

Community Survey 2025/26 — Public Link Responses

Summary of findings — not included in the formal survey report

Prepared for Steph Forde, Corporate and Strategic Planner. Analysis of the public link raw data file (620 responses), compared against the Key Research report for the invitation-based survey (404 responses).

Scope and how to read these results

- 620 people responded through the public link, compared with 404 in the formal invitation-based survey. Both used the same questionnaire and the same 1-10 rating scale.
- These results are unweighted. The formal survey is weighted to Census 2023 demographics for gender, age, ethnicity and location, so the two are not directly comparable in a statistical sense.
- The public link is open, self-selecting and uncontrolled. People with a strong view — usually a negative one — are more likely to seek it out. The results below should be read as an indication of what motivated residents are saying, not as a measure of district-wide opinion.
- No respondent identified as an elected member or a Council employee.
- Percentages are the proportion rating 7-10 out of 10, excluding "don't know", consistent with the formal report.

Headline finding

Public link respondents are consistently less satisfied than the formal survey sample, but the gap is not uniform. It is largest on measures of perception and judgement, and close to zero on measures of direct experience or fact.

- **Perception measures show gaps of 15-18 points.** Overall performance 36% (formal survey 51%), reputation 31% (46%), value for money 27% (43%), quality of services and facilities 39% (55%).
- **Service satisfaction gaps are smaller, at 10-11 points,** and the ranking of services is identical. Water, waste and parks sit at the top in both; roading and regulatory services sit at the bottom in both.
- **Experience-based measures are almost identical.** Among residents who contacted Council, satisfaction with overall enquiry handling was 51% through the public link and 53% in the formal survey. Awareness of emergency preparedness messaging was 58% in both, and personal preparedness 50% against 51%.

This pattern suggests the public link is attracting residents who are more critical of Council as an institution, rather than people with materially different day-to-day experiences of Council services.

Comparison of key measures

Measure (% satisfied, rated 7-10)	Public link	Formal survey	Gap
Overall measures			
Overall performance	36%	51%	-15
Overall reputation	31%	46%	-15
Overall value for money	27%	43%	-16
Quality of services and facilities	39%	55%	-16
Reputation components			
Leadership	30%	46%	-16

Measure (% satisfied, rated 7-10)	Public link	Formal survey	Gap
Faith and trust	26%	41%	-15
Financial management	18%	28%	-10
Value for money components			
How rates are spent	31%	47%	-16
Rates being fair and reasonable	22%	37%	-15
Fees for other services being fair	26%	44%	-18
Services and infrastructure			
Water management	70%	80%	-10
Waste management	74%	84%	-10
Parks and reserves	74%	85%	-11
Community facilities	67%	78%	-11
Roading infrastructure	51%	62%	-11
Regulatory services	45%	61%	-16
Communication and engagement			
Quality of information	45%	54%	-9
Keeping residents informed	44%	52%	-8
Influence on decision making	20%	26%	-6
Experience-based and factual measures			
Overall enquiry handling (contacted Council)	51%	53%	-2
Aware of emergency preparedness messages	58%	58%	0
Feel prepared for an emergency	50%	51%	-1
Council promoting emergency preparedness	50%	59%	-9
District going in the right direction	29%	44%	-15

Where results are strongest and weakest

The ordering of measures within the public link data closely mirrors the formal survey. Core three-waters and library services rate highly; financial management, influence on decision making and rates fairness rate lowest.

Individual measure (% satisfied)	Public link	Formal survey
Strongest results		
Reliability of the water supply	88%	92%
Reliability of the sewage system	88%	96%
Libraries (users)	87%	95%
Overall sewage system	87%	95%
Playgrounds (users)	82%	87%
Cemeteries (users)	82%	87%
Weakest results		

Individual measure (% satisfied)	Public link	Formal survey
Financial management	18%	28%
Influence on decision making	20%	26%
Rates being fair and reasonable	22%	37%
Managing and issuing resource consents	26%	41%
The planning unit	28%	56%
Condition of rural roads	31%	44%
Condition of urban roads	36%	50%
Largest gaps against the formal survey		
The planning unit	28%	56%
Swimming pools (users)	69%	87%
Art gallery (users)	73%	90%
Public toilets (users)	50%	67%
Aorangi Stadium (users)	74%	89%
Recycling services	72%	85%

Three facility measures stand out as unusually low relative to the formal survey — public toilets (50% against 67%), swimming pools (69% against 87%) and the art gallery (73% against 90%). The written comments point to public toilets in particular, with the Strathallan Corner development named repeatedly.

Perceptions of the district

- 46% say the district is a worse place to live than three years ago, compared with 27% in the formal survey. 11% say better (formal survey 15%).
- 55% say the district is a worse place to do business than three years ago, compared with 40% in the formal survey.
- 31% rate quality of life as worse than three years ago, compared with 17% in the formal survey. A majority (59%) still say it is about the same.
- 76% describe the district as safe or very safe, compared with 84% in the formal survey. 20% feel somewhat unsafe (formal survey 14%).
- 29% agree the district is going in the right direction, compared with 44% in the formal survey.

Subgroup patterns

- Satisfaction rises with age on almost every measure. Overall performance is 31% among those aged 18-49, 34% among 50-64 and 45% among 65 or over. The same pattern appears in the formal survey.
- Rural and semi-urban respondents are less satisfied than urban respondents. Overall performance is 39% urban, 26% semi-urban and 24% rural. The gap is widest on water management (73% urban against 43% rural) and regulatory services (48% against 26%), although rural sample sizes are small (around 70 responses).
- Two thirds of respondents were female (66%), against 51% in the weighted formal survey, and only 2% were aged 18 to 29. The sample is skewed and unweighted.

Contact with Council

- 34% had made a request for service or complaint in the past 12 months, higher than the 28% in the formal survey — consistent with a more engaged, more motivated group of respondents.
- Phone was the most common contact method (51% of those who made contact), followed by email (38%), online (33%) and in person (28%).
- 80% initially dealt with a Council staff member and 8% with a councillor, the Mayor or a community board member.
- Satisfaction with the handling of that contact was close to the formal survey: understanding of the issue 66%, helpfulness of staff 60%, communication 61%, time taken to resolve 48%, outcome achieved 53%.

Written comments

310 of the 620 respondents (50%) left a written comment, compared with 171 of 404 (42%) in the formal survey. Comments were also longer, at a median of about 40 words. Each comment was coded against the same themes used in the formal report; comments can carry more than one theme.

Theme	Public link (n=310)	Formal survey (n=171)
Wasteful spending / spending on the wrong things	34%	29%
More facilities / upgrades / general town maintenance	28%	5%
Poor project management (Theatre Royal, stadium) / consultants	25%	23%
Rates and fees too high	23%	20%
Increased communication / transparency / consultation	19%	12%
Support for city centre revitalisation / growth	16%	15%
Poor roading / potholes / maintenance	15%	17%
Vegetation and weed management	14%	13%
Satisfied / enjoy living in the area	13%	5%
Dissatisfied with Council staff / turnover / overstaffing	11%	13%
Lack of footpaths / footpath maintenance	10%	8%
Concerns about growth / town planning	10%	3%
Focus on core services	9%	7%
Waste management / public litter	8%	5%
Other	32%	9%

Three points are worth noting from the comments:

- **Spending is the dominant theme.** A third of comments raise wasteful spending, a quarter raise project management and consultants, and just under a quarter raise rates. These are frequently linked in the same comment — the argument being that rates rises are funding projects residents did not ask for. The Theatre Royal and the Strathallan Corner toilets are the two most frequently named projects, followed by the stadium and showgrounds, and the Stafford Street paving.

- **Presentation and maintenance of the town features more heavily than in the formal survey.** 28% of comments raise facilities, upkeep or general town maintenance and 14% raise weeds and vegetation, often about garden beds, kerbs and roadsides. This is a larger share than the formal survey recorded.
- **Positive comments exist but are usually embedded in criticism.** 13% of comments included something positive — most often Caroline Bay, the libraries, the parks, frontline staff and the district as a place to raise a family. On an overall read, around 70% of comments were predominantly negative, around 26% mixed or neutral, and around 4% predominantly positive.

Sample profile

Sample profile	Public link (n=620)	Formal survey (n=404, weighted)
Female	66%	51%
Aged 18-29	2%	—
Aged 18-49	36%	44%
Aged 50-64	35%	27%
Aged 65 or over	27%	29%
Māori	7%	8%
Ratepayers	93%	99%
Lived in district over 10 years	78%	70%
Live in an urban area	76%	—

Suggested use

- Treat the public link results as qualitative supporting evidence, not as a second set of satisfaction statistics. The comments are the most valuable part of the file.
- The consistency in the ranking of services across both samples, and the near-identical results on experience-based measures, add confidence to the formal survey findings rather than contradicting them.
- The written comments reinforce the improvement priorities identified in the formal survey — financial management, trust, and how rates are spent — and give specific, nameable examples that the quantitative results do not.
- Public toilets, town presentation and weed management are worth noting as operational themes that come through more strongly here than in the formal survey.