregate of individual satisfactions. Where surveys include people who do not use the service, their evaluation of that service is formed through second-hand reports from friends, family and the media. Usually, users rate their satisfaction higher than non-users. Thus, 82 per cent of users of local secondary schools are satisfied with those schools, while 30 per cent of the general population are satisfied. Similarly, users of services will often trump their global perceptions with their own experiences, perhaps explaining why only 5 per cent of parents rate their child's school experience as poor, while 10 per cent hold that standards in the nation's schools as a whole are poor.

There are also examples where the global, and indeed ideological, perception of government seems to trump the perception of a particular service. We see exactly this when the public is asked 'who they felt was responsible for the state of the NHS'. The answer was that 44 per cent blamed the government, 16 per cent NHS managers and 2 per cent doctors. Finally, particularly among non-users, global perceptions can strongly influence satisfaction and can be significantly fuelled by media attention. Indeed, satisfaction with the NHS rose by 16 per cent during the week of the NHS anniversary.⁵⁰

Views of a service received are, therefore, influenced by the media and possibly also by people's views about the government. These influences are set out in the diagram below:

Figure 21: The relation between satisfaction with a single transaction and satisfaction with an overall institution



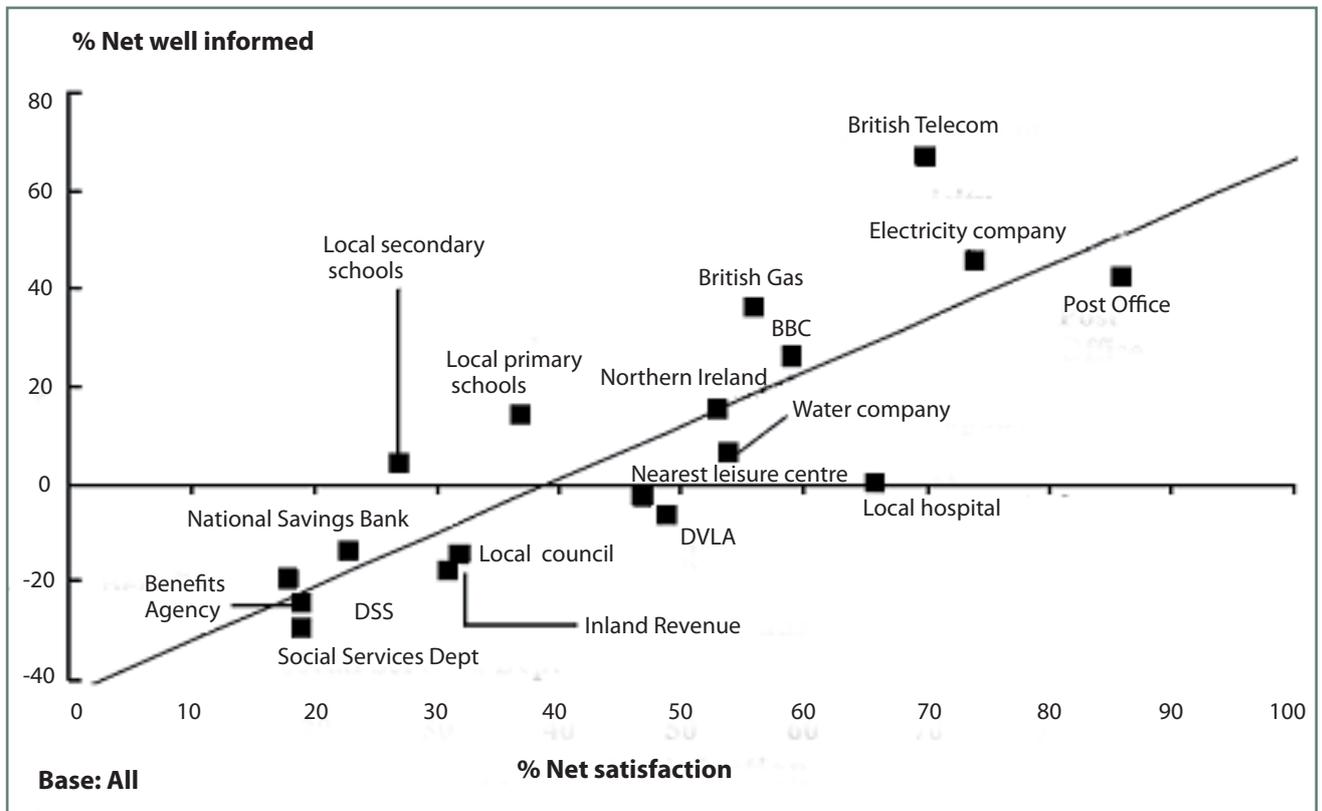
Source: Donovan et al, 2001

⁵⁰ All figures quotes are Donovan et al, Ibid

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In addition, Donovan et al make reference to another seemingly crucial influence in determining levels of satisfaction in public services – namely, how well informed people feel about an institution. Drawing on survey data on satisfaction levels in local authorities, they observe that ‘where people feel well informed about an institution their satisfaction is higher than those who feel ill informed’. This is also noted at the level of global perceptions, where again whether people feel well informed about an institution is positively correlated with higher satisfaction ratings.⁵¹

Figure 22: Being well informed increases satisfaction



Source: *What do the Public Want to Know?* MORI, 2001 in Donovan et al, 2001

3.3 Relating satisfaction to trust

Public administration has largely held the view that better service performance increases customer satisfaction and that this leads to increased trust in government.⁵² However, the evidence suggests that the relationship between these factors is not as reliable as some would suggest. As Bouckaert et al note,

⁵¹ See also ODPM, *Five Years of Communications: A review of local authority communication*, London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002

⁵² Bok D, *The Trouble with Government*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001

while trust in government can be measured, its 'linkages with good governance are far from clear'.⁵³ Customer satisfaction, trust in government and good governance are not interchangeable concepts. Rather, trust and satisfaction are better conceived of as necessary parts of a set of indicators for good governance.

What drives trust in government is therefore complex and there is little empirical verification of these drivers. However, one large-scale study from Norway attempts to shed light on this relationship.⁵⁴ It found that trust in government 'is of a general character: a high level of trust in one institution tends to extend to other institutions.' It also found that: 'Political-cultural variables have the strongest overall effect on variations in people's trust in government.' In particular, it states the 'single most important factor' to be 'general satisfaction with democracy'.

A Canadian study of 9,000 users examined the link between service quality and confidence in government institutions finding that: 'Good service not only makes citizens happy, it strengthens the institutions of government.'⁵⁵ However, there is no guarantee that such findings are applicable to the UK, where arguably a more individualistic culture and style of provision prevails. Therefore, it might still be the case here that satisfaction with services is in fact much more clearly driven by user/consumer satisfaction than it is in Norway and Canada.

Although the relationships between satisfaction, trust and good governance are problematic, research suggests conditions when satisfaction can and cannot be used to drive service improvement.

3.4 Using satisfaction to drive service improvement

Donovan et al suggest a number of ways in which satisfaction data can be used to improve services.⁵⁶

First, they identify situations where governments are unable to maximise satisfaction. This might be because of competing demands between the needs of service users and those of taxpayers, or a need to 'damp down' public demand as for example with unemployment insurance. Satisfaction may not be the appropriate goal when service reforms intend to increase 'safety, efficiency, or redistribution', or indeed when reforms must drive through difficult changes. The paper concludes that there will be times and situations where consumer satisfaction should not be the required goal.

⁵³ Bouckaert G and Van de Walle S, 'Comparing Measures of Citizen Trust and User Satisfaction as Indicators of "Good Governance": Difficulties in linking trust and satisfaction indicators', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol 69 No 3, pp329-343, 2003

⁵⁴ Christensen T and Lægveid P, *Trust in Government: The relative importance of service satisfaction, political factors and demography*, Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies, Bergen University Research Foundation, Working Paper 18-2002, 2002

⁵⁵ ICCS, *Citizens First 3: Summary report*, Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 2003

⁵⁶ Donovan N, Brown J and Bellulo L, *Satisfaction with Public Services: A discussion paper*, Performance and Innovation Unit, 2001

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Second, they examine when satisfaction can be used to improve services. They explore three appropriate uses of satisfaction data:

- **Identifying priorities for improvement:** Determining customers' priorities; identifying key satisfaction drivers and priorities regarding what to improve.
- **Benchmarking performance:** Satisfaction data can be used to benchmark the performance of different organisations.
- **Setting targets:** Satisfaction data can be used to set targets that focus effort on outcome measures, the wishes of consumers and adaptability to changing conditions.

The orientation to consumer satisfaction has both gains and limits, and is a policy lever of undeniable power. However, as a driver of service responsiveness it struggles to separate itself from more global attitudes to governance, and perhaps also from other values. Attempts to constrain the relationship between citizen and state to that of consumer and producer have not, therefore, achieved the clarity that was initially sought. The citizen has a way of sneaking back in, and this is nowhere more apparent than in the research on public expectations to which we now turn.

Box 4: Building customer satisfaction into performance – strategic and practical guidelines for central government departments

Acknowledging the paradox of improved performance and declining satisfaction, the Office of Public Services Reform (OPSR) has recently argued for the need to build customer satisfaction into the performance ratings of central government departments. To that end, OPSR offers a number of practical and strategic guidelines for departments to follow:

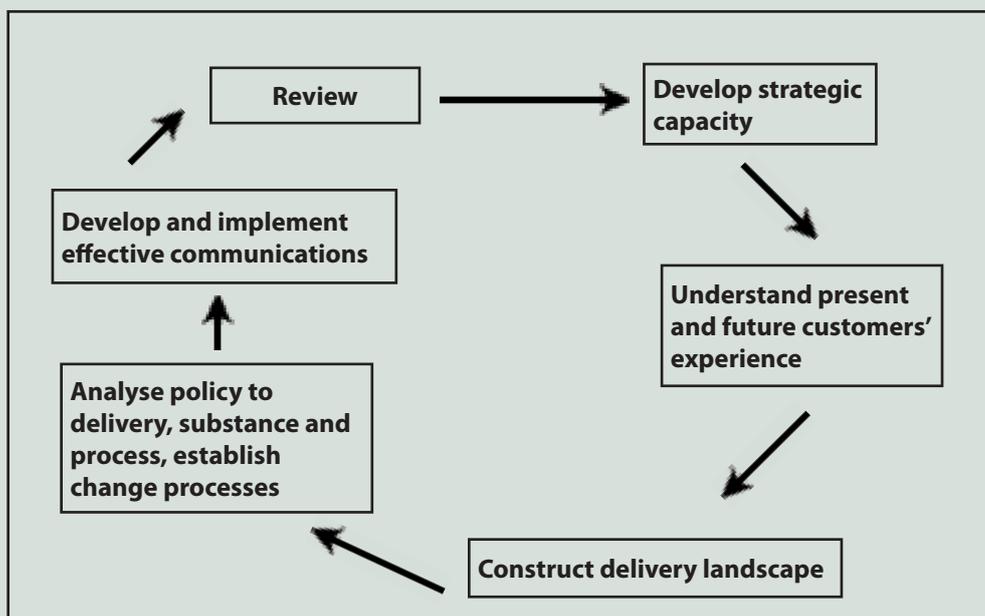
Co-ordination of research, communications and policy design in relation to customer satisfaction

Improving the quality and comprehensiveness of data is the first step in a complex process. The overall aim is to embed understanding of the customer in all aspects of the work of all organisations involved in serving customers, departments and frontline organisations. Ensuring that three key areas interconnect is fundamental to this:

- **Customer satisfaction research:** Action is needed to ensure that appropriately collected data provides all the necessary information and informs policy decision making. This research among direct customers should be supplemented by surveys of the general public to form the basis of a communications strategy.
- **Policy design:** Policy needs to be informed by detailed customer satisfaction data and should seek to improve customer satisfaction outcomes alongside achieving more specific targets. Policy needs to be supported by a well-designed communications strategy.
- **Communication:** Delivery chains for many public services are large and complex, involving multiple organisations. It is crucial that frontline staff, who interact with customers and have a major role in creating public satisfaction, understand the importance of their role. Effective communication strategies involve a high degree of interaction between communication and policy staff, with a view to developing strategic influence with frontline staff.

Instigating a cycle of continuous improvement

Strategic processes need to be aligned to ensure that a constant cycle of improvement is established. This needs to be based on regular collection of customer information and incorporate policy development and delivery processes as well as communication.



Source: OPSR, 2004

4. Managing public expectations

Where a policy initiative or service is oriented to the creation of public value, the goal is to be responsive to what the public values. We have seen that one of the problems with using satisfaction as an indicator of what the public values is that it occurs ex post – after the fact – of service delivery. Could it be that knowledge of public expectations, here occurring ex ante – or prior to delivery – is a better indicator? In attempting to respond to what the public values, surely then service providers must also shape the agenda and take care about what they are responding to. What the public demands of services is therefore of significant importance.

However, as we have already noted, there is another reason to consider expectations as an indicator of what the public values and this is the danger that arises when public expectations become excessive. Rising expectations are a direct challenge to perceptions of service quality and threaten to make demands that simply cannot be met. At the very least, public expectations cannot exceed available resources, statutory responsibilities and institutional capacities. Expectations have therefore been much studied as an indicator of what the public values and particular attention has been paid to how they are formed, whether they really are rising, and how they can be more effectively managed.

4.1 How are expectations formed?

The literature suggests that expectations are shaped by the following factors:

- individual needs
- previous experience
- word of mouth
- explicit service communications (eg posted printed matter)
- implicit service communications (eg building appearance)
- personal beliefs and values
- reputation of service
- client group (eg expectations among the elderly are lower than among those who are younger and better-off).⁵⁷

MORI-SRI research also stresses the influence of service reputation on expectations. It suggests that this influence may be inflated where, as is common in the public sector, there is:

- little information on competing services
- little real choice between competing services
- wide impact of a public service.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Donovan N, Brown J and Bellulo L, *Satisfaction with Public Services: A discussion paper*, Performance and Innovation Unit, 2001; MORI-SRI, *Measuring and Understanding Customer Satisfaction: A MORI review for the Office of Public Services Reform*, London, Office of Public Services Reform, 2002

⁵⁸ MORI-SRI, *Ibid*

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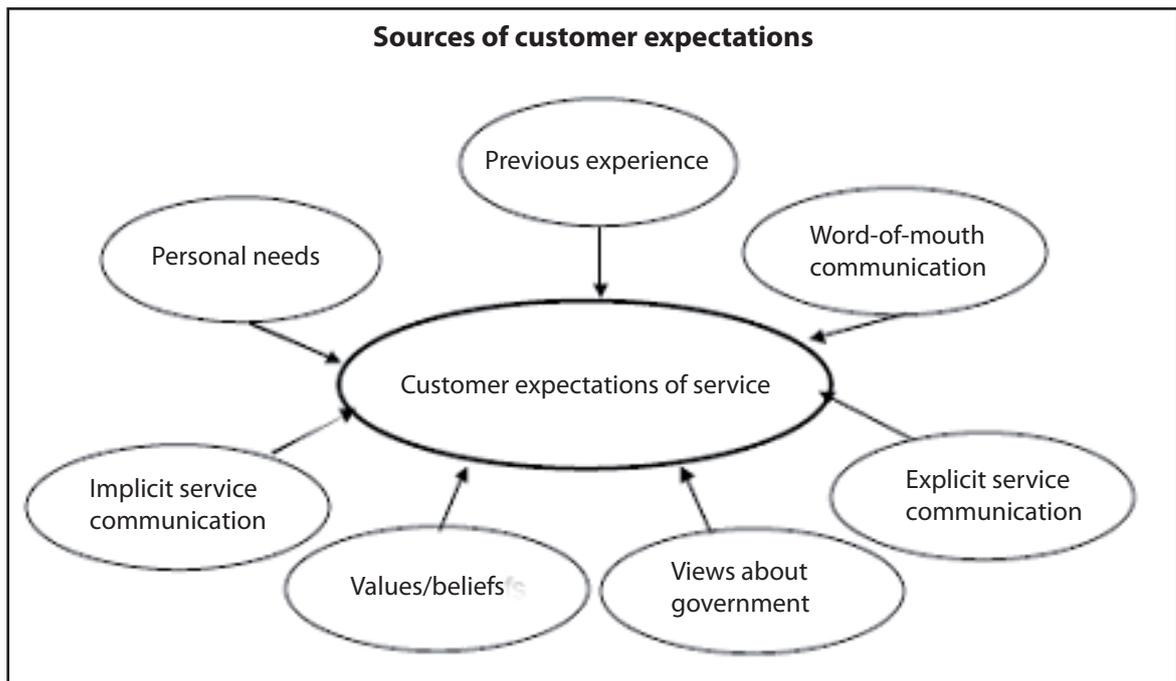
The same report drills down further into the category of 'personal beliefs and values' and identifies the importance of personal 'views of government and politicians'. For example:

'The distinction between politics, government and the public service may seem blurred in the eyes of many [such that] the public's perception of honesty and integrity in their government will affect their assessment of the services they receive from these institutions.'⁵⁹

This: 'Relates to what people view as the role of public services, reflecting their dual role as clients and citizens.' It concludes that one important driver of public expectations is, therefore, the 'reputation of the government as a whole'.

MORI-SRI summarises the key factors affecting public expectations of services in the following diagram:

Figure 23: Key factors affecting public expectations



⁵⁹ Dinsdale G and Marson B D, *Citizen/Client Surveys: Dispelling Myths and Redrawing Maps*, Ottawa, Canadian Centre for Management Development, 1999 quoted in MORI-SRI, Ibid

Clearly, different services and customers will be influenced by these factors in different ways. We should also note the evidence that suggests that the strongest indicator of expectations remains that of 'client group'. Finally, there is evidence that the importance of 'views about government' is reduced when people are asked to state their expectations of specific local services⁶⁰ – a point to which we will return later in this section.

There has been little research on how expectations change over time. However, one study undertaken concerned the Single Regeneration Budget, where public satisfaction with the areas in which they lived was surveyed both before and after the implementation of the scheme.⁶¹ Although this research was not able to establish any increase in satisfaction, despite the expenditure of resources and improvements made, it did find that people were much more positive if asked retrospectively whether the area had, in fact, improved. According to MORI-SRI, this suggests that: 'The area had improved but that residents' expectations had also increased.'⁶² This leads MORI-SRI to speculate that the 'announcement of additional resources and effort being targeted on the area resulted in residents expecting, and so discounting, improvements.'

It is of some importance, then, that explicit service communications particularly around the availability of resources be carefully thought out. Yet it is also important to understand the relation between public expectations and other indicators of what the public values, such as customer satisfaction, commitment and trust.

4.2 The role of rising expectations

The research literature often draws the distinction between service quality and satisfaction. The 'service quality' school sees satisfaction as built up of positive experiences with a number of individual interactions with the service, and then as 'decaying into an overall attitude towards service quality'. The 'satisfaction' school instead holds that 'assessments of service quality lead to an overall attitude towards the service', which they refer to as satisfaction.⁶³

In the service quality literature, disconfirmation theory (see Boxes 2 and 5) holds that customer satisfaction is related 'to the size of the disconfirmation experience, where disconfirmation is related to the person's initial expectations.'⁶⁴ Where experience exceeds expectations, then satisfaction is heightened. Where

⁶⁰ MORI-SRI, *Measuring and Understanding Customer Satisfaction: A MORI review for the Office of Public Services Reform*, London, Office of Public Services Reform, 2002

⁶¹ DTLR, *Lessons and Evaluation Evidence from Ten Single Regeneration Budget Case Studies: Mid-term report*, London, Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2002

⁶² MORI-SRI, *Measuring and Understanding Customer Satisfaction: A MORI review for the Office of Public Services Reform*, London, Office of Public Services Reform, 2002

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ MORI-SRI, Ibid; Brookes R, *Customer Satisfaction Research*, Amsterdam, ESOMAR, 1995

Box 5: The disconfirmation model in action: La Comunidad de Madrid

When satisfaction is measured using approaches based on the disconfirmation model, researchers measure the gap between expectations and perceptions of service quality. An example of how gap analysis has been used to improve public services can be found in Madrid.

The Comunidad de Madrid is one of the 17 regional governments in Spain. In 1995 it decided to implement a quality plan based on the disconfirmation model of satisfaction. The Comunidad de Madrid measured both the satisfaction of its citizens as well as the satisfaction of the clients of its public services.

The Comunidad de Madrid has developed and registered its own satisfaction measurement model called CAL-MA (Calidad-Madrid: Quality-Madrid) based on SERVQUAL. CAL-MA is based on the concept of a service quality 'gap': expectations and perceptions of service received are measured separately. The gap between them (usually negative) is taken to be the scope for improvement. Surveys are carried out every year on different representative samples of clients. Measurement of expectations takes place separately from that of perceptions of the service. Comunidad de Madrid has been successful in closing the gap between expectations and perceptions of service quality since 1997.

Source: Donovan et al, 2001

experience is less than expected, satisfaction is lowered.⁶⁵ Clearly, expectations exert a direct influence on satisfaction with services, and both disconfirmation theory and the service quality school hold that lower expectations will result in higher satisfaction ratings. Poor experiences with a service thus make it 'easier to pleasantly surprise customers'.⁶⁶

Yet expectations do not always behave in this way. This is particularly the case in situations in the public services where globalised attitudes to government and service providers are an important factor. Indeed, where overall preconceptions of a service provider are negative, expectations will be lowered and it will be harder to 'pleasantly surprise' the customer. And again, where such preconceptions are positive, high expectations make positive ratings more likely. It has therefore been suggested that the role of expectation has been over-simplified in the literature. This has been attributed to:

'...confusion between low/high expectations and general negative/positive views of a particular service. In particular, a poor reputation or image of a service is often viewed as both a factor that will result in users viewing services more negatively and as an influence that can lower expectations.'⁶⁷

The relation between public expectations and satisfaction is thus both more complex than assumed in much of the literature, and more dependent on the situational context in which that relation occurs. Indeed, as we have already noted in Section 2, there is an apparent paradox here. When we turn to scrutinising how

⁶⁵ Brookes R, Ibid

⁶⁶ MORI-SRI, *Measuring and Understanding Customer Satisfaction: A MORI review for the Office of Public Services Reform*, London, Office of Public Services Reform, 2002

⁶⁷ Ibid

this relation operates in concrete examples in specific service sectors and under different conditions, we again see the difficulties in mapping expectations against satisfaction.

4.3 Are expectations rising or are they misunderstood?

The following three case studies present examples of where public expectations were:

- misunderstood
- under-managed
- raised and then dashed by an inability to translate national policy at the local level.

In each case, the paradoxical relationship between expectations and satisfaction was the source of significant difficulties, as well as a stimulus to focus more accurately on what the public valued.

4.3.1 Policing crime or the fear of crime?

Under both Conservative and Labour governments, the police have worked hard to reduce high-volume crimes like burglary and car theft. Between 1993 and 2001, reductions in overall crime were achieved in seven out of eight years, with burglary falling by 43 percentage points since 1993-94 and car crime by 35 percentage points.

However, surveys continue to show not only that most people think crime is rising, but also that there has been little change in public perceptions of safety or in confidence in the police. Such confidence is important as the police requires the public to act as a source of intelligence and as witnesses if they are to fight crime effectively.

*Open All Hours*⁶⁸, a report on the role of police visibility and accessibility, argued that managing this apparent paradox requires closing what the researchers termed the 'reassurance gap'. Individuals' sense of reassurance can, it suggested, be broken down into perceived:

- levels of security (personal and property)
- order within the local environment (behavioural and physical).

Such perceptions are seen to be strongly influenced by the media and what the public sees around them. Other factors include age, race and gender, which affect an individual's experience of vulnerability.

Here, then, we see an attempt to explain the apparent paradox that pertains to the divergence of expectation and satisfaction in the provision of policing. For no matter how much actual crime figures fall, expectations are in fact being driven

⁶⁸ HMIC, *Open All Hours: A thematic inspection report on the role of police visibility and accessibility in public reassurance*, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2001

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by perceptions that levels of security and order are falling. This would suggest that problems such as vandalism, binge drinking and antisocial behaviour serve to lower perceptions of safety and security to the extent that actual reductions of crime fail to impact on such perceptions.

The report highlighted foot patrols as a crucial element in public reassurance. It is here that public expectations diverge most significantly from actual service quality and from what is possible with limited resources. In 1999-2000, only 17 per cent of respondents were satisfied with levels of foot patrols, while 83 per cent were satisfied with emergency responses and 89 per cent with burglary investigations. Clearly, replacing the bobby on the beat with vehicular patrols is not enough, and indeed when a police vehicle turns on its siren and blue lights it may well be signalling to the public that security and order are under threat. What the public seems to require is a style of policing that features known and accessible officers who understand the community's problems. The report then focuses on visibility, accessibility and familiarity in policing, and argues that: 'Continued success in reducing crime and disorder, within the context of a visible, accessible and community-focused policing style, will deliver enhanced public reassurance.'⁶⁹ The authors therefore suggest a move away from 'policing that values hard-edged tactics against crime and criminals – "real" policing – over community-based work aimed at reassuring vulnerable members of the public', and calls for 'the promotion of reassurance and public confidence' to be 'integrated in[to] mainstream operational strategies.'⁷⁰

The report also investigates the sources of information people use to form their perceptions of security and order in their communities. The authors focus particularly on the role of TV, radio and newspapers and the public's extraordinary appetite for crime news, police dramas, documentaries and media coverage of both police successes and failures. While media attention offers opportunities to highlight actual crime reductions, so does it advance perceptions of the police that may serve to undermine such achievements. The conclusion is that: 'Forces need to be proactive and use the full array of media liaison, public relations and marketing techniques in order to promote positive images and enhance public reassurance.'⁷¹

One tactic suggested by an American study shows that while high-profile media stories affect feelings of safety, their impact is lessened by stories giving a positive picture of the neighbourhood. Also, the study claims that people are 'less inclined to perceive that an area is unsafe if there is some detail in the coverage that would make them believe they are unlikely to be a victim.'⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

Another possibility arises from a 2000 study in which Hampshire Constabulary surveyed local residents on how their opinions about the police were formed. The results confirm many of the observations already made:

Table 3: How are opinions about the police formed?

Source	%
TV news	52
Local newspaper	44
Contact with or experience of police	43
Word of mouth/hearing about others' experiences	41
National newspaper	37
Documentary or crime programme	34
Neighbourhood Watch	11
British police drama programmes	8
Public meetings of groups of residents	4
American police drama programmes	2
Police websites	1
Other	7
Not stated	1

One figure here of particular interest is the unexpectedly high percentage that base their opinions on what they read in the local newspaper. Indeed, as research undertaken by the Newspaper Society shows, regional or local newspapers are the most widely read medium, with 84.4 per cent of all adults regularly reading one. Moreover, 40 per cent of those who read a regional paper do not read a national daily. Readership numbers were also remarkably consistent across all age groups.

HMIC therefore suggests that local newspapers offer significant opportunities to address public expectations about the police. Yet the authors were:

'...disappointed to learn that the negative and sceptical attitude some police officers have towards the press means that relationships are not always cordial. Even where a symbiotic relationship exists, fieldwork suggests that a reactive approach – giving information only when asked – is not uncommon.'⁷³

The authors also note that 'some officers do not volunteer information about items they think are routine and uninteresting', even though 'these "routine" stories often show the police in a good light and help to reassure the public.'⁷⁴

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Ibid

The report also includes the following case studies where attempts by the police to steer public expectations via the media were rather more successful:

- **Media coverage of public order disturbances in summer 2001**
The public order disturbances during the summer of 2001 in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford not only presented operational challenges to the three forces involved, but also a pressing need to restore public reassurance. Conscious of the need to learn from their experiences, Greater Manchester Police, Lancashire Constabulary (in conjunction with Burnley Council) and West Yorkshire Police engaged firms of PR consultants to evaluate their external communication plans, media releases and presentations with analysis against the actual media coverage. The use of the same firm by all three forces provided a consistency of approach and the final reports are sources of information from which all forces can learn.
- **Communicating to the public the police services available**
Wiltshire Constabulary placed policing information on the first eight pages of every *Thomson Local Directory* in the area. It was tailored to local circulation and included appropriate contact information about police stations, email addresses, the criteria for emergency calls, information on the ACPO team and a statement about the Wiltshire policing style. Costs included graphic design. The directory was circulated to 370,000 homes. Using the *Thomson Local Directory* meant that the information was likely to be retained, rather than be thrown away.

The case outlined in the foregoing illustrates the problematic nature of public expectations. It shows that the police, in its efforts to provide services that are responsive to what the public values, is seeking ways in which it can interact with its authorisation environment in a more engaged way. While this is partly a matter of public relations and open information, it also requires a new orientation – here to ‘reassurance’ – or increased confidence in the police’s ability to deliver security and order. In this case, then, we note the marked influence of public views of policing generally on satisfaction ratings of service quality.

4.3.2 DEFRA – policy delivery in rural England

In a wide ranging review, Lord Haskins examined the delivery of government rural policies in England following the creation of DEFRA as the new rural affairs department in Whitehall.⁷⁵ He found that, all too often, there was little understanding of DEFRA’s remit, that delivery functions were confused and overlapping, accountability was poor, there was a lack of responsiveness to customer needs and that ‘targets in rural delivery too often assess administrative processes rather than outcomes and public benefits.’⁷⁶

⁷⁵ DEFRA, *Rural Delivery Review*, London, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2003

⁷⁶ Ibid

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The study noted that customer satisfaction with the delivery of rural services was low and the quality of service variable. This he attributed to there being too many organisations involved with service delivery in rural areas (where at least six national agencies work with multiple regional and local organisations) and to customer confusion about the role of these organisations. In one region alone he found more than 70 regional or sub-regional strategies. These diverse organisations then generate initiatives and schemes in such number as to defy co-ordination. For example, a National Park can be subject to over 100 separate streams of rural delivery activity and funding. It is therefore little wonder that a 'complex and confusing delivery landscape' has emerged with inadequate integration with regional agendas and inadequate understanding among service providers of the strategic objectives of their work.

Haskins collected a series of reasons why these organisations are unable to respond to the public and why customers are so regularly confused by their activities. He notes that, all too often:

- customers lack clear information on products and services
- land managers and rural businesses complain about the amount of bureaucratic regulation and poor co-ordination between regulatory agencies
- complex scheme applications have led to false expectations
- grant processing is delayed
- there is inadequate ongoing help for projects once the initial grant is received
- there is insufficient targeting of help for those in greatest need.

There is little attempt to manage expectations and expectations are repeatedly dashed by the realities of service provision. Where contact with an organisation elicits the following type of response, we can assume low customer satisfaction:

'I think it's complex at the minute if you are a farmer to try and easily find somebody that will help you without going through three different organisations before you find the right one. I don't know all of the organisations that are out there. I find it difficult to find organisations that can help.'⁷⁷

Haskins goes through a series of possible improvements that might be made in the delivery of rural services, but he knows that this alone will be insufficient to generate customer satisfaction. An important component of customer satisfaction is what he refers to as 'greater credibility in the government's arrangements', which sounds remarkably like trust. This, therefore, is a case where expectations were strongly influenced by global perceptions of government ineffectiveness, and not just by service ineffectiveness itself.

⁷⁷ Ibid

4.3.3 The NHS and health inequalities

The 1998 NHS document *Modernising Health and Social Services* consolidated the Labour government's stated aim of reducing inequalities of access to NHS services and inequalities of health.⁷⁸ It set the NHS the task of reducing health inequalities within three years and guided it to do so in partnership with local authorities and in a 'joined-up' manner.⁷⁹

Local efforts to reduce health inequalities were already considerable and drew on a long history of concern. National policy was thus welcomed by agencies and individuals, and the new attention to health inequalities widely applauded. Indeed, with health inequalities now on the national agenda, local actors looked forward to developing their existing strategies further.

Yet the implementation of a national policy to reduce health inequalities has not significantly affected existing practices. Local stakeholders have derided the resulting policy as mere 'rebranding' or 'rebadging' what agencies were already doing. Some claimed that it only 'catalogued existing activities in a new format' and that 'existing local activities were shaped around the national policy imperatives':

'The actual policies [related to health inequalities] that have come down from government...have reflected really what people on the ground have been trying to do for the last ten years but haven't been able to. They haven't had the opportunity or the initiative or the money.' (*Local authority manager*)

Most local stakeholders found that the concern over health inequality was being overwhelmed by the number of other 'must-do's' emanating from central government. Often, performance management continued to centre on imperatives such as waiting lists and financial targets, with health inequalities losing their priority and sometimes not factored into organisational performance measures.

Here, then, local expectations were raised and then dashed, with the resulting disappointment focused more on central government than local services. In many ways, central government appeared to be sending mixed messages. Yet as Exworthy et al pointed out, this was, in fact, a two-way process:

'It is not just national expectations that have foundered locally but also local expectations that have foundered centrally. Thus, expectations in Westminster have been dashed locally and, significantly, local practitioners' expectations have been dashed by central government's policy approach.'⁸⁰

⁷⁸ DoH, *Modernising Health and Social Services*, London, Department of Health, 1998

⁷⁹ Exworthy M, Berney L and Powell M, 'How Great Expectations in Westminster May Be Dashed Locally: The local implementation of national policy on health inequalities', *Policy and Politics*, Vol 30 No 1, pp79–96, 2002

⁸⁰ Ibid

To address such difficulties, there have been attempts to create inter-agency groups and to appoint 'partnership managers' specifically 'charged with overcoming locally what were often perceived as central government failures'.⁸¹ Yet, once again, we notice the importance of wider perceptions – of the service provider, of the reputation of government – in the construction of public expectations.

4.4 Conclusions

As service quality improves, we would also expect customer satisfaction to improve, but it does not. This paradox is most apparent when we consider the public's expectations of the services they receive. Here, a number of other factors are seen to cloud the simple assessment of customer satisfaction. When we considered the public's views of services in Section 1, we saw that a host of values other than individual satisfaction were in play, examples being equity, fairness and openness. The shift from citizen to consumer ushered in by new public management (Section 2) has resulted in a drive for efficient services, yet such gains are not reflected in public assessments of those services.

In this section, we have seen that public expectations of services are strongly influenced by global assessments of service providers and their reputation, by the values people attach to public service provision and indeed, by a host of other values. In particular, we have seen that how an individual sees government directly affects how they will respond to better services.

⁸¹ Ibid

5. Mechanisms of responsiveness

Government reform of public services has sought a variety of mechanisms by which to ensure services are responsive to their publics. Target setting, benchmarking, competitive tendering and external contracting form one group of such mechanisms. Another group derives from the empowerment of the consumer through provision of choice and voice.⁸² It is to discussions around choice and voice as mechanisms to deliver responsiveness that we now turn.

5.1 Choice and its limits

Arguments that centre on the ability of consumer choice to enforce responsiveness tee off empirical research that has suggested a demand for choice among the public. However, as we saw in Section 1, while the public may see the benefit of choice in principle, it is less certain that the public is prepared to pay more to ensure that choice is made real. A further argument offered in support of choice is that it promotes service values widely supported by the public, such as equity and fairness. Here, choice is advanced as a means by which all users of a service can exert equal pressure on providers to meet their preferences. However, the central and most powerful argument for choice turns on its ability to deliver provider responsiveness to user needs. The empowered consumer, wielding the capacity to exit, exerts pressure on the service provider to assess more accurately and meet consumer need. As the government has argued:

‘Those providers who are not chosen have a strong incentive to raise their game. They will have to improve the quality of their service (at least in the eyes of users) to increase their responsiveness to users’ expressed needs and wants, and to use their resources more efficiently so as better to attain these ends. In such cases, choice is acting as an instrument for achieving other desirable social ends.’⁸³

Choice can take a number of forms. Principal among them is choice of provider and choice from variety. The former has focused on giving parents and patients a choice of service provider, while the latter are smaller in scale and akin to what the government has described as ‘personalisation’ of service provision. Examples of public service choice so far enacted in the UK include:

- **Choice of provider**

Health care: The Patient Choice scheme in coronary heart disease was introduced in 2002 as a national pilot.⁸⁴ Patients waiting for a heart operation for six months are offered the choice of remaining on the waiting list for an appointment at their chosen hospital, or moving to another hospital offering treatment sooner. Similarly, the London Patient Choice Project was established in 2002 to increase the options among

⁸² PASC, *Choice, Voice and Public Services: Fourth report of Session 2004-05*, Vol 1, House of Commons, Public Administration Select Committee, HC49-1, 2005

⁸³ OPSR, *The Case for User Choice in Public Services: Joint memorandum from minister for state for Department Of Health; minister of state for Local and Regional Government; and minister of state for School Standards*, London, Office of Public Services Reform, 2005

⁸⁴ DoH, *Establishing the Heart Surgery Scheme: Draft for stakeholder consultation*, London, Department of Health, 2002

which patients could choose.⁸⁵ By 2004, the scheme had expanded into offering choice at the point of referral (such as for cataract and heart surgery), had a take-up rate of 66 per cent and had served over 18,000 patients. By the end of 2005, patients will be offered a choice when they are referred by their GP of four to five hospitals, and over the time and date of their appointment.⁸⁶

Secondary education: The 1988 Education Act extended choice by allowing parents to choose secondary schools outside the boundaries of their child's home local education authority (LEA). The government now seeks to increase the diversity of secondary schooling, offering a greater variety of specialist schools and academies.⁸⁷ Around 60 per cent of secondary schools now have specialist status.

Social care: Since 2003, the direct payments scheme requires local authorities to offer payments to all eligible individuals for social care. Rather than the council choosing a provider of social care for all individuals, this scheme enables service users to choose among a number of providers, including their own support workers or personal assistants.⁸⁸

- **Choice from variety**

Expert Patients Programme: This was set up in April 2002 with the intention of widening the real choices of patients with chronic long-term illness. The programme provides the necessary training for such patients to take an active role in the design and management of their own services. The NHS now estimates that around 19,000 patients will have benefited from the scheme.⁸⁹

Choice-based letting (CBL): The ODPM has overseen 27 pilot schemes. The most popular model gives prospective tenants the choice of whether to apply for a property, instead of giving that choice, as usually occurs, to a housing officer. All local authorities will be required to introduce CBL schemes by 2010.⁹⁰

Personalised learning: The 'personalised learning agenda' requires schools to hold reviews with pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 (age 14) and to develop an individual learning plan.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Burge P, Devlin N, Appleby J, Rohr C and Grant J, *London Patient Choice Project Evaluation: A model of patients' choices of hospital from stated and revealed preference choice data*, RAND, 2005

⁸⁶ DoH, *Choice, Responsiveness and Equity in the NHS*, London, Department of Health, Cm 6709, 2003

⁸⁷ DfES, *Five-Year Strategy for Children and Learners*, London, Department for Education and Skills, 2004

⁸⁸ DoH, *Direct Payments Guidance: Community care, services for carers and children's services – England*, London, Department of Health, 2003

⁸⁹ Kennedy A, Gately C, Rogers A and EPP Evaluation Team, *National Evaluation of Expert Patients Programme: Assessing the process of embedding EPP in the NHS: Preliminary survey of PCT pilot sites*, National Primary Care Research and Development Centre, University of Manchester, 2004; DoH, *The Expert Patient: A new approach to chronic disease management for the 21st century*, London, Department of Health, 2001

⁹⁰ Arend N and Lent A, *Making Choices: How can choice improve local public services?*, London, New Local Government Network, 2004

⁹¹ NCSL, *Leading Personalised Learning in Schools: Helping individuals grow*, National College for School Leadership, 2005

Box 6: Does choice improve satisfaction?

Informed choice in transport, Perth, Western Australia

In 2000, Perth Council undertook a pilot study using marketing techniques to persuade people to walk, cycle or use public transport in the city of South Perth. The aim was to provide people with information and encouragement to make informed choices about which mode of transport to use. The pilot involved over 15,000 households and cost A\$1.3m (£468,000).

The effect was a 35-percentage point increase in walking, a 61-percentage point increase in cycling, a 17-percentage point increase in public transport use and a 14-percentage point decrease in car journeys. This translated into 300,000 extra bus passengers per year and an estimated 18-percentage point decrease in pollution and CO₂ emissions.

Moreover, satisfaction with public transport in Perth increased. Those satisfied with public transport rose from 31 per cent in 1998 to 47 per cent in 2000, and those dissatisfied declined from 55 per cent in 1998 to 39 per cent in 2000.

Education vouchers, Milwaukee, USA

In Milwaukee, vouchers for students from low-income families were introduced in 1990. When the scheme started it accounted for 1 per cent of enrolment. By 1998 this had risen to 15 per cent. A recent evaluation found that pupils' achievements had risen dramatically. For example, scores in mathematics rose by almost 7 percentile points in those schools with the highest number of voucher students.

However, whether these higher levels of attainment are the result of choice is not clear. For example, other factors such as improved accountability may have been much more important determinants in raising standards. Moreover, the effects were, on the whole, limited to African-American children. This might suggest that attainment levels rose not because of choice, but because these children were removed from underperforming schools.

Nevertheless, it was also found that voucher recipients were much more satisfied with their schools than non-recipients, with about 40 per cent giving their school the highest rating compared with 10 per cent of non-recipients. This satisfaction extended across almost all dimensions of school performance, even though improvement in standards was often very small.

Source: Hoxby, 200

5.1.1 When provider choice may not be appropriate

There are areas of public service provision where choice may not be an appropriate or effective way of giving users more power and control. Where services are intended for the most vulnerable or are particularly sensitive, they may not be appropriate. The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, for example, has questioned whether the expansion of choice in mental health services is, in fact, deliverable.⁹² It points out that the compulsory nature of many people's entry into the system means that they do not have the option to exit. Also, the community-focused nature of service provision will mean that exercising choice between one service and a geographically-distant alternative will not be practical for many. Moreover, the 'episodic nature' of mental

⁹² SCMh, memorandum by the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (CVP 01) in Public Administration Select Committee, *Choice, Voice and Public Services: Fourth report of session 2004-05*, Vol 2, HC 49-II, 2005

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health problems often means that patients sometimes have difficulty making choices, while for others, they are quite capable of doing so. In these circumstances:

‘For disadvantaged groups in particular, and mental health service users in general, advocacy will be the key to accessing appropriate services and making choices. For many people advocacy is the route to empowerment. But the quality and quantity of advocacy available around the UK is patchy: it requires considerable investment before we can be sure effective advocacy is being offered equitably.’⁹³

Where services are strongly collective in nature, such as the police or army, they may not be suited to schemes that increase choice. It is also the case that choice will not be appropriate in cases where public services are imposed – in the case of arrest or being served with a parking ticket – or where they deal with collective goods that are shared – in the case of community facilities such as public parks.⁹⁴ Here, choices cannot be enacted on the basis of an individualised transaction between providers and user, but must rely instead on an alternative mechanism through which collective choice can be advanced.

The ability to offer effective choice to consumers of public services requires adequate capacity to satisfy those choices. Without such capacity, the drive to introduce choice is unlikely to assuage concerns over service quality.⁹⁵ Choice can also raise concerns around inequity if, by accident of geography, public services are unable to reach those who want them. School choice has laid bare the potential for such unfairness. Those who can afford to move to a good school’s catchment area enjoy a wider choice than those who cannot.⁹⁶ Choice is further undermined where schools or hospitals are popular and can effectively choose who uses their services. Here, providers have the power to select the users to whom they provide services and their criteria for selection may be based on organisational self-interest (eg targets, league tables) rather than the needs of users.⁹⁷

Finally, if service users are to choose between providers, then they need their choices to be informed. This requires easy access to, and the ability to interpret, accurate information. Even where great care is taken to disseminate such

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ PASC, *Choice, Voice and Public Services: Fourth report of session 2004–05*, Vol I, House of Commons, Public Administration Select Committee, HC49-I, 2005

⁹⁵ Appleby A, Harrison A and Devlin N, *What is the Real Cost of More Patient Choice?*, London, The King’s Fund, 2003

⁹⁶ PASC, *Choice, Voice and Public Services: Fourth report of session 2004–05*, Vol I, House of Commons, Public Administration Select Committee, HC49-I, 2005; Ball S, *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The middle class and social advantage*, London, Routledge Falmer, 2003; and Croft J, *Gating Communities for Children? The perennial problem of school choice, residential location and their (continuing) relationship with neighbourhood*, ESRC Centre for Neighbourhood Research, University of Bristol, 2003

⁹⁷ The Sutton Trust, *Rates of Eligibility for Free School Meals at the Top State Schools*, The Sutton Trust, 2005; Atkinson A and Gregg P, ‘Selective Education: Who benefits from grammar schools?’, *Market and Public Organisation*, Issue 11, Autumn 2004

information, people vary greatly in the skills required to gather and assess it. Some information, particularly in health care, can be of a highly technical nature. In the NHS, for example, public access to figures on an individual surgeon's death rates will require great care, advice and intelligent interpretation lest the information become misunderstood.⁹⁸

5.2 The role of voice

In a speech to the Social Market Foundation, Alan Milburn argued that: 'There are enormous gains to be made from bringing the public inside the decision-making tent.'⁹⁹ Citing a number of examples of rising satisfaction levels that resulted from greater consultation by providers of services users, he further suggested that 'giving individual citizens more information and more choice' is critical to reform, and put particular stress on 'new mechanisms...for empowerment'.¹⁰⁰ Local decision making in the New Deal for Communities scheme, new representative bodies to fight crime and improve poor urban environments are, Milburn suggested, exemplary initiatives that shift accountability 'outwards and downwards'.

This interest in the potential of voice to contribute to the responsiveness of services is taken up in two ODPM reports, which seek to marry the theme of securing sustainable improvements in public services with that of re-engaging citizens with the institutions of government.¹⁰¹ These documents set out ways to increase community involvement in decision making, including Neighbourhood Charters giving clear standards of service that local people can expect, delegating budgets to ward councillors, and giving local people the power to demand action if service quality falls below minimum standards.

Further recent interest in maximising citizen voice more generally is signalled in the renewed attention of government to directly elected mayors, and the acceptance of the need to simplify democratic structures in local government by moving to all-out elections for all councils in England every four years. Local councillors are increasingly seen as key players for they are uniquely placed to be 'at the heart of neighbourhood arrangements, stimulating the local voice, listening to it, and representing it at local level'.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Marshall N, Shekelle P, Brook R H and Leatherman S, *Dying to Know: Public release of information about quality of health care*, Rand/Nuffield Trust, 2000

⁹⁹ Milburn A, speech to the Social Market Foundation, 8 December 2004

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ ODPM, *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why neighbourhoods matter*, London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005; ODPM, *Vibrant Local Leadership*, London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005

¹⁰² ODPM, *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why neighbourhoods matter*, London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005

5.2.1 Recent developments in regard to voice

The need to focus more directly on the impact of voice is not unique to UK public services. Indeed, a number of recent developments beyond the UK that seek to channel user voice into the management of service design and delivery offer important insights from which we might learn.

In Canada, the Institute for Citizen-Centred Service (ICCS) conducts a biennial survey of 9,000 users. The ICCS specifically seeks evaluative criteria by which public satisfaction with individual services can be assessed.¹⁰³ The UK government is seeking to learn from Canada and is currently developing a measurement tool for consumer satisfaction that can be applied across public services.¹⁰⁴ As the OPR has previously argued:

‘Without [a common measurement tool] it is hard to gain a definitive picture of how well government is responding to the needs of customers across the whole public sector. What we need is a clear understanding of what matters to citizens about how public services are delivered and the key factors that will ensure that users of public services are satisfied with the experience...’¹⁰⁵

Other developments have sought to make it easier for service users to contact government departments and to communicate directly what they require of their services. France is now moving to provide a single access gateway, called ‘Allô, Service Public’. The gateway answers administrative queries and satisfies 70 per cent of requests straight away without further referral. The aim is to project a friendly and modern image of public services. Both the Public Administration Select Committee¹⁰⁶ and the National Audit Office¹⁰⁷ have recommended the introduction of a similar gateway service to offer a single point of contact to answer citizens’ administrative enquiries and assist those who want to complain about public services.

¹⁰³ See for example ICCS, *Citizens First 3: Summary report*, Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 2003

¹⁰⁴ Hutton J, ‘Making Public Services Serve the Public’, speech by Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and cabinet office minister John Hutton to the Social Market Foundation, 24 August 2005

¹⁰⁵ Tetlow M, ‘The Canadian Experience’, *Public Finance*, January 2004 quoted in PASC, *Choice, Voice and Public Services: Fourth report of session 2004–05*, Vol I, House of Commons, Public Administration Select Committee, HC49-I, 2005

¹⁰⁶ PASC, *Ibid*

¹⁰⁷ NAO, *Citizen Redress: What citizens can do if things go wrong with public services*, London, National Audit Office, 2005

Box 7: Five critical factors for delivering successful user and citizen engagement in local government

Based on an analysis of corporate assessment reports from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) exercise in local government, the Audit Commission has identified five factors that work together to ensure that councils successfully engage with users and citizens. These are:

- 1. Commitment to user focus and citizen engagement**
Strong user focus is underpinned by core values such as honesty, inclusiveness, fairness and realism. Those councils that are succeeding in engaging users are committed to these and similar values, and demonstrate them in their organisational behaviours and priorities.
- 2. Understanding your communities**
Successful councils understand the perspectives of the people they serve and the complexities of their communities. In so doing, they are able to anticipate, plan for and respond to people's needs. Using a mixture of methods to understand the variety and complexity of community patterns will better enable councils to plan and provide flexible and appropriate services.
- 3. Clarity of purpose**
Those councils that gain the most from a user- and citizen-focused approach are clear about what they are trying to achieve, whether it be simply providing information to citizens, undertaking a consultation exercise with users or attempting to encourage greater involvement in decision making. Members, officers and citizens need to be clear about whether consultation has influenced council priorities and, if so, how. The key to good connections with users lies in variety and flexibility so that two-way communication, effective consultation, meaningful involvement and participation in decision-making processes all take place.
- 4. Communicating in appropriate ways**
The means by which councils communicate, consult and involve their citizens and service users can contribute to good user and citizen focus. The most effective councils use a combination of approaches that enable people to communicate with their council at a time and in a manner that suits them. Those councils that are most successful at engaging users do not rely solely on traditional paper-based methods of consultation and are always looking to develop their range of consultation channels. The most successful councils ensure that there is a corporate approach to consultation and that consultation is integrated and systematic.
- 5. Delivering change and improved outcomes**
The most successful exponents of user engagement not only put into place the practice and values of the above critical success factors, but also ensure that the rationale behind user focus and citizen engagement results in positive change and better services. In delivering change, the most effective councils have listened to and learnt from communities. They have incorporated what they have heard into their community strategies and have also ensured that they have communicated the council's priorities to citizens. Where user focus works, the positive benefits for the council should be increased user engagement, greater trust between individuals and councils, and a greater sense of ownership of services by users and a willingness to participate among citizens.

Source: Audit Commission, 2004

Box 8: Giving voice to citizens in public services

In an international study of initiatives to improve the responsiveness of public service providers to service users' needs, Goetz and Gaventa¹⁰⁸ identify a range of mechanisms that aims to give users more influence over policy and spending decisions. These include:

- **Research for advocacy**

This involves research to generate information on citizens' needs and complaints in relation to service delivery. It can involve innovative and participatory methods that in themselves act as awareness-raising and mobilisation mechanisms.

Putting Breast Cancer on the Map: Participatory research and advocacy campaign that challenged the relative neglect of research on breast cancer and gave voice to a largely silenced clientele – women at risk of or living with breast cancer.

- **Lobbying to influence planning and policy formulation**

In response to disillusion with politicians and legislatures, direct forms of engagement with planners and decision makers are seen to offer a better means of articulating policy preferences than traditional mechanisms of engagement such as voting, political party activism etc.

Community Safety Forum (Brighton): Citizens' group representing the concerns of the lesbian and gay community about community safety forms part of the Community Safety Forum – an autonomous body that liaises with police to improve community safety – and the policing of crimes that are not sufficiently well prevented and prosecuted. It also seeks to address discriminatory attitudes among police staff and negotiates for policy and practice changes in police work.

- **Implementation and precedent-setting**

Where the expression of citizen preferences does not produce a response from service providers, but where exit is not an option because no alternative providers exist, one response is for citizens to run services themselves or through an NGO. Sometimes this is initiated in partnership with the state. However, at the heart of this approach is the need to challenge the accepted rules of the game in the delivery of certain services in order to demonstrate the extent to which alternative delivery patterns, information-generation systems, or client self-organisation can result in more accessible and appropriate services.

Community-based housing organisations: Small-scale housing associations with elected management committees drawn from local residents. Non-elected residents can also participate in decision-making forums.

- **Auditing**

This form of engagement offers an opportunity for citizens to audit actual spending. It aims to strike at the heart of practices that preserve the powers and privileges of politicians and public managers (eg secrecy in public accounts). Auditing can be done at the receiving end of public services, where citizens consider whether funds allocated to public services have been spent in appropriate ways. The aim of this 'social audit' is to assess the relevance and impact of spending priorities on local services. Local auditing helps to promote citizen awareness of what government is doing and to judge the effectiveness of policy.

Social Audit, Local Agenda 21 (Sutton): Consultative tools that organisations can use to understand, measure and report on social performance. The process was managed by an environmental NGO and volunteer auditors were used to undertake the consultation exercise in which a range of stakeholder groups were consulted through questionnaires, workshops and interviews.

¹⁰⁸ Goetz A M and Gaventa J, *Bringing Citizen Voice and Client Focus into Service Delivery*, London, Department for International Development, 2001

Contd...

- **Government frameworks for participatory planning and community development**
This is a mechanism that provides a framework for participatory planning by local citizens. In the UK, examples tend to be marked by ad hoc procedures and citizens being consulted, but without any statutory provisions for representation of civil society groups on key decision-making bodies or requirements to follow citizen-developed plans and priorities.
New Deal for Communities: Integrated strategy to regenerate deprived neighbourhoods. Process includes open public consultation days, residents' surveys, workshops for local residents, exchange visits to other neighbourhoods, youth days, and question-and-answer sessions with representatives from police and housing authorities.
- **Consultation on service delivery and policy priorities**
Consultative processes can open spaces for public involvement in making and shaping interventions, principally through recommendations made by the public or by affected user communities. Where consultation reaches beyond elected or even informal representatives to seek a broader picture of public or user-community opinion, it offers a more direct democratic mechanism that enables people to have a say about the services and policies that affect them.
Participatory Wellbeing Needs Assessment: Consultation framework for improving understanding and communication between clients and professionals as a route to enhancing responsiveness. Based on a Participatory Appraisal with and by a wide range of stakeholders – many of whom normally do not participate – articulating their needs and developing alternative service-delivery proposals.
- **Standards setting**
This mechanism focuses the efforts of service providers on setting minimum, socially appropriate and feasible performance standards. It provides users/clients with a benchmark against which they can measure the quality of services they receive, and for which they can hold service providers to account through monitoring by user communities and citizen groups.
Citizens' Charter: A statement by a public organisation of its aims, the standards that users can expect, feedback mechanisms to improve the quality of services and raise standards, and grievance redress mechanisms. May also give limited statutory rights to certain public service users/customers.
- **Making government accessible: Information and services**
Efforts to make public service providers more accessible and transparent in their dealings with the public include physical points of access where citizens can obtain information and process a range of claims (eg one-stop shop desks in local government offices). They also include the creation of 'virtual' points of access where new information and communication technologies are used to consult with and provide information to service users.
NHS Direct: 24-hour telephone and internet advice services. Expands access to healthcare information at the same time as relaxing trivial demands on health services by weeding out non-serious cases.
- **New rights for citizens or clients**
This is a mechanism intended to empower citizens in relation to the state. While there are some examples of service users being endowed with statutory and justifiable rights to a particular service, more often this mechanism takes the form of public institutions whose role is to protect the rights of users and/or channel and resolve user grievances.
Ombudspersons: These act as watchdogs on public services in the UK. Set up to oversee services or sectors, and acting as a voice for the citizen once internal public sector complaints procedures have failed to produce a satisfactory conclusion.

Source: Goetz and Gaventa, 2001

5.3 The limits of voice

Just as choice has its limits, so does voice. The National Consumer Council, while recognising that 'voice must be heard at the point at which services are commissioned, regulated, inspected and monitored and not just at the point of supply', also notes a number of problems with voice. These include:

- Consultation processes can conflict with efficiency if the desired ends are unclear or unrealistic.
- Stakeholder processes are subject to capture by unrepresentative groups if not managed carefully.
- Involvement and consultation that do not affect outcomes can increase cynicism and contribute to 'consultation fatigue'.
- User involvement in governance needs to be matched by a mature understanding of risk sharing if individuals are to take on a greater responsibility for decisions that directly affect others.
- Processes involving the public need to develop in sophistication and appropriate use if they are to build public confidence. Experience in this remains limited, particularly in the area of governance.¹⁰⁹

These points demonstrate the difficulty of establishing credible and robust mechanisms for making the voice of the user heard through representative bodies. Moreover, these concerns increasingly appear to chime with growing scepticism in government over the value of voice in delivering public service reform. As a mechanism to impose responsiveness, voice is:

'...often poor at dealing with under performance. Voters are rarely faced with the costs of meeting their service requirements. When they are not faced with those costs, they can simply vote to increase or maintain services at other people's expense. Indeed, this often happens when school or hospital closure proposals are put to a vote; the voters concerned usually do not have to bear the costs of keeping the institutions concerned open and in consequence usually vote the closure proposals down... Whatever activists' hopes and aspirations may be, in fact far fewer people are involved in expressing their views through formal mechanisms of "voice" than through using services. And those that do tell us that there is much more to be done to make such mechanisms satisfying and effective.'¹¹⁰

Voice is also expressed through complaints. Yet even here the government has been less than convinced of its value. Complaints, it argues, require:

'...energy and commitment...and a good deal of time; and they create defensiveness and distress among those complained against. They favour the educated and articulate. Users who complain are not necessarily those

¹⁰⁹ NCC, memorandum by the National Consumer Council (CVP 04) in Public Administration Select Committee, *Choice, Voice and Public Services: Fourth report of session 2004–05*, Vol 2, HC 49-II, 2005

¹¹⁰ OPSR, *The Case for User Choice in Public Services: Joint memorandum from minister for state for Department Of Health; minister of state for Local and Regional Government; and minister of state for School Standards*, London, Office of Public Services Reform, 2005

who have the most to complain about; and adversarial relations between professionals and users, especially tied to a threat of lawsuits as they often are, can lead to expensive and inefficient defensive reactions on behalf of providers.¹¹¹

Box 9: Problems with collective voice – tenants’ ballots on social housing options

The debate over tenant ballots on social housing options has raised some important questions about the value of voting in decisions on the future of public services, and government and local authority attitudes to it. If the option being considered is transfer of the housing stock to a registered social landlord, then there is a requirement to ballot tenants. If the option is either to introduce an arm’s-length management organisation (ALMO) or private finance initiative, then there is no requirement for a ballot. In many local authorities the consultation process has taken the form of ballots, regardless of the options. There have been some high-profile examples, such as Camden and Birmingham, where tenants have voted against the option put to them. In Camden the tenants voted against an ALMO and in Birmingham a 75 per cent turnout voted two to one against stock transfer. Effectively, tenants appeared to be voting against improvements being made to their homes.

Elsewhere, such as in the London Borough of Newham, tenants have not been given a vote on stock transfer, but have been consulted by means of public meetings and a MORI survey. Newham’s director of housing explained that in his view:

‘I do not think tenants should collectively be given the choice of landlord. My belief is that these are the state’s assets to provide housing for the current generation and for generations after. If the state chooses that it wants to re-mortgage or re-finance in order to bring this housing up to a standard and it has a responsibility to do that, then I think who owns the property, whether it is a housing association or the council, is not something that should be offered to tenants by way of choice. The only choice the tenants would have would be in an election where they would choose between one manifesto and another.’

Thus at several levels of government there is dispute about the value of voting and of representative bodies on local service issues. The collective voice sounds uncertain.

Source: PASC, 2005

Choice, it appears, is increasingly favoured over voice in government. Nevertheless, the latter remains important. Not only does it seem that the public wants both choice and voice, but it might also be argued that the emphasis on choice does not adequately balance the role of the user as consumer with that of the user as citizen. The use of voice as a driver of service responsiveness is not, it seems, clearly understood. As the Public Administration Select Committee concludes in its

¹¹¹ Ibid

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recent report on choice and voice in the public services:

‘We recognise that, just as there are constraints on choice, there are constraints on voice, whether expressed in representative bodies or through complaints systems and user surveys. More careful and imaginative consideration needs to be given to making voice mechanisms effective... Together, choice and voice can contribute to making public services responsive and giving more power and control to those that use them, but they must be treated with equal seriousness by the government.’¹¹²

¹¹² Ibid

Conclusion

Public services serve the 'public', no matter how oriented to the individual consumer they are. As such, they appeal to the individual and to the individual as a member of society – the latter cannot be boxed off. What explains the delivery paradox between satisfaction and performance is the insistence of citizenship; the paradox cannot be explained in the consumer relation alone, nor is it merely a public relations problem. Rather, the paradox arises when engagement with the public is artificially constrained to a consumer relation between individual and state.

We see this when an individual benefits from the prompt arrival of a bus. Here, the individual consumer at the bus stop is efficiently served and should, therefore, be satisfied. Yet if there are three buses right behind the one that meets their immediate individual need, this will affect their assessment of the bus service. As a citizen, perhaps frustrated by a service delivery system that seems unable to simply space the buses out, and perhaps feeling excluded from decision making in other interactions with governance institutions, individuals change their assessment of the service. Despite their own bus arriving as required, they now express dissatisfaction with the service as a whole. Expectations of services thus include elements of a consumer relation to the state and that of a citizen relation, requiring both choice and voice. In this case, not only must the bus serve individual needs, it must also accord with other, more public, values.

In this review of current research we have noted the extraordinary commitment the public continues to have to public services, to the founding values on which they were based and to the ethos that continues to inspire those who work to deliver such services. These are elements of citizenship. Rather than seeing them as distortions of consumer satisfaction, a public value approach would see them as repositories of value on which service reform should be based. The public value approach, with its renewed emphasis on processes of engagement with the authorisation environment, offers a more balanced conception of the citizen/consumer, and is thus well placed to make services both responsive to public need and appreciated by the public.

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