

Buller District Council

HOW WELL IS THE COUNCIL PERFORMING WITH CUSTOMER SERVICE? Customer Satisfaction Survey

Research Report | April 2021





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HOW DO RESIDENTS RATE THE BULLER DISTRICT COUNCIL FOR **CUSTOMER SERVICE**?

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Buller District Council conducted a survey with residents who had interacted with the Council to understand satisfaction with and ways to improve customer service. The survey was available online and through hard copies between February 1st and March 1st, 2021. 409 respondents participated in the survey and this report summarises the results.

The majority of residents who have interacted with the Buller District Council are **satisfied with the customer service**, the **level of information** received from Council, and with the **level of consultation**.



Results also show that the types of interaction residents had with the Buller District Council (BDC) influenced the rating of their experience. Not surprisingly, those who have made a complaint tend to be less satisfied.

Residents say that the **staff** who work for the Council/**at Council facilities are great.**



52% specifically mention the staff in a positive light.

on important issues.

Positive, willing staff who seem to want to help."

However, there is **room for improvement** in the areas of **communication/consulation.**



21% mention that communication/ consulation methods can be improved

G Council could have given more information on their process for the recent rates review."



Section 1

WHAT ARE THE **MAIN INTERACTION AVENUES** USED BY RESIDENTS?

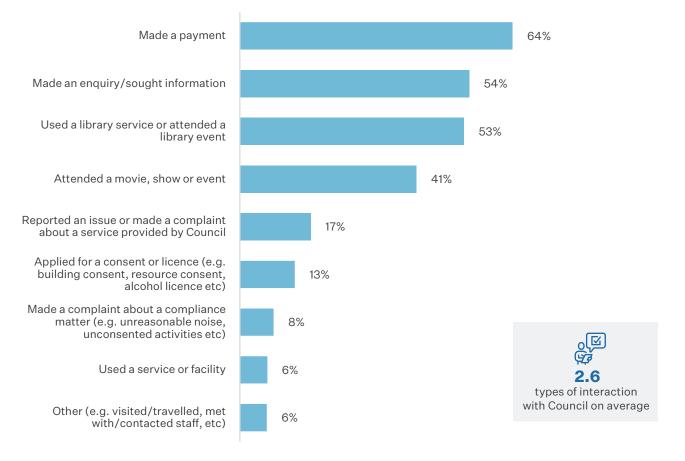
Interaction in the past 12 months

The majority of respondents have made a payment, made an enquiry/sought information, or used a Council facility (library, movie etc) in the last 12 months. On average, respondents have 2.6 types of interaction with council over the 12-month period.

Interactions vary by demographics where:

- Respondents in Westport Ward are significantly more likely to have attended a movie, show or event or used a library service/attended a library event. However, those in the Seddon Ward are significantly more likely to have made an enquire/sought information than those in the other wards.
- Respondents aged 46-65 are significantly more likely to have applied for consent or a license. Younger respondents (those under 25) are significantly more likely to have fewer interactions on average.

As will be seen on the following pages, the type of interaction, the amount of interaction, and who respondents interact with, influences the customer experience.



Interaction with Council in past 12 months

Q. In the last 12 months, which, if any, of the following have you done with Buller District Council? Base: All respondents excluding missing responses (n=403)



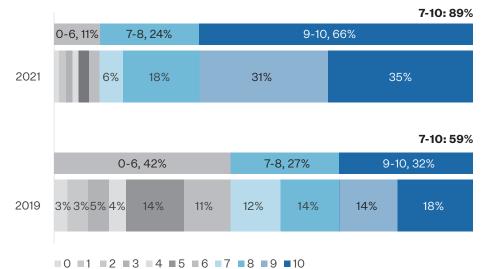
Section 2

HOW SATISFIED ARE CUSTOMERS WITH THE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND COMMUNICATION/ CONSULTATION?

Satisfaction with customer service

The majority of respondents who have interacted with the Council are satisfied/ very satisfied with the customer service they received (89%). Comparing results with those from 2019, results have improved significantly and meets the KPI target of at least a 5% increase.

- Great customer service always cheerful, helpful."
- **G** Great strides of improvement noted in last couple of years; much more open and transparent about business."



Customer service experience

Q. (2019/2020) How would you rate the customer service you receive from Buller District Council

Q. Please rate the customer service you received. 0 = Poor, 10 = Excellent Base 2021: Respondents excluding n/a and missing responses (n=403)

The majority of these respondents also feel their matter was dealt with in an acceptable timeframe. Again, results in 2021 have significantly improved since 2019¹, rising from 66% (2019) to 87% (2021).

G Questions are answered in a timely fashion."

Matter being dealt with in an acceptable timeframe



Q. Did you feel that your matter was dealt with in an acceptable timeframe? Base: Respondents excluding n/a and missing responses (n=314)

The proportion of respondents who are satisfied with the experience and/or feel the timeframe was acceptable differ by certain types of interaction/reason for contact.

- Respondents who made a complaint are less likely to feel satisfied with the customer service (50% rated the customer service as a 9-10), and are less likely to feel the issue was resolved in a timely manner (75%).
- Those who have interacted with council in more than three ways are less likely to provide a top score for the customer service received in comparison to those who had only interacted one or two times (26% and 42% provided a 10 rating respectively). Results indicate again that this is due to there being variability of customer service depending on the interaction.

¹ The answer options for the question was asked slightly differently in 2021 where it provided a n/a response.

Satisfaction with communication

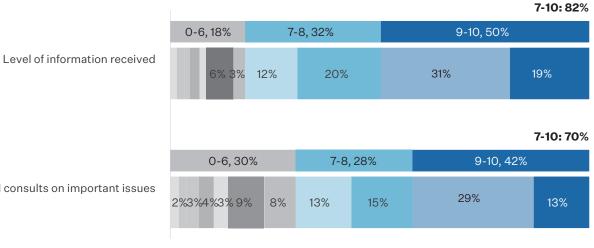
While satisfaction with the level of communication received from BDC is relatively high, Council fails to reach the two KPIs in this area. As such, there is still room to improve.

82% are satisfied with the level of information compared with the KPI of 85%.

Residents who have made a complaint are less likely to be satisfied (7-10) about the level of information received from Council (68%).

70% state that Council consults with residents on important issues compared with the KPI of 90%.

G Council is clearly trying different initiatives to engage with the community drop-in sessions, good use of Facebook, small engagement groups are more productive than large community meetings, and allows more sectors of the community to speak rather than the loudest with an axe to grind."



Satisfaction with Customer service experience

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Council consults on important issues

Q. How satisfied are you with the level of information you receive from Council? 0 = Very dissatisfied, 10 = Very satisfied

Base: Respondents excluding n/a and missing responses (n=386)

Q. Do you think Council consults with you on important issues? 0 = Very poorly, 10 =Very well

Base: Respondents excluding n/a and missing responses (n=384)



Section 3

WHAT IS BDC DOING WELL, AND WHERE IS THERE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT?

What Council does well

The majority of respondents speak well of the Buller District Council (84%).

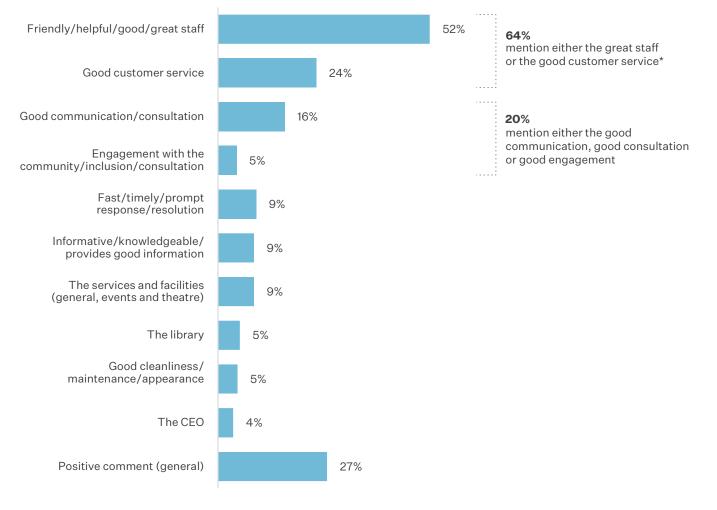
G Keep doing what you are doing - big improvement on previous leadership.

The majority of respondents are very impressed with the existing staff and the customer service provided. Some respondents call out certain staff members by name or mention a particular service area as being great/outstanding, while others describe what made the service great (e.g., responsiveness, timeliness, or level of knowledge), and some provide more generic positive comments.

ff Knowledgeable staff who are prepared to go over and above to find out information if they don't know.

As with the satisfaction score, the type of interaction with Council significantly impacts the nature of their feedback.

- 58% of those who made an enquiry/sought information mention the great staff.
- 20% of those who made some form of complain mention the fast/prompt response/resolution. (However, as will be seen next, commentary is divided on this topic).
- 19% of those who have attended a movie/show/event, used a library service/attended a library event, or used any other service and facility mention these services/facilities in positive light.



Positive feedback - responses over 4% of mentions²

Q. Based on your experiences of customer service from Council, what would you say Council does well?

Q. What could Council do to improve customer service?

Q. Do you have any other comments/ feedback/ suggestions on Council's customer service?

Q. Do you have any other comments/ feedback/ suggestions on the level of information and consultation Council provides?

Base: Respondents who provided an answer (n=376)

* A total of 64% of all respondents mentioned topics relating to the great staff and good service. Some respondents may have provided feedback on both, which is why when only looking at comments about the staff (52%) or if only looking at good customer service (24%) the figures do not seem to add up.

² Please see Appendix D for a sample of verbatim responses

What Council could improve

While the majority provide positive comments, over half of the respondents (57%) also provide negative feedback and suggestions for how Council could improve. Some of their suggestions are outside of the scope of this survey but still useful to be aware of.

The greatest area suggested for improvements is in increased and improved communication and consultation, providing more detailed information to residents.

G BDC should not rely on Facebook and other social media as much as they do. I do not and will not use them, e-mail and text are quite sufficient and much more direct in all cases. We hardly, if ever, listen to Radio. There should be better lines of communication and planning between BDC and West Reef, particularly over water supply.

In addition, while the staff and the customer service are generally seen as great, several respondents have not had such a positive experience, wishing there could be more staff or better staff.

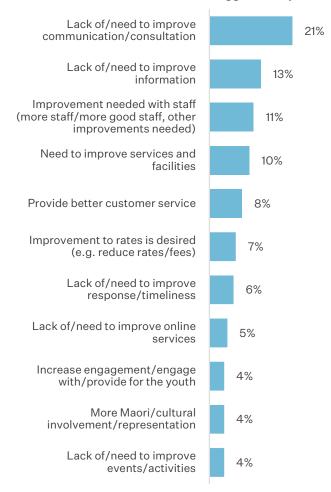
G Reception staff need to be more informed of what council is offering and when.

Other areas of suggested improvement also include the rates process, timeliness of response, a desire for a more sophisticated online system that can be transactional (pay bills etc) and better representation of and engagement with youth or residents from other cultures, specifically Māori.

Can we have rates online rather than post. I have another property in a different authority and all of my interactions with council take place online including options to ask questions in real time to a customer service rep.

Similar to previous results, feedback is impacted by the nature of the interaction with Council.

- 26% of those who made an enquiry/sought information mention the need to improve communication/consultation.
- 21% of those who made some form of complain mention the need for more staff/good staff, and 13% also mention that the timeliness could be improved.
- 13% of those who applied for a consent or license suggest improved processes.



Suggested improvements - responses over 4% of mentions³

Q. Based on your experiences of customer service from Council, what would you say Council does well?

Q. What could Council do to improve customer service?

Q. Do you have any other comments/ feedback/ suggestions on Council's customer service?

Q. Do you have any other comments/ feedback/ suggestions on the level of information and consultation Council provides?

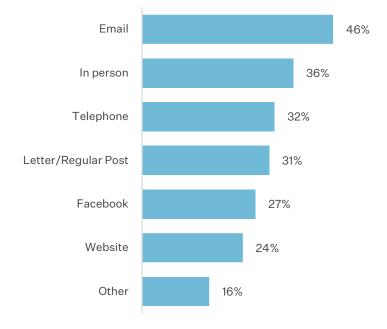
Base: Respondents who provided an answer (n=376)

³ Please see Appendix D for a sample of verbatim responses

Channels to communicate with residents

Respondents want a range of channel options available for Council to communicate with them. This indicates the need for a multi-pronged communication strategy.

• As could be expected, the preference for social media as the best way to communicate decreases by age.



Preferred channel of communication

Q. What is the best way for Council to communicate with you? Select all that apply Base: Respondents excluding n/a and missing responses (n=396)



Section 4

APPENDICES

Appendix A: About this Research

Context

Buller District Council conducts customer satisfaction surveys with residents who have had dealings with the Council in the last 12 months. The last survey was conducted in 2019 interviewing 385 residents and others who had sought information, applied for a consent, or otherwise engaged with the Council through various methods.

The 2021 survey was similarly aimed at residents and those who had interacted with the Council in the last 12-months to gather insights to enable council to measure customer satisfaction and establish what Council can do better.

C To help us to advance our internal processes towards delivering outstanding service it is important that residents submit their feedback. We want to listen and know how we made our customers feel us to improve our customer service" - Chief executive Sharon Mason

The key service areas tested in the 2021 customer satisfaction survey are:

- The types of council/service interaction had,
- Perceptions of customer service, and
- Perceptions of communication and consultation.

Method

In line with 2019, the 2021 survey was conducted using a mixed method where the survey was available online and through hard/paper copies. The open link was available via Buller District Council's webpage and on social media pages and paper copies could be found at various locations in the Buller District.

The survey was also advertised online on the Council's webpage, on social media, in local publications, on radio and through sofa sessions⁴ and by direct approach to residents.

The survey was open for a month, and available between February 1st and March 1st, 2021. 409 surveys were completed - 253 through the online link, and 156 by filling out the paper copies.

⁴ The sofa sessions were two-hour sessions in a public space where residents meet a staff member, have a chat about the customer service, provide feedback and fill out the survey as well.

Profile of respondents

The survey was open to any resident over 15 years of age, but four residents under 15 still chose to participate, as did 32 respondents who did not live in the area and these have been included in the analysis as the feedback provided was still deemed to be valid. The rest of the survey respondents vary in age, gender, and ethnicity and reside in the three different wards. However, as quotas were not put in place, the sample skew towards females (66%), tend to be aged 45 years or older (67%), and reside in the Westport Ward (67%).

A full demographic breakdown of the sample is shown in Appendix B.

Respondents predominantly self-selected to participate, and it is important to acknowledge that self-selecting respondents tend to be different from those approached through a quota managed random sampling basis where respondents are invited to take part. Self-selecting respondents may have characteristics and opinions that are not consistent with the general population.

Data Analysis

Frequency analysis

Proportions for each response have been presented individually in the charts and often responses have been combined to provide clarity. Generally, results exclude missing responses when respondents chose to not answer a question/ skip a question.⁵

The survey had several open-ended questions that were analysed by reading the answers and placing them into similar themes, with results analysed by frequency of mention. Please note that in general, any list or response with fewer than five responses—is not individually shown or commented on. Examples of verbatim comments have been provided in the appendix.

It should also be noted that not all percentages shown add up to 100%. This is due to rounding or allowing respondents to make multiple selections.

Comparisons

To provide more detailed analysis of the results and understand commonalities by subgroups within an area, results have also been analysed against past performance and by demographics where relevant and possible.

Where relevant, significant differences have been noted.

⁵ Non-responses came from hard-copy surveys were there was no way of making responses mandatory.

Appendix B. Profile of respondents

Gender

	%	n=
Male	32%	130
Female	66%	268
Gender diverse	2%	7
No response	1%	4
Total number of respondents	100%	409

Q. Which gender do you identify with? Base: All respondents

Age

	%	n=
15 or under	1%	4
16 to 25	3%	11
26 to 35	11%	44
36 to 45	18%	72
46 to 65	37%	153
65+	30%	121
No response	1%	4
Total number of respondents	100%	409

Q. Which of the following age groups do you belong to? Base: All respondents

Ward

	%	n=
Inangahua Ward	15%	60
Seddon Ward	9%	37
Westport Ward	67%	273
I don't live in Buller	8%	32
No response	2%	7
Total number of respondents	100%	409

Q. Which area of Buller do you live in? Base: All respondents

Ethnicity

	%	n=
NZ European/Pākehā	84%	345
NZ Māori	7%	28
Pacific Islander	1%	3
Chinese	0.2%	1
Other European	4%	18
Indian	2%	9
Other	3%	13
No response	2%	7
Total number of respondents	100%	409

Q. Which of the following ethnic groups do you identify with? Base: All respondents

Appendix C: Coded responses to all open-ended questions

What Council does well based upon customer service experience

	%	n
Friendly/helpful/Good staff	43%	175
Good service	21%	87
Communication	11%	43
Fast/prompt response/resolution	8%	31
Library	5%	19
Engagement with the community/inclusion/ consultation	5%	19
Services and facilities	4%	18
Cleanliness/maintenance/appearance	3%	13
Informative/knowledgeable	3%	12
The CEO	2%	10
Positive comment (undefined)	2%	7
Theatre	1%	5
Events	1%	4
Accessibility/mobility	0%	2
Other	3%	11
Negative comment/room for improvement	8%	31
Don't know/missing response/nothing/NA	14%	56
Total number of respondents	100%	409

Q. Based on your experiences of customer service from Council, what would you say Council does well?

Base: All respondents (n=409)

How Council could improve customer service

	%	n
Lack of/need to improve communication/ consultation	9%	35
More of the great staff	7%	29
Better service	6%	26
Lack of/need to improve services and facilities	6%	23
Lack of/need to improve information	5%	20
Lack of/need to improve response/timeliness	4%	17
Lack of/need to improve online services	3%	13
Reduce rates/fees	2%	9
More Maori/cultural involvement/ representation	2%	9
Lack of/need to improve processes	2%	8
Engage with/provide for the youth	2%	7
Lack of/need to improve events/activities	1%	5
Lack of/need to improve cleanliness/ maintenance/appearance	1%	5
Better/more appropriate prizes	1%	3
Take care of employees	0%	2
Lack of/need to improve environmental response	0%	1
Other	6%	23
Don't know/missing response/nothing/NA	36%	149
Positive comment	14%	57
Total number of respondents	100%	409

Q. What could Council do to improve customer service? Base: All respondents (n=409)

Additional feedback on Council's customer service

	%	n
Positive comment (NET)	26%	107
Positive comment (general)	12%	49
Staff positive	8%	31
Good communication/consultation	2%	8
More Maori/cultural involvement/ representation	2%	8
CEO positive	1%	5
Good service	1%	5
Good response/timeliness	1%	5
Good cleanliness/maintenance/appearance	1%	5
Good services and facilities	1%	4
Negative comment/suggested improvements (NET)	20%	83
Lack of/need to improve services and facilities	3%	12
Lack of/need to improve communication/ consultation	3%	11
Lack of/need to improve events/activities	2%	10
Engage with/provide for the youth	2%	9
Lack of/need to improve information	2%	7
Lack of/need to improve service	2%	7
Neutral/negative response	1%	6
Staff negative/room for improvement	1%	6
Lack of/need to improve response/timeliness	1%	6
Rates	1%	4
Lack of/need to improve online services	1%	4
Lack of/need to improve environmental response	1%	3
Reduces fees	1%	3
Other	3%	14
Don't know/missing response/nothing/NA	52%	214
Total number of respondents	100%	409

Q. Do you have any other comments/ feedback/ suggestions on Councils customer service?

Base: All respondents (n=409)

	%	n
Lack of/need to improve communication/ consultation	11%	44
Lack of/need to improve information	6%	26
Engage with/provide for the youth	2%	7
Neutral response	1%	6
Rates	1%	6
Lack of/need to improve services and facilities	1%	6
More Maori/cultural involvement/ representation	1%	5
Improve online services	1%	5
Staff negative/room for improvement	1%	4
Lack of/need to improve response/timeliness	1%	3
Positive comment (general)	7%	30
Information positive	5%	21
Good communication/consultation	4%	16
Staff positive	3%	14
CEO positive	1%	5
Good services and facilities	1%	5
Other	4%	16
Don't know/missing response/nothing/NA	53%	217
Total number of respondents	100%	409

Additional feedback on Council information and consultation

Q. Do you have any other comments/ feedback/ suggestions on the level of information and consultation Council provides? Base: All respondents (n=409)

Appendix D: Sample of Verbatims Responses

Based on your experiences of customer service from Council, what would you say Council does well?

- **1.** The staff on the front desk and who answer the council's main telephone number are knowledgeable and respectful- so they are great to deal with. 2. The facilities (internet access, computer access, printer, photocopier and scanner) at the library are a godsend. I only have a computer and limited internet access at home, so am totally reliant on the library's services. Having these facilities available during covid level 2 has been even more important as Work & Income has been closed to the public in the past have referred their clients to the library. 3. Library staff are fantastic as is the service that they provide. Last week I was fortunate to have a staff member install Libby and Borrowbox on my phone. Now I can download and listen to audio book recordings. I've wanted to do this for a long time and didn't know how. This has opened up a new world for me. 4. I also use the swimming pool on a regular basis. This is a great facility and a huge bonus for the people who live in the Buller region.
- **Council almost always gets back to me in a timely fashion.** I often contact the wrong dept. I am redirected in a friendly and accommodating way. I use the council on behalf of others regularly. Service is friendly, prompt and helpful. People at all levels of the hierarchy at BDC are available to the public for problem solving. Services such as WestReef respond quickly. Overall, most departments have a solution focused approach. Thank you.
- **Council staff are very friendly & helpful. They have responded well to suggestions to improve services.**
- I can say that the Buller District Council does seem to try to do everything well. I certainly have no complaints about the service I have had recently.
- **I** Last service request I had a response and the problem fixed within 48hours.
- **G** Face to face contact with customers is a priority and well done.
- **Much improved communication and customer service response well done!!**
- **Staff are generally friendly and professional, and do their best to be helpful.**
- **f** The people I dealt with were friendly and able to either answer my enquiry or directed me to the correct person.
- **G** They checked out my concern within 2 days and notified me by email that a job order had been raised for the work to be carried out.
- **I** The service at the Reefton service Centre is excellent, always helpful.
- **f** The library is awesome.
- I am ex-Bullerite returning to visit my family. I can't believe how vibrant, colourful and busy Westport and Carters beach is. Appealing, family friendly

X

What could Council do to improve customer service?

- **G** Acknowledge if a customer has come up to the counter and the receptionist is on the phone. A quick nod of the head or 'I will be with you shortly' is a nice way to be acknowledged instead of having to stand there while they are on the phone.
- **G** After hours noise control could be better. Not very friendly on the phone and no information about what will happen.
- **G** Allow champions to promote the correct way of customer service.
- **G** BDC should not rely on Facebook and other social media as much as they do. I do not and will not use them, e-mail and TXT are quite sufficient and much more direct in all cases. We hardly if ever listen to Radio. There should be better lines of communication and planning between BDC and West Reef, particularly over Water supply.
- **G** Be more visible, have a tent and stands and be proud of the services that you offer based on what I was told today. It would have been nice to see councillors present, I would have thought they would have been more visible and connecting in with their community which tells me they are not interested in their Māori community, unless they were off attending other events elsewhere.
- **G** Consistency in telephone manner.
- **Get** rid of the grumpy people. Have friendly, helpful public servants on the desk and phone.
- **Keep** doing what you are doing, they just need to know everyone where abouts or if they are on leave etc.
- Keep your website up to date section on public consultation is outdated showing oceans gold as the latest consultation. I went to this section because I thought that is where the link to the survey would be and there is no mention of the survey or the rates review.
- More interactions with community in smaller groups please, I am more willing to have a voice and contribute in a smaller group than a large community meeting which can be intimidating.
- **Mot** much, just keep smiling and be helpful.
- Would be good to be able to do more things online like dog rego etc then the front desk would be less busy.
- **G** Reply to emails! Sent an enquiry regarding water rates over a month ago with no response.
- Respond back faster to emails & phone calls. Give good advice upfront, not get back a week or 2 later. Proactively follow up every enquiry to make sure things are going well. Advertise a strong customer service guarantee so the public hold you accountable to it. Become renowned as a go ahead, can do, proactive, positive, helpful, generous council not a 'can't do roadblock' to everything.

Do you have any other comments/ feedback/ suggestions on Councils customer service?

- **G** Building inspection completions are also quite slow.
- **C**onsistent customer service is important and it should be displayed by all staff in their dealings with customers, as it's not only those in front-of-house roles who provide customer service.
- **G** Don't rely on one person to carry the team.
- Generally I find most council customer service staff friendly and helpful, the library staff in particular go above and beyond in creating a good feel and are very helpful.
- **G**reat strides of improvement noted in last couple of years much more open and transparent about business.
- I applaud council for wanting to improve. We can always improve our services that is if we listen to what the people want, need or expect. My comment in relation to this question is to listen without judgement and consider the conversation, before making decisions. I understand council cannot give information on everything they are working on - for a variety of reasons. However, when council make a public statement regarding a topic they have been working on - there is often a section of people who feel - for whatever reason - displaced or left out of the consultation/decision. Only discussing certain topics can appear to be selective and discriminative.
- Increase staff and councillors' treaty & cultural understanding.
- **Library and theatre facility should be used more to hold events and gathering for 65** plus.
- **G** More youth orientated programmes and activities, keep asking youth what they want. Not sure survey is best suited to youth questions are very adult orientated.
- **G** Opportunity exists for a more inclusive community input for community members with a disability in terms of planning for the current and future.
- **G** Overall community seems happy with council I hear very little negativity from friends except rates grumbles and council can't please everyone.
- **K**esponse can vary depending on who you know in council.
- **So far have only had positive interactions.**
- **G** Town is buzzing and busy there is a great feel around Westport that progress is happening.
- **Website needs upgrading.**
- **Westport is looking vibrant and bright and busy.**

Do you have any other comments/ feedback/ suggestions on the level of information and consultation Councilprovides?

- **G** Buller seems to advertise things in the Westport paper. Yes, even though Reefton is part of Buller we get the Grey Star and Messenger so we don't see Westport's news. Even if we make a phone call its free to ring Greymouth but a toll call to Buller. I wish we were part of Grey District Council, not Buller.
- **G** Connecting more into young people. Is there a youth council?
- **G** Council employs contractors who are not good at providing information required to make on matters affecting ratepayers.
- **Council gives very little feedback on the result of Council Meetings and even less on the result of Public Excluded however restricted it is. If Council dislikes the reports in the Westport News, then it should be proactive in informing its ratepayers. "Connect" is ok but far from sufficient.**
- **G** Don't really get all information unless you ask yourself.
- **I** get more information from the local newspaper.
- **I** have seen significant improvement in most departments now council needs to aim for consistency.
- **I** like the newsletter that gets put into letterboxes. I also follow BDC's Facebook page, and read items in the Messenger.
- I think Council gets the balance right with the issues it consults on, consulting on matters where necessary/required and getting on with getting things done where possible. Council's use of a wide range of tools and channels to get information out is appreciated.
- I think the Council "over" consults at timed. Decisions have to be made and Council, at times, needs to make the hard calls without continually going back to the public.
- **I**t can sometimes feel a little bit like we need to be the ones getting in touch first.
- **G** Keep trialling different consultation options.
- More technology friendly ways of connecting to community.
- **66** Need to make sure the elderly aren't left out; they are usually the last to know important stuff.
- **F** Provide timely and accurate information.
- **G** Quite often get information late and not enough to rural areas.
- **G** Rates Review This would have to be the poorest presentation I have seen in my life! The information is not transparent and lacks detail with numerous mistakes in the online documentation!
- **F** True consultation process needs to be developed.
- **W** Very little info unless you have Facebook and not all of us do.



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