

The Highland Council
Resources Committee – 25 February 2015

Agenda Item	18(b)
Report No	RES/22/15

Website Review Report

Report by Depute Chief Executive\Director of Corporate Development

Summary

Following the launch of the new Highland Council Website in July 2014, this report provides an update on the current status of the website and an analysis of recent survey results from the Communities and Citizens Panels.

At the Resource Committee meeting in August 2014, it was agreed that a six month review of the website would be carried out to help inform future developments and improve customer satisfaction. This report outlines how the Council will use this information to continue to improve performance.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Customer Engagement Strategy 2012-15 details the Council's commitment to developing online services and providing digital as a channel of choice for customers. The strategy states "...all service activities (where feasible), should be delivered over multiple channel access – telephone, online and face-to face".
- 1.2 As part of enhancing online facilities, in July 2014 the Highland Council officially launched a redesigned customer focused website, which is accessible via mobile devices and in areas with low or no broadband connectivity (i.e. where customers may need to use a "dial up" service). A fundamental objective of the new website is to ensure that it meets the needs of customers who have to utilise specialist software or equipment to be able to use the website.
- 1.3 The website has approximately 800,000 page views each month with over 160,000 unique users. Our most popular web pages are those on planning, bin calendars and job vacancies with some seasonal trending reflected around school enrolment, recycling and winter maintenance.
- 1.4 In line with good practice guidelines, a post implementation review of the new website has been undertaken; including surveys to measure customer satisfaction with the new website. A full copy of the survey results can be found in **Appendix A** (attached).
- 1.5 The survey was sent to the 323 community groups who make up the Communities Panel, including 151 Community Councils. The rate of return was 17%.

1.6 Of the groups who responded there were:

- 29 Community Councils
- 8 development groups/trusts
- 6 Parent Councils
- 5 disability support/advocacy groups
- 2 CAB
- 5 other groups

1.7 This survey was also sent to 2,637 individuals on the Citizens' Panel, which elicited a response rate of 34%. This level of public engagement is extremely helpful and ensures that we have the feedback and insight necessary to improve and enhance the customer experience for our all our website visitors.

2. Key Features

2.1 Survey questions were posed to both panels around a range of issues such as frequency of use, reason for access, the types of devices used, layout and overall satisfaction. Respondent's views on ease of use and accessibility were sought as these were seen as some of the key objectives for the new website. The opportunity was also taken to seek user's views on any improvements that could be made, including any information or services that could be added to the website.

2.2 Some of the key survey findings for both the Communities and Citizens Panel are highlighted below.

2.2.1 Overall satisfaction

Communities Panel

62% were very satisfied or satisfied overall with the website.

Citizens Panel

82% were very satisfied or satisfied overall with the website.

2.2.2 Reason for visiting the website

Communities Panel

72% of respondents visit the website to find information on Council committees and meetings.

Citizens Panel

61% of respondents visit the website to access services.

These responses highlight the varying and wide range of reasons that individuals and groups have for accessing the website. It also supports the demand to extend the number of services available online and the underlying requirement to focus on all our customer needs.

2.2.3 **Types of device used to access website**

Communities Panel

100% of respondents used a desktop or laptop computer, 25% a tablet and 17.5% a mobile phone.

Citizens Panel

88.3% of respondents used a desktop or laptop computer, 34.6% a tablet and 10.8% a mobile phone.

Over the period October 2014 to January 2015 there has been a significant shift in the number of users accessing the website using tablets or mobile phones. Use of mobile phones has increased from 17% to 41% and tablets from 15% to 23%.

This demonstrates assurance that a range of devices are being successfully used to access our website and also that more than one device may be used by an individual or group. The website forms also allow users to upload a photograph or document with their service request.

2.2.4 **Layout**

Communities Panel

27% agreed with the statement that "the layout makes it easy to find what I am looking for".

Citizens Panel

54% agreed with this statement about the layout.

The significant variation on responses here underlines the need for further work to be undertaken to ensure our website meets the needs of all our customers. The results however do give us some indication of what our customer's say about our website and outlines some of their requirements. Specifically, the need to review navigation to committee agendas and minutes to make these areas easier for users to access. This work is regarded as a priority.

2.2.5 **Accessibility**

Communities Panel

5% advised that they had made use of accessibility features such as magnified text.

Citizens Panel

6.3% advised that they had made use of accessibility features such as magnified text, changing fonts, browsealoud etc.

We will continue to explore features and functionality that will support all our users in accessing our website. Section 3.2 outlines the results of a further survey undertaken by the Digital Accessibility Centre which also focused on this key area.

2.2.6 Searching for content

Communities Panel

55% of respondents felt that they could not easily search for information.

65% indicated that they were able to find what they were looking for on their previous visit.

Citizens Panel

16% of respondents felt that they could not easily search for information.

87% indicated that they were able to find what they were looking for on their previous visit.

During the timescale of the survey, the Council deployed Google as a search tool for the website with the intention of fine tuning and customising results based on customer submitted queries. Given this development, it is expected to see an overall rise in satisfaction in this area.

An improvement on the search for content has also been achieved by a combination of our online search, use of the A to Z functionality and the application of the Scottish Navigation List (SNL). (A navigational layout used by most local authorities in Scotland.)

2.2.7 Content is relevant and up to date

Communities Panel

58% agreed that the content was relevant and up to date.

Citizens Panel

64% agreed that the content was relevant and up to date.

The Digital Services team strives to assist the wider organisation in ensuring content is relevant and up to date. This good practice is confirmed by these results.

3. **Areas of Strength**

3.1 Detailed analysis of the Communities and Citizen Panel survey returns, combined with input from independent, nationally recognised, survey companies has helped us to identify our strengths and where the focus for future areas of development is needed.

3.2 SiteMorse, an independent survey company also carried out a review of our website. This provides us with a valuable opportunity to benchmark our performance against other local authorities. In Q4 of 2014, the Highland Council website was ranked 25th out of 429 UK Local Government organisations in terms of online capability (this took into account Function, Accessibility, Code Quality, Performance etc.). This is a significant improvement on our rating from the previous comparable quarter when we ranked 87th in this category. This means that the Council's website now ranks in the top 6% of UK Local Government organisation websites.

- 3.3 A further survey was undertaken by the Digital Accessibility Centre (DAC) who employ people specifically to test the complete website, to ensure compatibility with adaptation and enablement tools and software such as screen readers and magnification tools. The final report noted *“The quality of the site tested was good and it was obvious that a lot of consideration had gone into making the site accessible, however a few areas of concern were encountered”*.
- 3.3 Further investigation highlighted that the areas of concern were around features such as portals that signpost from the website. This is an area that the Council has limited control over e.g. Capita payments module and the Planning module. The Council has engaged with these service providers to undertake remediation over the next three months.
- 3.4 The recent launch of the School Closures web content, linking in social media (Facebook/Twitter) and automated emails is an excellent example of good practice in action and is widely considered as a success with 173,800 views in January 2015 (our second most popular page during this month). We have also seen a significant increase in traffic from Facebook users as part of this integration with an increase from 1,467 “hits” in October 2014 to 63,545 “hits” in January 2015.

4. Future Developments

- 4.1 Future website development will focus on a number of key areas to enhance the customer experience and increase usage. Where customers have highlighted a particular issue e.g. layout and searching for Council agendas and minutes we are working to ensure that they are easier to find. We are also working to improve our online forms, so that again customers will find them easier to access and use.
- 4.2 The Digital First Report highlights the continued growth in the number of customers accessing digital services and we envisage an even more positive response once we have increased the number of services available. We will work with ‘Citizens Online’ to support their involvement with local communities and individuals so that they can understand and gain the benefits of being online. Knowledge transfer from Citizens Online will also help us to better understand digital inclusion issues which we can then work to overcome in partnership.
- 4.3 In line with this strategy the website content and functionality will be developed with a number of initiatives currently ongoing as a result of direct customer feedback e.g. a facility for customers to locate the nearest grit bin on a user friendly map page and the introduction of subscriptions to allow email notifications to be sent for Council minutes, agendas and reports online.
- 4.4 In response to customer demand there is further expansion planned of the “Apply for it”, “Pay it”, “Report it” and “Request it” themes that are also popular amongst other local authorities. These four key gateways allow customers to navigate the website more easily. The existing process in place to check for broken links will be complemented by the introduction of a facility whereby customers will also be able to report broken links themselves.

- 4.5 Customer Services alignment with the Digital First Programme supports both an increase in the number of services available online and encourages growing customer interaction with this channel. There are currently 34 services available through the Highland Council website with another 37 in development. With the Digital First Report focusing on the introduction of Digital Champions we will also have the opportunity to help promote online services to all our communities. In 2014, there were 82,000 online transactions (including payments) and progress is well underway towards our target of 10% of all transactions taking place online this year.
- 4.6 The introduction of the “myaccount” service aims to give people a simple and secure way to access public services online throughout Scotland. This facility should be available from the end of March 2015 and once established, Highland Council will be one of only two Scottish Local Government organisations to deliver this service.

5. Summary

- 5.1 Overall the survey results are positive, and offer a platform to build on and improve for example increasing the number of services available online and enhanced access to council minutes and agendas. There is a programme of continuous improvement underway to expand the content in line with customer needs, improve on the aesthetics and increase the functionality of the website. With high levels of overall satisfaction the launch of the new website has been a positive investment. It is important to recognise the value of the survey results and use them to inform our actions and guide the future direction so that we offer our customers a truly accessible digital channel.

6. Implications

- 6.1 Resources/Legal/Climate Change/Carbon Clever/Risk/Gaelic implications – there are no known implications in these areas.
- 6.2 Equalities Implications: The Council website needs to be accessible to all different types of people with different styles and needs of access. As outlined in Section 3.2 detailed work has been undertaken with the Digital Accessibility Centre (DAC) to ensure that the website can be used by as many people as possible and that it is compatible with adaptation and enablement tools and software such as screen readers and magnification tools.
- 6.3 Rural Implications: Use of the Council website is dependent on internet access. It is acknowledged that some areas of the Highlands have poor access or limited bandwidth, and on that basis the Council will continue to offer a mixed provision of face to face, telephone and web customer contact channels. Internet access is also available at Libraries via the people’s network.

Recommendation

Committee Members are asked to:

1. Note the report.
2. Agree the necessary actions to be taken to improve the website further and to respond to feedback.

Designation: Michelle Morris
Depute Chief Executive\Director of Corporate Development

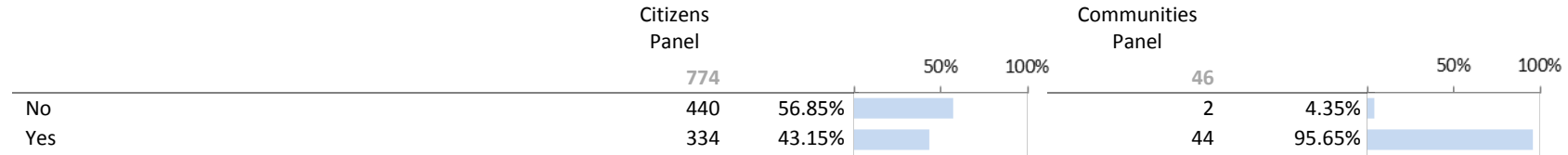
Date: 10 February 2015

Author: Vicki Nairn, Tina Page, Darren Macleod

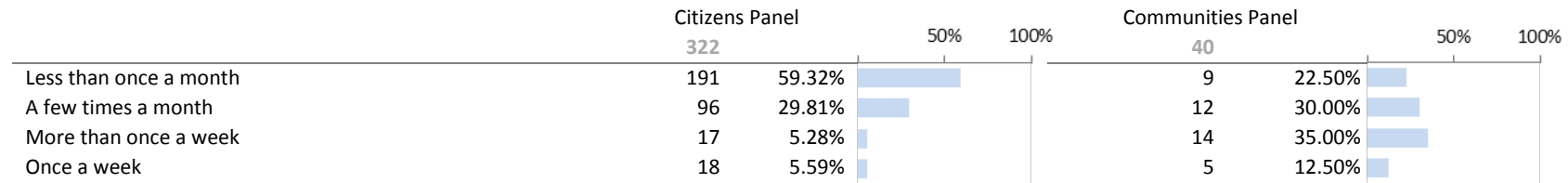
Attachments: Appendix A - Full Survey Results

Appendix A Full Survey Results Web Survey Report 2015

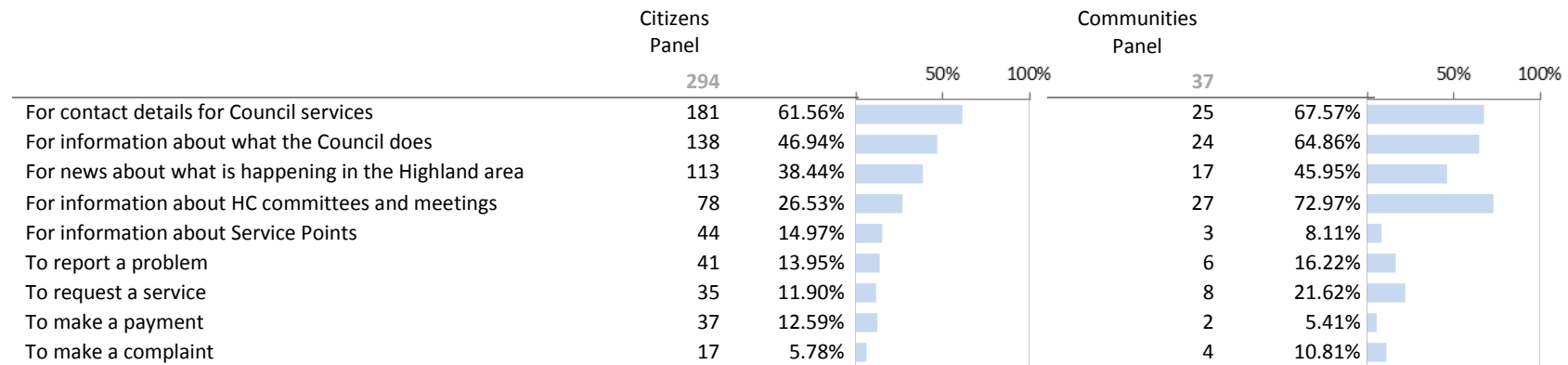
Q1: Have you visited the Highland Council website since it was launched in July 2014?



Q2: How often do you visit the Highland Council website?

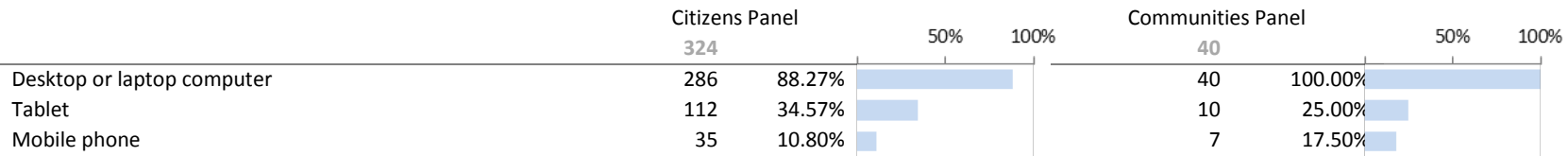


Q3: Why do you visit the Council website?



*Respondents could choose more than one answer

Q4: How do you access the Highland Council website?



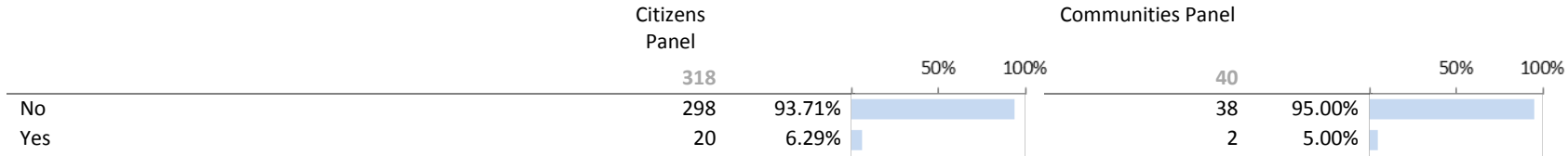
*Respondents could choose more than one answer

Q5: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

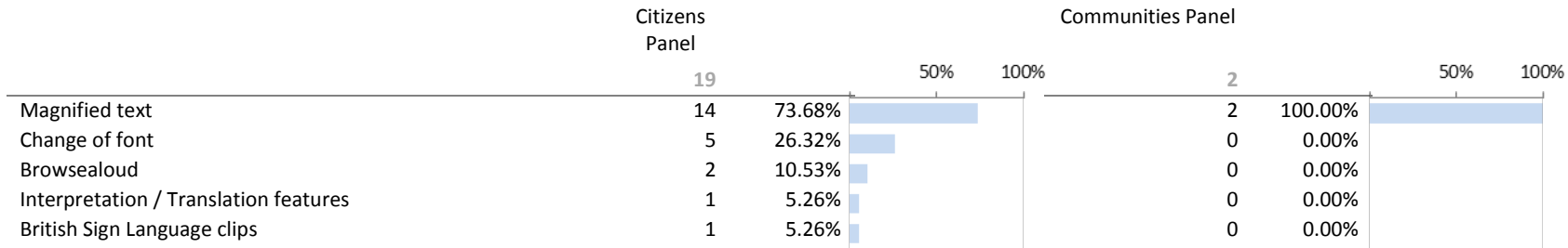
	Citizens Panel					Communities Panel				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The writing is clear and easy to read	32.82%	55.11%	10.53%	1.55%	0.00%	10.00%	80.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%
The layout of the website makes it easy to find what I am looking for	16.88%	39.69%	23.13%	15.94%	4.38%	0.00%	27.50%	27.50%	22.50%	22.50%
I can search for information easily	15.00%	43.13%	24.69%	13.44%	3.75%	0.00%	27.50%	17.50%	35.00%	20.00%
It provides relevant, up to date information about Council services	14.11%	50.16%	28.84%	6.27%	0.63%	7.50%	50.00%	27.50%	7.50%	7.50%
I can make payments that I need to	11.11%	22.22%	64.58%	1.74%	0.35%	3.13%	18.75%	75.00%	0.00%	3.13%
I can request a service	11.04%	35.79%	50.84%	1.67%	0.67%	0.00%	38.24%	58.82%	2.94%	0.00%
There are sufficient accessibility features available	8.97%	37.87%	47.84%	3.65%	1.66%	0.00%	29.73%	56.76%	5.41%	8.11%
It provides what I expect from a Council website	11.78%	50.00%	24.52%	10.51%	3.18%	7.89%	34.21%	23.68%	26.32%	7.89%

Q6: Do you make use of the accessibility features on the website?

Accessibility features make a website easier to for some people to use, for example, increasing the size of text to make information easier to read

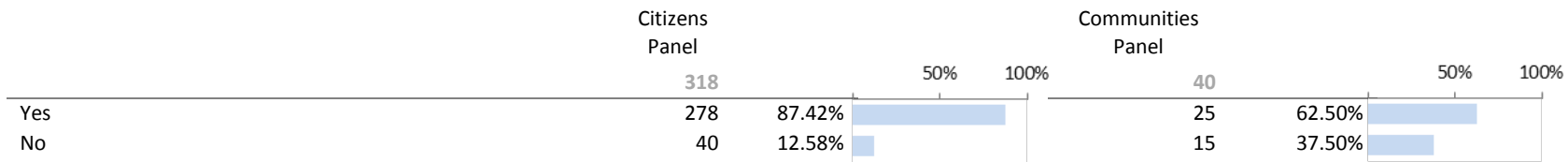


Q6b: If yes, which accessibility features do you use?

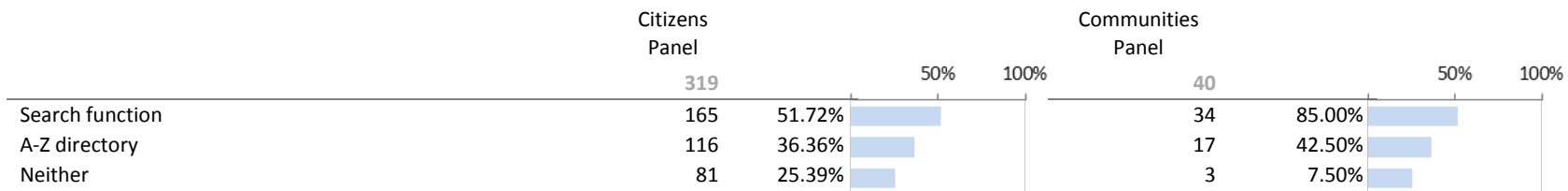


*Respondents could choose more than one answer

Q7a: Please think about the last time you used the Highland Council website. Did you find what you were looking for?



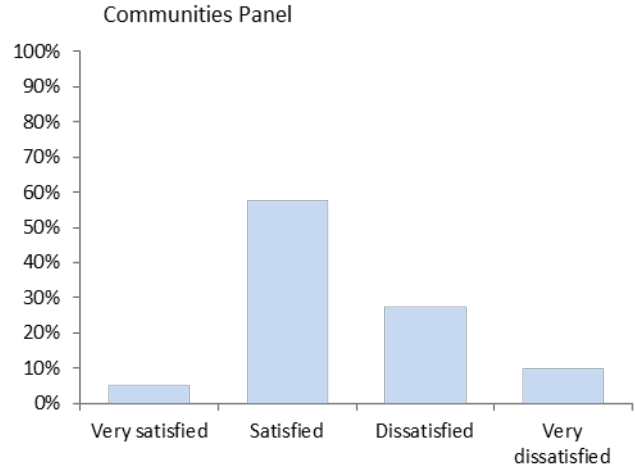
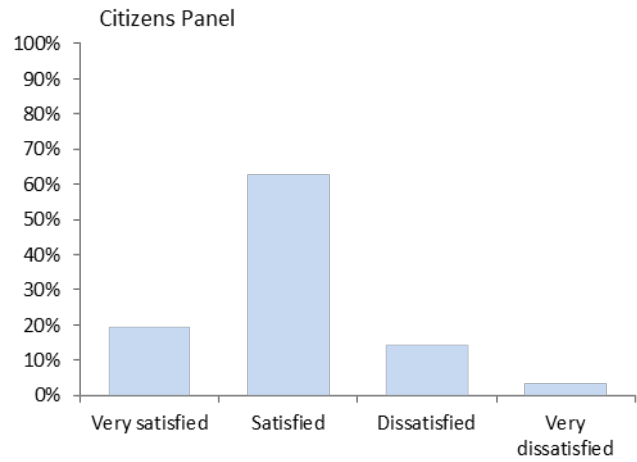
Q7b: Still thinking about the last time you used the website, did you use the search function or the A-Z directory?



*Respondents could choose more than one answer

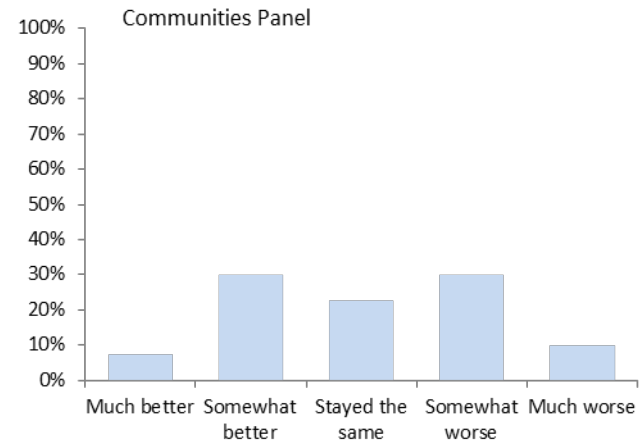
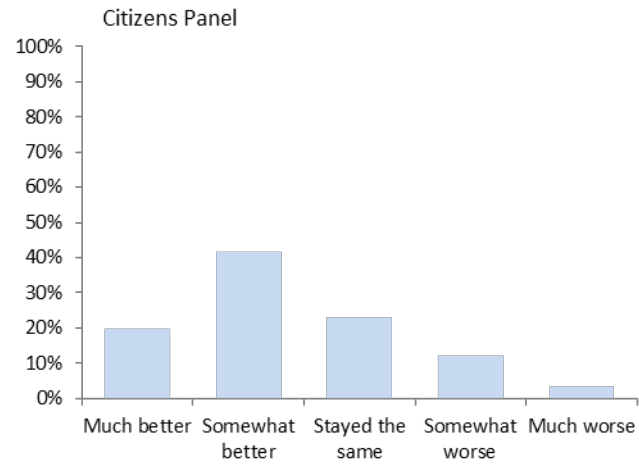
Q8: Overall, how satisfied are you with the new website?

	Citizens Panel		Communities Panel	
	313		40	
Very satisfied	61	19.49%	2	5.00%
Satisfied	196	62.62%	23	57.50%
Dissatisfied	45	14.38%	11	27.50%
Very dissatisfied	11	3.51%	4	10.00%



Q9: Do you think the new website is better than the old website?

	312		40	
Much better	62	19.87%	3	7.50%
Somewhat better	130	41.67%	12	30.00%
Stayed the same	72	23.08%	9	22.50%
Somewhat worse	38	12.18%	12	30.00%
Much worse	10	3.21%	4	10.00%



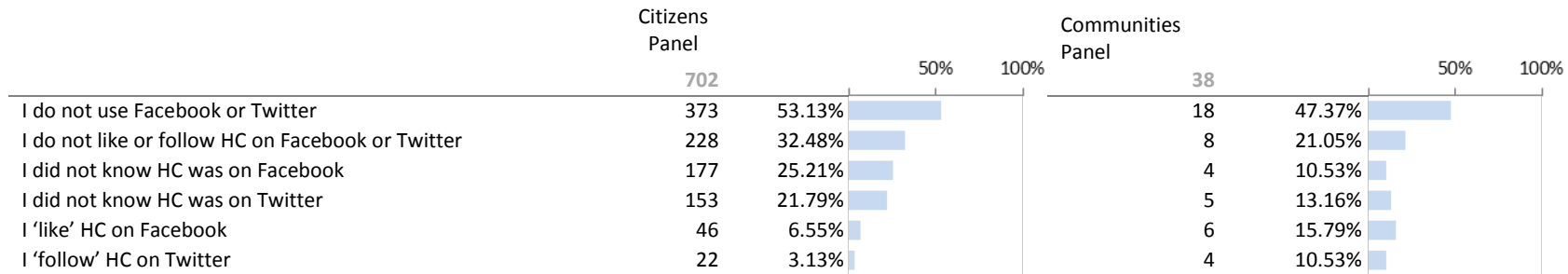
Q10: Is there any information or any services that are not available on the current website that you feel should be?

	Citizens Panel		Communities Panel	
	304		37	
No	257	84.54%	20	54.05%
Yes	47	15.46%	17	45.95%

ALL RESPONDENTS ANSWERED THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

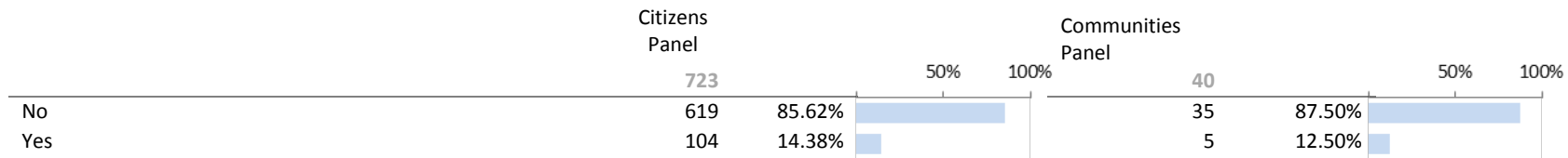
Q11: Do you like or follow Highland Council on Facebook or Twitter?

Facebook and Twitter are social media websites where HC can post news and information

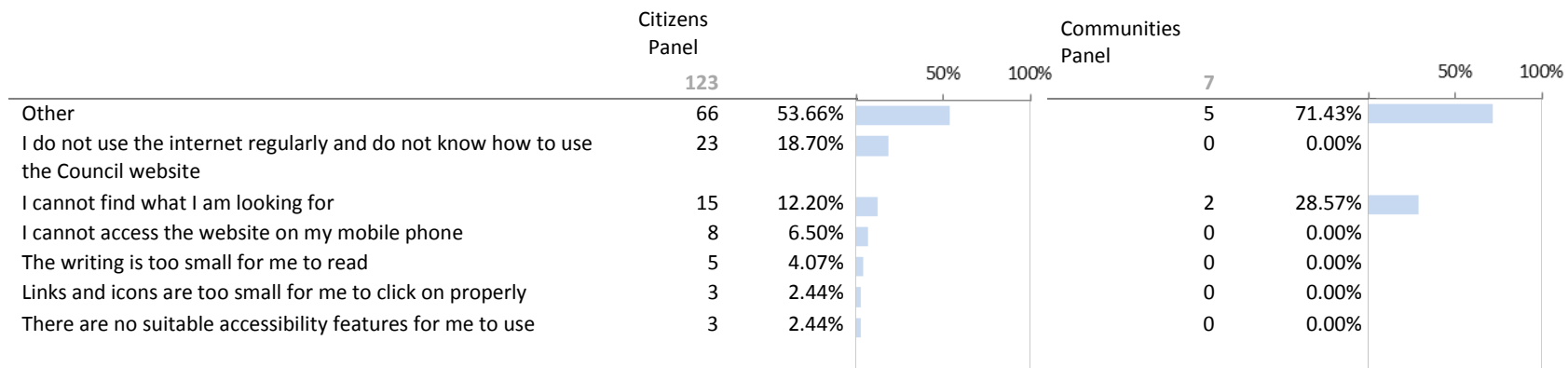


*Respondents could choose more than one answer

Q12a: Is there anything that prevents you from using the current website?



Q12b: If yes, what prevents you from using the current website?



*Respondents could choose more than one answer

Q13: Is there anything that would encourage you to use the website more?

