

5.5 Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do

This driver was explored in the general public, Māori, Asian and Pacific Peoples groups as well as Young People (older working 24-30 years) respondents from Hamilton and tertiary students from Dunedin. In the general public and Asian groups the trust driver *The Public Service keeps its promises – that is, it does what it says it will do* was also discussed at the same time and some of those issues are covered in this chapter.

The following table shows where groups were held:

	Far North		Auckland		Hamilton	Lower Hutt	Otago		
	Kaitaia	Kaikohe	North Shore	Manukau			Dunedin	Waitaki	Clutha
General public			1		2		1	1	
Māori	1			1		1			
Asian			1			1			
Pacific				1		1			
Young People					1		1		

5.5.1 Overview

A 'promise' is not something that respondents normally associate a public servant making, but there is a strong expectation that public servants do what they say they will do. Even so, a 'promise' is most commonly understood as a commitment to do what one said one would do, so the driver is aptly described in the way it is.

An important aspect of making a promise is the expectation of 'follow-through' it creates to ensure completion of what has been promised. A strong sense of accountability attaches to promises once they have been made. Staff are expected to take personal ownership of the commitment and pride in doing the job they said they would do.

The most common promise is a commitment to do something by a certain time. Doing a job properly or thoroughly is an aspect too, but this was mentioned by fewer respondents.

Promises should not be made lightly. It is better to be honest and be unsure whether something can be achieved than to say it will be. It is also far better to under-promise and over-deliver. And if a promise has been broken, it should be accompanied by an apology and an explanation as to why it happened.

Compensation is not generally expected, but it may be warranted in some instances. In general though, promises should not be made unless they can be delivered.

Few respondents said they had heard a public servant make 'a promise' using that term, though most had heard public servants state an intention to do something for them. In the Māori, Pacific People and Asian groups a promise was seen more as a matter of trust.

Of the satisfaction drivers, this is the one that can most easily damage trust if promises are broken.

Staff are regarded as representatives of the Public Service, so if a staff member breaks or keeps a promise it reflects on whether the Public Service keeps its promises. However, it is acknowledged that staff may try their best to keep a promise, but they can be let down by systems and processes within the organisation. To that extent there is a difference between staff keeping their promises and the Public Service keeping its promises.

There is also some weak blurring of perceptions about what the Public Service promises and what the Government or politicians promise. When this occurs promises are treated with some scepticism.

5.5.2 Key themes

■ What is a promise?

Prior to informing respondents of the driver, they were asked to say what a promise was. Unprompted, respondents more or less described a promise in terms of people doing what they said they would do. Occasionally a promise was described word-for-word as it was in the driver. This gives a high degree of confidence that the driver is appropriately worded.

[What is a promise?] *They do what they say they're going to do.* (North Shore, Asian, male)

For some respondents, particularly Maori, Pacific and Asian groups, a promise was a matter of trust.

[If someone makes a promise, what does that mean to you?] *A commitment. Got to be done. Follow through. Giving an assurance that it will be done. You trust that it will happen. You rely on them. There's an expectation.* (Manukau, Pacific People, females/male)

Respondents said the word 'promise' was not one they associated with public servants using.

It's quite a loose term used in the Public Service I would say, for me anyway, the word 'promise'. It's too loose. [You don't hear it a lot?] Definitely not. (Manukau, Pacific People, female)

In one of the general public groups there were some who wanted to distinguish between a promise and a public servant declaring an intention to do something as this was a better reflection of reality since promises should not be broken, but were.

I consider a promise a promise. I promise I will do this. Anything other than that is an intention. They intend to call me tomorrow but if something happens then they won't. They haven't broken their promise. So anything other than "I promise to do this" is an intention. (North Shore, general public, female)

➤ **Follow-through**

Follow-through was another frequently used term to describe what people expect to happen when a promise is kept.

[So what is a promise in the context of public service?] Providing they honour their word it is all good, if they say we will do this if they follow that through then you can't get any better. (Oamaru, general public, male)

People taking responsibility to follow through. You're dealing with one person rather than being shoved down the line so just take responsibility, coming back to you, and being efficient. It's all time pressures. (Manukau, Asian, male)

Promises carry with them a clear sense of accountability to the public. Without a commitment to do something there would not be any accountability.

The ones I have dealt with are very good at not making a promise. [Is that a good thing?] For them, but I just feel run around but for them it is good because they don't have to be accountable to me for anything that doesn't line up with what they have said. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

The experience for some is that direct responsibility is not necessarily taken on board.

There is an element of hiding behind the organisation and not being accountable as a representative of the organisation that they work for. (Oamaru, general public, female)

Some members of the public will establish their own ways of ensuring accountability for promises that have been made.

Maybe it is my expectations because I am dealing with government departments especially and they make me a promise, also if they make promises I tend to ask for their name, a bit of extra accountability. [So for you if a promise is made to you?] Then I expect it to be kept. [So you get the name of the person?] Yes. (Lower Hutt, Māori, female)

■ When promises are broken

Accountability requires that failures to keep promises are acknowledged.

Accountability is pretty big, it is better that they acknowledge that something bad has happened and you know they know they did something wrong. (Hamilton, young people, older working, female)

When promises are broken there is a strong expectation that an apology and an explanation must be provided.

At the least an apology. And maybe an explanation of why. I think that is just courteous. (Dunedin, general public, male)

Acknowledging that a promise has been broken by making an apology and explanation leads people to be less critical and can go some way toward restoring the relationship.

If someone rings up and says "sorry I didn't call you on the day I was supposed to", you'd be a bit miffed, but if they said "sorry I didn't call you on the day I was supposed to because this happened and this happened" then I think you're more understanding. (North Shore, general public, female)

There is also an expectation that if an explanation is provided that there is an assurance that there will not be a recurrence.

Guarantees that it won't happen again. (Manukau, Pacific People, female)

Expectations of compensation when promises were broken were not strongly articulated though in situations where a promise had not been fulfilled and a payment of service was made the case was made for some recompense.

If you pay for it depending on what kind of promise it was maybe a refund or something. (Dunedin, general public, male)

■ Types of promises

The most common type of promise that respondents experience are promises to deliver a service by a particular time.

When I sent my applications away there was one for my daughter and one for myself and I got my daughter's one back. They actually said to give it 12 to 14 days but I actually got it back before then. (Kaitiāia, Māori, female)

Timeframes are specific and are expected to be kept.

If you say you will do something, especially if you put a time on it, then you must do it. (North Shore, general public, female)

A common type of promise that respondents complained about not being kept was not getting back to people.

I think the most common one though is I will phone you back and you just never hear from them again and you are having to always do it. (Dunedin, general public, male)

Another promise encountered on the phone is to be promised to be referred to the right person for help.

They keep transferring you to the wrong person. (North Shore, Asian, female)

Occasionally, examples were given where service quality was promised and not delivered.

5.5.3 Linkages across drivers and links to trust

There were fewer linkages between *Staff keep their promises* and the other key drivers of satisfaction that have been discussed so far.

■ The service experience met your expectations

Chapter 5.1 identified that service expectations include that staff will do what they say they will do and that there is follow-through to help and resolve matters for the public. There is therefore a direct linkage to this driver. It is also apparent that there is a strong expectation that public servants should not make promises unless they are going to be kept.

■ Staff were competent

Following on from that observation, Chapter 5.2 also identified that competent staff are customer-focused with an attitude to provide solutions and be helpful. This carries with it the inference that such staff do what they say they will do.

■ Trust

This driver has a strong linkage with trust as keeping a promise is regarded as a matter of trust and to break a promise is to break a trust. Of all the satisfaction drivers in this study, staff keeping their promises had the strongest association with trust. This was particularly important for the Māori, Pacific People and Asian groups. Keeping promises was also not just a matter of trust, but a way of developing a relationship based on trust.

By getting back to you with what they say they will and then after that you realise that you trust them and will go back to them. (North Shore, Asian, female)

It is because of the strong trust element and the hope and expectation a promise conveys that damage to *trust* occurs if a promise is broken. Respondents said they wanted public servants to be open and honest about whether a promise can be fulfilled.

It's easier to be honest and say "I actually don't know" than to pretend you know but you have to find it. So that's like worse because you kind of expect them – because you have the false pretence, the false assumption that they will be able to help you. (North Shore, Asian, female)

I would much rather be under-promised and over-delivered than over-promised and under-delivered. (Manukau, Māori, male)

■ Staff versus Public Service keeping promises

Most respondents in the general public and Asian groups did not see a significant difference between the satisfaction driver *Staff keep their promises – that is, they do what they say they will do* and the trust driver *the Public Service keeps its promises – that is, it does what it says it will do*. Staff were seen as representatives of their organisations, so if a staff member broke their promise that reflected on the organisation too. The Public Service was seen to determine the boundaries of a promise for staff, so staff were simply seen to some extent as being the enforcers of policy.

Allowances were made for staff, in situations where staff might try their best to keep a promise, but other factors within the organisation might prevent it from being fulfilled.

It could be where the staff member is willing to help but the Public Service and its bureaucracy doesn't permit them to do that because they've got so many checks and balances they have to go through to actually get what you want. The business itself is restricted so they can only do what they do against a set of rules. (Manukau, Asian, male)

5.5.4 Differences across groups

The groups were all very similar in describing that a promise was doing what one said one would do and that it entailed follow through and accountability on behalf of the public servant who made the promise. Where differences existed they were about how highly a promise was regarded.

■ Māori, Pacific People and Asian groups

Among Māori, Pacific People and the Asian groups the word promise consistently carried a strong expectation of fulfilment.

Giving an assurance that it will be done. You trust that it will happen. You rely on them. There's an expectation. (Manukau, Pacific People, females/male)

5.5.5 Areas to focus on to improve satisfaction levels

Specific areas of training that are important for delivering on this driver are outlined below.

■ Establish realistic service delivery expectations

Public sector organisations should establish standard, realistic service expectations, particularly for response and delivery times. These should be capable of being met all the time under normal circumstances. Staff should be informed about these measures, so they have clear guidance about what they can expect to promise the public.

■ Measure performance

Periodically measuring actual performance of the service expectations will identify if and where failures are occurring, so they can be addressed.

■ Apologise, explain and mitigate

In the event that a promise has been broken, it should be a standard procedure for an apology to be given together with an explanation of what happened and if possible the steps that have been taken to ensure there is no recurrence. These steps are critical to giving effect to the expectation that a promise carries with it accountability.

■ Compensate in some way if a loss has been incurred

While an apology and an explanation are sufficient in most cases, there may be a need to consider compensation when a promise has been made that results in some form of financial loss to an individual. This may be relevant when a fee has been paid for a public service.

■ Have a transparent and open complaints process

If public servants make promises, then they need to be held accountable for keeping them. A transparent and open complaints process, which should be a mechanism available to handle other complaints about service, would provide an opportunity to resolve disputes about broken promises if they are not acknowledged.

5.6 It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent

This driver was explored in the general public, Māori, Asian and Pacific Peoples groups as well as with Young People (older working 24-30 years) respondents from Hamilton, younger working (18-23 years) respondents from the North Shore and those with young families from Clutha (Balclutha).

	Far North		Auckland		Hamilton	Lower Hutt	Otago		
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Pacific				1		1			
Young People			1		1				1

5.6.1 Overview

This driver is distinctly different from the other satisfaction drivers as unlike the others, which respondents easily understand in terms of their service experiences, this one is interpreted as requiring a more challenging judgement. A few even question how they can make such an assessment. That kind of comment did not emerge in discussions about any other driver.

When respondents were asked to give examples of other drivers they easily cited personal examples. However, with this driver the predominant examples given are not personal experiences, but generic services of a particular type. These are invariably core services – health, education, police, emergency services and to a lesser extent infrastructural and environmental. The reasons why these are considered value for money are essentially that they are:

- 'free', that is, paid for out of direct taxation or rates;
- necessary and available to everyone;
- performing well despite being under-resourced;
- a demanding job for those on the front-line;
- providing excellent treatment based on personal experience.

Where personal experiences are retold as examples of good value for tax dollars spent, they often involve a high quality, comprehensive service experience suggesting value is perceived when expectations are exceeded.

Asian and Pacific People in particular made international comparisons with public services they had experienced elsewhere to gauge whether there was good value for tax dollars spent. Those from rural areas have concerns about value for the tax dollars they pay as they see a relative lack of services locally and disproportionately more services going to large urban centres. Among young people, those with young families place a strong emphasis on services for children as being of most value for tax dollars spent.

When respondents were asked to compare similar public and private sector services, they focused primarily on the health and to a lesser extent the education sectors exclusively. A consistently strong theme is that service expectations are higher for the equivalent private sector services in those two sectors. That did not necessarily mean though that the private sector provided a better service or value for money. However, respondents placed a very high value in the health sector, for instance, on access to services straight away rather than to be placed on a waiting-list. In general, though the existence of choice and competition as well as payment for service carried with it higher service expectations. For some respondents the fact that public services are provided for everyone inferred that service quality is diluted as a result.

Similarly, higher expectations are attached to public services that people pay for directly than those funded out of general taxation. This is primarily because when people consciously part with their own money they wish to see a return whereas services provided from taxation are seen as 'free.'

When people choose to pay for a public service they have higher expectations of value than when they must pay a fee for a public service. Mandatory payments tend to be paid with little thought as to their value and some respondents have little idea what some fees, for example, car registration cover.

Greater value for tax dollars spent is placed on front-line staff than advisory or administrative staff. This is due to perceptions that the latter are over-paid relative to the former and because the work that advisors do is somewhat of an unknown quantity. Respondents find it easier to assess value for tax dollars spent when the service is visible.

There is very strong support for value for tax dollars spent to be shown. Some say that as they find it difficult to make a judgment on value without being provided with information on how tax dollars are being spent, they would like to see data on how tax dollars are spent. Suggestions were made that such information could be available on a special website and information in libraries and local newspapers were frequently suggested ways of doing this. However, some scepticism was expressed over whether people would read such information. Others said that having good service experiences would demonstrate value for tax dollars spent, so visible improvements to service quality would be another means of demonstrating value. And it was also pointed out that television programmes about some public services had helped them to understand the value those services provided.

5.6.2 Key themes

■ Awareness of how money is being spent

Some respondents found it difficult to provide examples of good value for tax dollars spent. These people felt they needed to know how much was being spent and where in order to make an assessment.

I think I'd have to understand exactly where the money's going to and just see visually where my money's going. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

There's eight people here and we struggled to name what the public services are. So we don't even know what our tax dollars are being paid for. (Manukau, Pacific People, female)

■ Poor value versus good value

A few respondents found it easier to give examples of poor value for tax dollars spent. These were examples that had received widespread publicity in the past, some not always accurately recalled.

They were recently in the paper for going off to some swanky hotel and I mean to be honest not the best look. (Hamilton, young people, older working, male)

Others rated some services low because they did not know what a payment had been for. For example, car registration was seen as a mechanism for just raising revenue.

I think probably because you can't actually see where the money is going. You can't actually see it is like that whole bottomless pit, that consolidated fund idea where you are just putting money into the government to vaporize. (Balclutha, general public, female)

Those with multiple cars felt it was an unfair imposition.

Car registration I actually rated it the lowest because for me it doesn't work I have got a multitude of vehicles that I have to register but I can only drive one at a time. So why not register our license and pay x amount to be a driver each year, that to me makes more sense. (Oamaru, general public, male)

But it was the rare respondent who did not feel they received some value for tax dollars spent. For example, there was a sense of measurable value in the return that the quality of the New Zealand environment brought in attracting tourists to the country.

I think DOC does a great job, they are quite hamstrung a lot of the time but the results are these islands are getting predator free and that is going to bring in tourism from all over the world. That is great value for money, I can't talk about all the others I don't know about them. (Hamilton, general public, female)

Similarly, education was seen as an investment in the future of society.

I think with education it has a value in itself and it has the ability to contribute back into the system. (Hamilton, Māori, female)

■ Comparative assessment

Some respondents thought a comparative means of making a value assessment is required.

How do we know whether it's good value for whatever because we don't have anything to compare it with. (Hamilton, general public, female)

A number made comparisons based on international examples and by comparing the public sector with the private.

■ International comparisons

International comparisons were used to provide a sense of relative value for tax dollars spent. In almost all cases, New Zealand public services were compared more favourably.

I was in England for awhile and dealing with their health service makes New Zealand's look quite a bit better even though it has got its challenges and it's not perfect as a comparison it seems pretty good. (Hamilton, general public, male)

Such comparisons were most frequently provided by those from the Asian and Pacific People's groups.

I was born here but I went back to Tonga and they don't even have a public service, so I find gratitude for whatever we have here. Also in the States if you don't have medical insurance you're not going to be treated. In Thailand people live on tourists giving them stuff. I think we're lucky to have some kind of benefit coming in, but that's the only good thing I could say about the Public Service. (Manukau, Pacific People, female)

Some respondents noted that the price of a passport had doubled and the period of its validity had halved in recent years. The passport was therefore an example of poor value or less value for money.

Why don't you get a passport for life, the same as the drivers licenses our lifetime drivers licenses 15 years ago and then for some reason suddenly they weren't lifetime any more. And now we have to pay every 10 years. (Hamilton, general public, male)

However, Asian groups pointed out the comparative value of having a New Zealand passport as it reduced the cost of acquiring visas because of New Zealand's visa-free relationships with many countries.

It costs about \$200 for a passport and a passport is good quality, world class, hard to get forged and takes you through a very high number of places. Well respected. The \$200 that you're paying for it is hardly its cost. So yes it's rewarding. Everybody wouldn't complain about paying the \$200 for the privilege of having a New Zealand passport so it is money well spent. (Manukau, Asian, male)

■ Private sector comparisons

Some respondents compared public services with private sector services, and good value for money, driven by competitive pressures, was associated with the latter. For example, several respondents talked about being able to exercise a choice for their private sector provider and being able to take goods back.

With the public sector there is not the ability to shop around. Whereas with the private sector if I don't like this electrician then I can go to this electrician or I can go to this bank or this bank or this bank. (Balclutha, general public, female)

If you go to the Warehouse and you take the service back and say I don't like your service can I exchange it for something else and have a replacement but with government departments you can't do that. You have no second go at anything. (Balclutha, general public, male)

Others derived good value for money from the perception that competitive pressures require private providers to perform better.

The private sector always go back and examine themselves whether they're efficient or not because they have to be ahead of their competition. There is always competition in the private sector. But in the public sector there's no competition so it's up to us to judge them, and basically when there is no competition, they can put a man to race around a track to race by himself. He's not going to break any records, but you put someone with him and sometimes records might be broken. (Manukau, Asian, male)

There were some, however, who said that while they assumed there would be better value from the private sector, it did not necessarily mean that there would be a higher level of service. This related primarily to the health sector where most public-private comparisons were made. Respondents did not think that their medical treatment would be better in private care, but they placed a very high value on avoiding waiting-lists and they also expected to receive extra, non-medical attention.

You get the same service at the end but you are pushed to the front of the line. (Balclutha, young family, male)

■ Importance of showing value, and how

There was unanimous agreement across the groups that it was important for the Public Service to show value for tax dollars spent. This was exclusively based on the fact that the money spent was not the Public Service's money, but their own and as a result accountability for the spending was required.

They should show that we have done these things for you as the citizens of this country. The money that we are spending is on these areas - all the statistics and things like that, they should be all published and everything like that. Why not? (Manukau, Asian, male)

There was also a message to make such data simple and understandable from this commerce student who was familiar with public sector annual reports.

Even though I've studied accounting, I find it really hard. My other mates in the class, we can barely understand what's in their annual report. It's supposed to be for us. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

The information also needs to be relevant to taxpayers.

Every household has to have a sense that because the public sector was there it contributed to the betterment of the lives of the household and their advancement. How you measure it I am not quite sure. But there needs to be some tangible measure of that. Because unless all of that contributes to the aspirations of the family the system is pointless. (Hamilton, Māori, male)

In most groups, there were a common set of ways of showing how tax dollars are spent together with any relevant comparative data, including having the data available on a website or in schools or public places like libraries.

I guess they can provide information at libraries, schools, other public places where people can read, or a newspaper or on TV. (North Shore, Asian, female)

Some suggested it would be good to have success stories reported in the media too.

It comes out in the success stories rather than the other stories we hear. Through the local rag. Council newsletters. Internet. I mean there's so much they can do, but usually the local rag seems to be the way to go. (Manukau, Pacific People, male)

Television programmes can also influence perceptions of value as people become aware of the role and range of work some departments undertake.

Mine's Customs. I think they're very good. Like it's money well spent with Customs. [Expand?] Because they provide a really good service. Like I didn't realise actually what they did until you see the programmes on TV and stuff and they control all the mail that comes through. I just didn't know that, I didn't really think that anyone sort of looked at stuff like that. So I just think that that's really good service. (North Shore, young people, female)

There was, however, a warning from some that the publicity attached to showing value for tax dollars spent should be somewhat muted and should not in itself be expensive to produce.

[How would you feel if the government started running workshops or putting ads on TV saying "this is where your tax dollars have gone in the last year or so"?] I think the fact they're talking about it, and spending so much money just talking about it, is a waste of money. (Manukau, Asian, male)

It was also suggested that only a few people might be interested in checking the value for tax dollars spent. Having information available might only be of benefit to the few who would take the trouble to read it

None of us are probably interested either. (Balclutha, young family, male)

■ Core services

The most common examples of good value for tax dollars spent that did emerge were of core public services like health, education, policing, emergency services and local government and infrastructural services. This was because such services were seen as:

- necessary and available to everyone;
- 'free', that is paid for out of direct taxation or rates;
- generally performing well despite being under resourced;
- involving a demanding job for those on the frontline;
- providing excellent treatment, based on personal experience.

■ Necessary and available to everyone

The Police, Fire and Ambulance services were identified as good value for tax dollars spent primarily because they do a necessary job.

The Police I think, we can't do without them so the money put into them we obviously would benefit from. (Dunedin, general public, female)

I just think they risk their lives and they put their lives before everything else. They get to do a lot of the grizzly stuff like car accidents and things. They are the ones that cut them out and pick up the bodies and people forget that side of it. (Dunedin, general public, female)

Ambulance. [Why is the ambulance good value?] *Well, they turn up in emergencies often first.* (Balclutha, general public, male)

Welfare expenditure on those in need was also included among the core services where value was appreciated.

What benefits the majority of the people, especially the old people. (Manukau, Asian, female)

The availability of ACC for everyone and the provision of the appropriate level of service was a driver of value for that service.

[What would be an example of good value for tax dollars spent?] *ACC.* [Why?] *It's just a really good service and everyone's covered and for whatever you need it for. They're not biased, they don't give you more than you need, they don't give you less, they give you the right amount.* (North Shore, young people, female)

■ Free, that is, paid for out of direct taxation or rates

The fact that services were also regarded as 'free' was also a factor in determining perceived value for tax dollars spent, for example hospitals and education.

[Why do hospitals provide value for money?] *Because I think the doctors and nurses also, they provide a free service for patients. I think it's good value for money.* (North Shore, young people, male)

I think secondary school teachers are good value for money because they teach kids a lot of things and it's free education for the students. I think that's really good. (North Shore, young people, male)

Even those who noted that they paid something toward public education asserted it was good value. In this case the respondent was able to make a comparison with the costs of childcare.

Well schools I wouldn't say it's free but for the quality the kids get we don't actually pay a lot. If you had to pay the teacher weekly what it would really cost for him to look after your kids and teach them you would be paying quite a bit of money so I am satisfied with that. (Balclutha, young family, male)

■ Local government services

Local government services, for example libraries, were one of the second tier of examples of good value for tax dollars spent which were not mentioned nearly as much as the core services. And like core services what characterised value in these examples was their availability to all and the perception that they were 'free'.

Public library. Books are expensive, not everybody can afford books, opens the world up to your children and to yourself and there is the use of computers in there. (Balclutha, young family, female)

Infrastructural council services, particularly roading, also came in for mention as good value.

Probably just all your council and district councils are good value for money in general, the whole process really. [In what sort of way?] Once again they are so necessary, the infrastructure is important. They provide our every day facilities. Basically we wouldn't live the life we live without them. Roothing, water, sewerage. (Hamilton, Māori, female)

And recreational services that were available for all were also mentioned.

Recreational services. [Good value?] Yes. [Why?] Because my whole family, we use like the pools and library and the rec centres. (Auckland, Pacific People, female)

■ Services funded from general taxation versus fees for service

Respondents had different expectations for services funded out of general taxation, sometimes described as 'free' services, from services where fees are paid, for example, passports or birth certificates.

I have just noticed that the things I have scored lowest are the things that I actually have to write a cheque out for like a passport which really gets up my nose because value for money is way down looking at it historically. So my expectations are really different if I have to physically pay for it from something that comes out of my taxes. (Oamaru, general public, female)

An additional issue around some fees for service is the cost of paying for information about oneself, such as a birth certificate.

Paying for your birth certificate that gets me, paying for a copy of your own details and they charge for somebody to sit up there on a computer and punch in print. (Balclutha, young family, female)

■ Performing well despite being under resourced

Good value was also derived from the perception that core services were performing well despite being under-funded or under-staffed, or having under-paid front-line staff.

I'm just looking from the outside into education but I think it's under-funded, but I think we get good value from what we do spend in there. We could get an even better result if we spent more. (North Shore, general public, male)

Hospitals I think you get reasonable value for a department that is under-funded and under-staffed. (Hamilton, young people, older working, male)

There was also the perception that the Police were under paid for the type of job they had to do.

They work very hard and they deal with all sorts of horrible, horrible things. They have to remain impartial and their hours are horrible and they do it and they don't get overly paid for it. (Balclutha, young family, female)

■ Frontline versus back-room

In several instances, the perceived under-payment to front-line hospital staff was contrasted with the view that hospital administrators were paid too much.

I don't think it is good value because I think too much is spent on administration and not as much on what it should be doing. (Dunedin, Māori, female)

There was a consistently strong view that more value for tax dollars spent was provided by front-line public sector staff than those behind the scenes providing advice and administering rules and regulations. This was principally because in the case of the latter it was hard to see what they did whereas with front-line staff respondents could see what had been done.

For some faceless bureaucrat down the road, you don't see what they're creating so you don't get a perception of value for money because you don't see what they're actually shovelling out the other side. (North Shore, general public, male)

There was a perception that those behind the scenes were better paid than those on the front-line.

There is too much money put into advisories and reports and lawyers. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

And a few were clearly prejudiced against the 'bureaucrats' in Wellington.

I think that is a waste, I think that is the biggest waste. I think there are a lot of clowns in Wellington, they actually piss me off. (Dunedin, general public, male)

However, in one of the Asian groups a different perspective was provided where the need for advisors and front-line staff were equally recognised.

It's like a human body - it will not work without a heart. A heart will not function without a brain. A brain will not function without an eye. [So all those three parts are needed as part of the Public Service] Absolutely. (Manukau, Asian, male)

■ A demanding job for those on the frontline

Good value for tax dollars spent was also recognised in the tough job carried out by those on the front-line, some of which is highlighted in television programmes.

The police I think is good value for money. [Why do you say that?] I feel sorry for the cops actually with all the crap they have to put up with. Just looking at Police 10-7 and Police Ten, my goodness. (North Shore, Asian, female)

I chose the Police. A thankless task for many frontline men and women. (North Shore, general public, female)

[Teachers] Quite a lot of crap from students who don't respect them sometimes. So I think they have a hard job. (North Shore, young people, male)

There was a suggestion that an indicator of good value for tax dollars spent would be less stressed front-line staff.

I think we'd probably decide they were good value for money if the front-line people, the ones that we actually see like the doctor, the nurse, the receptionist, the case worker or whatever if they seem happy and not stressed out to the max – because if they're being well cared for and are caring for us well, then obviously it's working. (Dunedin, Māori, female)

■ Providing excellent treatment based on personal experience

Some people had experienced exceptional treatment in hospital which influenced their perception of value. For example, one woman in Clutha told how her young daughter, who had collapsed lungs, was flown together with her mother to Starship hospital with all travel costs paid for. Other examples were based on personal experiences and benefits of services.

Hospitals again, my experiences, personal family experiences, myself and my wife. We have been fortunate in the way that we've found the hospital following up on the patients, doing things for them, checking on them and so on. (North Shore, Asian, male)

The perception of value for tax dollars spent on ACC was also based around comprehensively good service.

ACC are good value for money [Why is that?] They offer a prompt and efficient service. [They have improved haven't they over the last few years. (Interjection.)] My personal experience they were actually very good. They put a name to a person, you get a case manager, they have good systems, they have good phone systems and you can contact the person, that is your only contact. (Balclutha, general public, male)

Some related to their own personal experiences of how State assistance helped them to work.

Childcare subsidy for working people. [Tell us [Name deleted] how come that is a good example?] Because I am a solo dad with two kids and one is at school, the other one is in day care all day so I wouldn't worry about going to work if it didn't get subsidised. (Balclutha, young family, male)

Good value for tax dollars spent emerged where people have experienced efficient or citizen-centred services.

Land Transport I deal with them quite a bit through my job and they are always let's make it easy, let's get it sorted. I work in car dealership so I have a lot of dealings with them and they are so, so helpful and it's keep it simple stupid which is what I like to operate on and they operate from that principle. (Hamilton, general public, female)

I can only think of our mobile clinic that comes every Monday. Comes out for us and I think that is a pretty good example of tax dollars well spent. [Why is that?] Well we don't have to pay anything we drive just to the next bay, if we were in the city and went to the hospital we would have to pay wouldn't we. (Kaitaia, Māori, male)

■ Value linked to quality of service

One means of demonstrating good value for tax dollars spent was to improve the quality of public services so service expectations were better met.

If you go somewhere and you get the service that you want, the results that you want in a quick, then aren't you getting good value for your tax dollar. (Hamilton, general public, female)

Your interaction with that particular agency you understood what was happening, the transaction was timely, you felt heard and of value. (Hamilton, Māori, female)

5.6.3 Linkages across drivers and links to trust

There were few direct linkages between *It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent* and the other key drivers of satisfaction. This is mainly because this driver was understood in terms of the provision of generic services more than as a personal experience unlike the other drivers which were understood almost exclusively on the basis of personal experience.

■ The service experience met your expectations

When respondents described personal experiences as examples of good value for tax dollars spent, they gave examples where expectations had been comprehensively met. Meeting or even exceeding service expectations results in people receiving good value for tax dollars spent.

■ Trust

This driver has a strong linkage with the trust driver *The Public Service provides services that meet your needs*. This is because one of the important ways that this trust driver is understood is in terms of the universal provision of core services, such as, health, education and safety. These are the same services that are cited first and foremost when respondents provide examples of good value for tax dollars spent.

5.6.4 Differences across groups

■ Māori

There was a suggestion by one or two Māori respondents that value for tax dollars spent had occurred as a result of consultation with Māori. This is only a tentative finding as there were only a couple of examples given, but such examples did not emerge in any other groups.

We have had some good dollars spent with consultation with DOC and the Far North District Council to get us to where we are now. [Why is that?] Probably because we understand a lot more than what we did before about those services. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

■ Asian

➤ *International comparisons*

As was the case for Pacific People, Asian respondents who had migrated to New Zealand were more likely to draw on international comparisons to assess whether services were good value for tax dollars spent. The comparisons that they made were favourable.

➤ *Passport valued*

Asian respondents tended to place more value on the New Zealand passport than others. It was described as a high quality passport and one that had additional value because of the visa-free access it provided to many countries where otherwise visa charges would have applied.

■ Pacific People

➤ *International comparisons*

Like the Asian respondents, Pacific People were more likely to draw on comparisons with public services in the Pacific Islands to assess the value of services in New Zealand. The comparisons that they made were favourable.

■ Young People

➤ *Family focus*

The group with a young family focused almost exclusively on services that related to their families and their children as examples of good value for tax dollars spent. These included funding for childcare, working for families tax credits which enables extra things to be brought for the children, education and children's healthcare issues.

■ Rural-Provincial

Loss of services to urban centres was perceived as unfair and equated to poor value for tax dollars paid by some of those from rural-provincial centres. There was a desire to see more tax dollars spent locally.

I know that when you pay for a litre of petrol 65% of it goes to the government to provide a service back to me. And living in the deep south that money doesn't come here it goes north. That is just one wee example. If I pay my tax dollars I know it is paid out in the benefit, education, health and everything else and most of that is not paid back to my region it is paid back to north of the Bombay Hills... we generate a lot of money and most of that revenue is spent by government agencies up north with the services they provide. (Balclutha, general public, male)

The visibility of local government expenditure is far higher than for central government spend on services in provincial areas.

I think you see what is happening in your own community with your local council, where your rates are going as opposed to being able to see the total big picture of what is going on in New Zealand with every department of public service. So it's actually harder to see where the money is going or being spent. (Oamaru, general public, female)

5.6.5 Areas to focus on to improve satisfaction levels

The following suggestions are made to better enable good value for tax dollars spending to be recognised when it occurs.

■ Improve service delivery to meet expectations

One way in which people assess value for tax dollars spent is by having their expectations met. Implementing the set of recommendations to meet expectations in Chapter 5.1 will go a long way toward improving perceptions of value for tax dollars spent.

■ Raising public awareness

Raising public awareness of what public service agencies do, such as through television programmes, can be an effective way of reaching a large audience in an entertaining and informative way. Police and Customs have done this successfully and are likely to be more effective in improving satisfaction levels than publishing facts and figures around where the money is spent which may only be read by relatively few people.

■ Develop measures of value for money

It is evident from discussion of this driver that people struggle to assess value for tax dollars spent. They have no financial measures or comparative data to be able to base their assessments on. If people are to be expected to make such an assessment and it is clear from the groups that it is important to do so, then public services need to develop simple, understandable measures of value for money.

■ Inform what fees cover e.g. car registration

The value for some fees for service is not recognised because people do not know what they are paying for. Some think a car registration is a means of gathering tax and do not realise that it funds the cost of road accidents. Some think a passport is only used by the government to track a person's movements and provides no personal benefit. Informing people what fees cover and the benefits the services provide are important ways to enable people to see the value they receive for what they pay.

■ **Set measures for efficiency of core deliverables and publicise**

Key service standards, such as realistically achievable response times should be set and be publicly available to ensure expectations are transparent and there is accountability for fulfilling them. By enabling the public to see that there is accountability for service delivery there will be a parallel sense of accountability for tax dollars spent.

■ **Website and other public information**

There is strong support for the Public Service to show value for the tax dollars it spends. A suggested way to provide this accountability is to post data on a website. This may need to be a generic website for the Public Service and would include value for money measures, so people can view the total tax spend. However, individual departments should provide department specific data on their own websites. The information needs to be provided in a simple, easily understood manner and similar information should be available in other places where public information is available, for example, public libraries. Where appropriate success stories that demonstrate value for tax dollars spent should be publicised, though not advertised, in the general media.

5.7 Channels

■ Overview

Of the communication channels, phone and face-to-face are the most preferred because there is a strong desire to be able to explain one's circumstances and to be able to question public servants to gain more information. This is more pronounced where an individual's circumstances are complex. Face-to-face is also the most trusted channel.

The Internet and mail are valued for the documented evidence they provide. Both channels are important where it is felt proof may be required of the undertakings made by public servants. The Internet is convenient because it enables access to information at a time and place that suits the customer. Mail is considered slow and inflexible, but may suit those who are not computer literate. While both the Internet and mail are least suited to conveying emotion or enabling people to discern genuineness in the communication, written material is regarded as useful for those for whom English is a second language.

■ Face-to-face

Expectations are higher of face-to-face contact and it is often the preferred channel, particularly if an individual's service requirements are complex. Personal contact is also regarded as a more trustworthy guide to how committed a public servant is to the service as non-verbal factors such as body language can be read. Face-to-face contact can play an important role in building relationships with the public and is particularly important for Māori, Pacific People and those for whom English is a second language.

You can look at them and tell whether they are lying or not. (Balclutha, general public, male)

Face-to-face I have the opportunity to use non-verbal, which as you've already said is 95% of the decision. But over a phone I have to entirely rely on verbal and it must be clear. (Manukau, Māori, female)

This also means that expectations are generally higher in a face-to-face situation. Respondents say it increases their chances of getting something done.

You increase your chances of getting what you want done, completed, by going over the counter. (Manukau, Asian, male)

There is an expectation that the body language in a face-to-face meeting would be friendly and welcoming.

■ Phone

The phone is also a preferred channel for those that want to speak to a real person.

I would rather use the phone than email because I would rather talk to a person. With email you don't know if they have received it or not whereas if you are talking to a person you know they have got it. (Kaitaia, general public, male)

A competent phone channel is an accessible one, that is, people are able to get through to speak to a staff member promptly, and once through experience courtesy.

Over the phone you want their voice to sound interested and actually engage in a conversation and not just be human answering machines. (Hamilton, general public, female)

Many respondents reported that receiving service over the phone is problematic. This is principally due to delays in actually getting in touch with someone who could help. There is also less accountability as the public servant on the phone is not necessarily identifiable.

When you are on the phone you expect to be on hold for the first 15 minutes before they talk. Then they are bounced from one person to another and each time you call it is a different person who has no idea who you are on about. [So there is a different expectation on the phone, you expect to wait?] On the phone you expect it to be a painful experience. You don't want it to be. (Balclutha, young family, male)

However, for those in rural-provincial areas, the phone may be the only practical way in which to speak to someone as local offices do not exist.

The phone may also be avoided by those for whom English is a second language as they find it easier to understand and be understood through face-to-face contact. Even so, the phone was considered useful in removing prejudice that some felt they encountered in face-to-face contact.

Over the phone I can take away the prejudice. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

■ Internet and mail

Both the Internet and mail (including email) are important because they provide a written record that can be referred to later or used as proof of something if required. Both channels are the most trusted for making promises because the written word provides clear evidence that public servants can be held accountable for. Some respondents said the written word did not convey emotion well and did not enable them to discern genuineness.

I think if they write it people don't usually lie if they do it in writing because you have got something hard to go back to and you can actually take it further and further. It is more legal. (Dunedin, general public, female)

I actually like email better because I have it written in black and white what has occurred. Because I have had but I rang you on the 12th – we have no record of that. So I find that really frustrating. (Kaitaia, general public, female)

The Internet has obvious advantages because of its capacity to provide a quicker, written response and is easy to use.

The Internet I expect to be much easier to do. It should be really straightforward and really easy to use. (North Shore, young people, younger working, female)

Internet can also provide significant advantages for those who find it easy to access what they want. This conveys efficiency as the example below shows.

Lodging money in GST accounts used to be done by pen and paper in the past. Then all of a sudden the Internet came in and they said “from now on you can submit it over the Internet”. [How have you found that?] Perfect, beautiful. I can submit it at 3 am rather than having to put a stamp on it and having to walk to the Post Office and put it in the mail. I can lodge it on the Internet and I immediately get a response back and it’s done, thank you very much. That receipt I can show that it was done at that specific time which is an improvement that the post couldn’t have helped me with. (Manukau, Asian, male)

Email can become a default channel because of experiences of problems over the phone.

I use the Internet because I am sick and tired of getting somebody down the phone who doesn’t know and the other ones who are out at lunch so I will flick them an email [Is there anything different using the Internet in terms of competence or expectations?] Yes, because I have given them plenty of time, I haven’t rung up and put them on the spot and said you answer now. (Hamilton, general public, female)

Experiences of the Internet are somewhat uneven with some reporting that emails they had sent to public servants had not been replied to and some websites were difficult to navigate to find the information required. There is an expectation that emails should be responded to within 24-48 hours.

[Over the Internet, what sort of things to meet your expectations] *A prompt reply. [What’s prompt?] Two days. Just acknowledgement I guess is important. [One to two days would be good. (Interjection.)] (North Shore, Asian, male)*

In offering the Internet as a channel, public servants need to be mindful that not everyone either has access to a computer or is computer literate.

You look for your land references and they tell you to go to the computer over there and do this and do that. Excuse me I have never used a computer, you don’t get that personal attention like you used to before. You are supposed to be on the ball and be computer literate. (Kaikohe, Māori, male)

As with the Internet, mail has the benefit of providing documentation that may be needed later. And as with the Internet the written word removes doubts or misunderstandings that could arise over the phone. While convenient for people that are not computer literate, using mail was generally considered too slow to meet most needs and there was a concern that mail can get lost.

6. Drivers of trust

This part of the report will devote a section to each of the *trust* drivers apart from the driver that was explored only with Māori which will be covered in the Māori section of the report. As was the case with the previous section, what follows was common to all population groups with which trust was explored. Any findings that were unique or particular to Māori or Asian respondents are covered in separate sections specific to those populations. No trust drivers were explored with either Pacific People or Young People. As noted in the methodology, the general concept of trust in public services was discussed in some groups in an endeavour to gain more insights and a section is devoted to this at the end of the discussion on the trust drivers.

6.1 You have confidence that public servants do a good job

This driver was explored in the general public and Asian groups. The following table shows where groups were held:

	Auckland		Hamilton	Otago		
	North Shore	Manukau		Dunedin	Waitaki	Clutha
General public	1	1			1	1
Asian	2		1			

6.1.1 Overview

This driver is most closely linked to the satisfaction drivers *The service experience met your expectations* and *Staff were competent* and to a lesser extent with *Staff kept their promises – that is they did what they said they would do* and *Your individual needs were taken into account*.

When respondents describe what doing a good job means they identify almost all the expectations that emerged in Chapter 5.1 that contribute to service experiences meeting expectations and to the attributes of competent staff outlined in Chapter 5.2. Those most important attributes of both competent staff and of those who respondents have confidence in to do a good job are:

- helpful;
- knowledgeable or experienced;
- ability to listen and understand needs;
- being customer focused;
- empathy, and;
- that they follow through (solutions focused).

Respondents say they have confidence a public servant is doing a good job when they are motivated to help people, have the knowledge and ability to understand what people need, can provide a solution for them and obtain job satisfaction from doing that.

There were common perceptions across the groups that front-line staff were often not sufficiently empowered or knowledgeable to help people and that staff were generally under-resourced and under stress. Some staff were said to not have their heart in the job and were not helpful. This is consistent with the suggestions respondents made about ways to improve levels of satisfaction in service expectations when they identified the need for more front-line resources and better training of front-line staff.

Confidence levels that public servants do a good job differ between the types of public services being considered. For instance, the highest level of confidence is in emergency services due to absolute trust that they are committed to doing their very best job when called upon to help even to the point of putting their own lives at risk.

Of the channels, face-to-face contact is the one where respondents feel most confident that a good job will be done and the phone engenders the least confidence. The Internet and mail are impersonal and there are some concerns that mail can get lost which undermines confidence. The difference between channels is dealt with more fully in Chapter 5.7.

Confidence in public servants doing a good job may be lower in rural-provincial areas due to issues like more limited face-to-face contact and a less localised focus.

The Asian groups were distinguished from the general public groups because they placed a lot more emphasis on the ability of staff to explain and communicate information and on the need for cultural sensitivity. They were also more relaxed about staff they deal with thinking one thing and doing another while the general public groups saw this as inconsistent with having confidence in staff doing a good job.

6.1.2 Key themes

■ General confidence levels

Respondents tended to express qualified confidence that public servants do a good job.

Depends on who they are. I would assume that 70% of them would do a good job. And some of the rest are just having a bad day and some of them hate their job and they take it out on the world. (Oamaru, general public, female)

Only the emergency services enjoyed unqualified confidence that they do a good job.

Depends on the Public Service as well, you can pretty much trust a fireman to come and put your fire out, the evidence is the fire has gone out therefore he has done a good job. But as for the more fluffy stuff like ACC claims or whatever may or not be allowed that is more of a roll of a dice. (Manukau, general public, male)

The main reservations about expressing confidence were directly linked to experiences with front-line staff. Some felt that they were unable to get the answer they wanted from the person they spoke to over the phone.

Usually the person you deal with at the front-line is not the person who can actually give you an answer. They have to go to the next person. You don't know how many chains they have to go up to get the answer. Once they get an answer, it comes back down the same channel. It could get lost in the translation. (North Shore, general public, male)

Some felt front-line staff were under-resourced to do the job required.

I've seen nurses in tears because they can't do their job well enough. [They're under so much pressure for all sorts of reasons. It's terrible. (Interjection.)]
(North Shore, general public, female)

And some blamed staff attitudes.

Thinking about the people they are working with instead of their morning tea break. (Oamaru, general public, female)

I think some of them are really caring. They really do try their best. Others think "to hell with it", they're having a bad day. (North Shore, general public, female)

To a large extent whether a good job was being done depended on service expectations being met. This essentially meant public servants needed to be helpful.

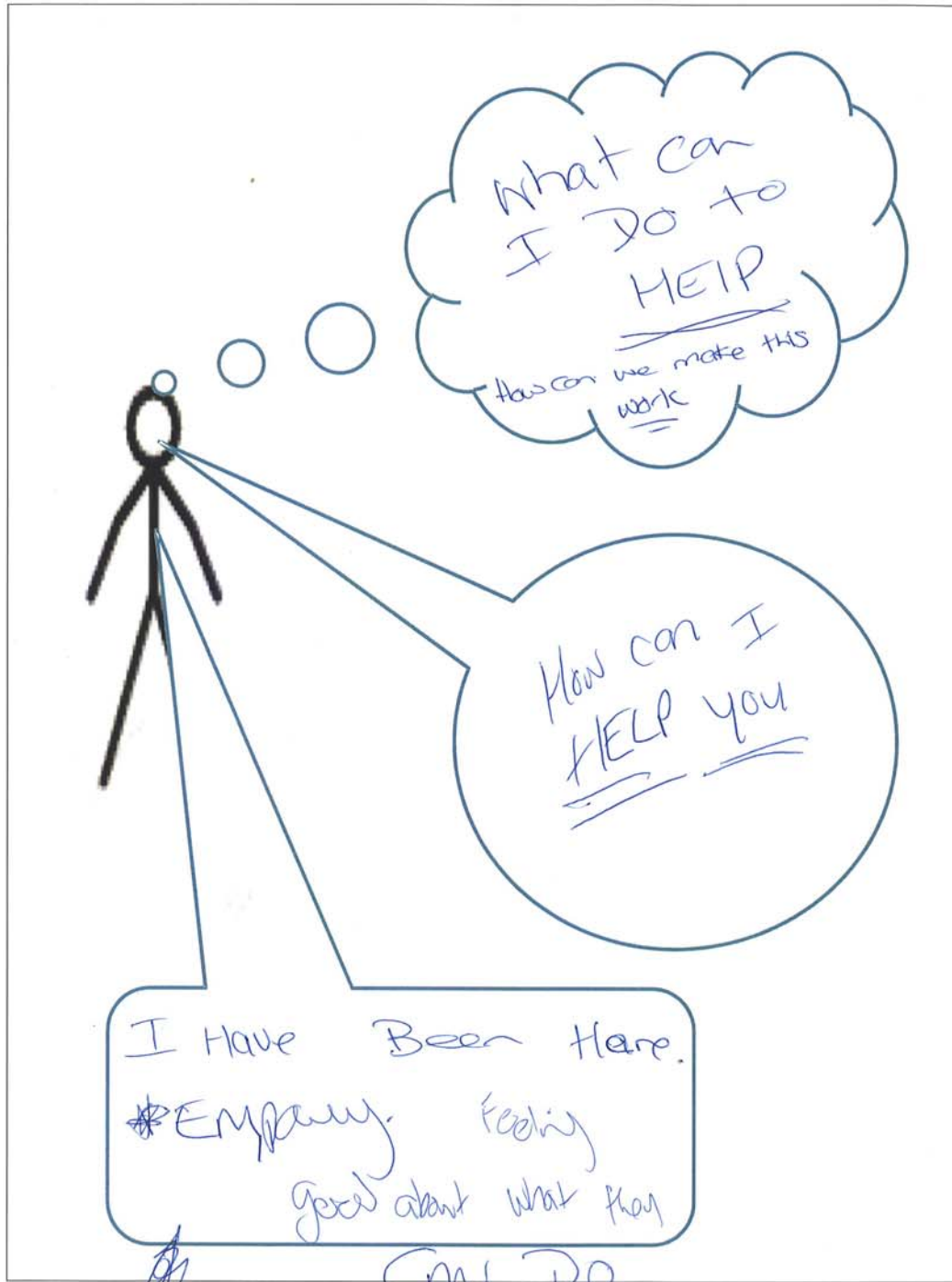
■ Helpfulness

Respondents were asked to do a projective exercise where they filled in what the ideal public servant would be thinking, saying and feeling if they were doing a good job. There was strong commonality across the groups that the ideal public servant wanted to help, actually helped and gained self satisfaction from helping. Over the page are two examples, one general public (Oamaru, male) and one Asian (North Shore female) that typically illustrate respondents' expectations about helpfulness. Other components of what it means to be helpful for these two respondents are also apparent in the exercise, such as, being efficient, fair and treating people as individuals.

Fundamental to being helpful was having a strong customer focus which was also one of the core service expectations identified in Chapter 5.1.

Thinking how are they best able to help or assist the person, saying how they are able to help or assist them in any way and feeling that they have done the best job possible. (Balclutha, general public, female)

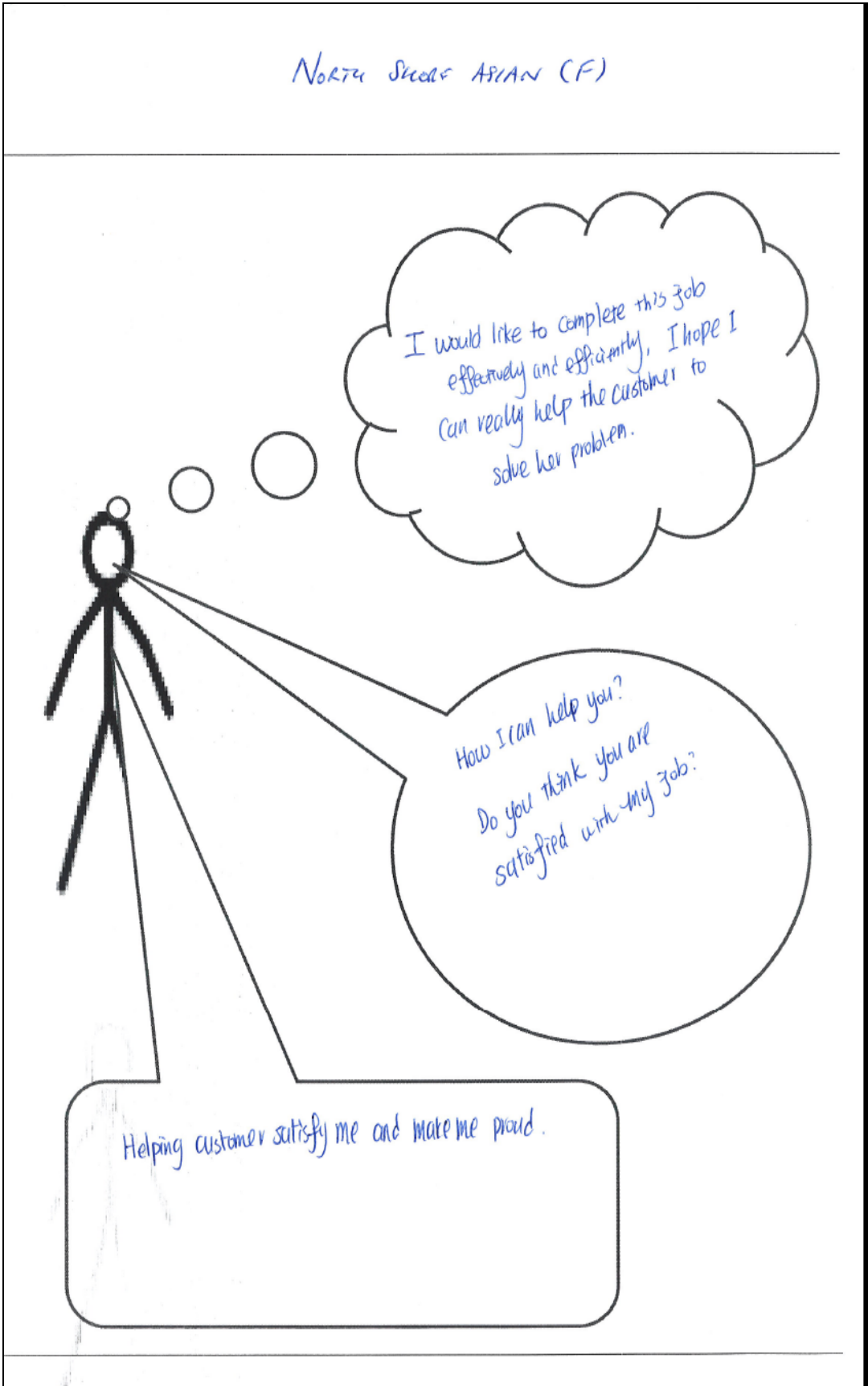
WAITAKI (OAMARU) GENERAL PUBLIC (F)



~~④~~
A Commitment to a Person they are working with

Waitaki (Oamaru), general public, female

NORTH SHORE ASIAN (F)



North Shore, Asian female

After respondents had written on their diagrams they were probed on how important it was for the public servant to be consistently thinking, saying and doing the same thing. The Asian groups were more inclined though to accept inconsistencies between what a public servant might be thinking and doing.

You cannot possibly say everything you think. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

You are not going to say something to offend a person. You can think it but you don't say it. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

■ Knowledge

In order to be helpful, one of the most important expectations respondents had of public servants they could have confidence in to do a good job was that they be knowledgeable, that is, they knew what they were talking about.

They very much have the knowledge on what they are doing. So you can tell him he is competent at that job. (North Shore, Asian, male)

The need for public servants to be knowledgeable and understanding (see below) are critical aspects of the satisfaction drivers *Staff were competent* and *Your individual circumstances were taken into account* which are discussed in Chapters 5.2 and 5.3.

■ Listen, understanding and explain

The ability to understand an individual's needs was also crucial to having confidence that a good job would be done.

Thinking what does this person need so how can I help you. (Balclutha, general public, female)

This can entail understanding an individual's circumstances and not treating everyone the same. This has obvious links to the satisfaction drivers *You were treated fairly* and *Your individual circumstances were taken into account*.

Maybe they need to know the information, not just about a job, also about the customer so how to – it's also just like understanding needs of clients. If they know the clients they will understand their need. If they don't really know anything about the clients, they won't know really what they need. [Need to know in some way] Like the information of the clients like what they really want, what is their background, and what is their like special need. (North Shore, Asian, female)

The ability to communicate effectively instilled confidence in those who could do that. This was particularly so for Asian respondents.

I work in the lab and you have different cultures that come in and a Kiwi can be pretty abrupt in the way they talk to them because they don't understand the language. And some Kiwi's do talk quite fast. And if you can't speak the language if English is not your first language you are going to battle to try and grasp what is being said. But they don't care about it. You know that you need to do this and that, go and get somebody else to speak the language and that kind of thing. (North Shore, Asian, male)

■ Empathy

Closely linked to the ability to understand someone's needs and to be helpful was the need to have empathy for the customer. Sometimes this was described as being compassionate, but the important thing is for the public servant to genuinely care. The need for empathy emerged as a service expectation in Chapter 5.1 as well as in the discussion on the satisfaction driver *Your individual circumstances were taken into account* in Chapter 5.3.

With the empathy thing, it's understanding who you are, what you're living in, that it's difficult getting to and from work, all that sort of stuff, yes so I understand the problem in the world that you're actually living in, not necessarily just your problem, but who you actually are. (North Shore, general public, male)

■ Keeping promises

One of the complaints respondents brought up about public servants that undermined confidence that public servants did a good job was lack of follow through which was often expressed as a public servant not doing what they said they would do. This underscores the need for public servants to keep their promises in order to create confidence that they do a good job (see Chapters 5.5 and 6.5 which discuss the relevant satisfaction and trust drivers that relate to keeping promises).

[What does doing a good job mean for a public servant? What are the main aspects of that?] *Doing what they say they're going to do. Follow through. (North Shore, general public, female)*

Within reason I mean they can't do everything, be honest if you don't know the answer don't give the line just say I don't know the answer. [But I will try and find out. (Interjection.)] And I will get back to you and actually get back to you. (Oamaru, general public, female)

■ Admitting mistakes

Acknowledging errors and omissions helps prevent confidence from being undermined. Accountability was demonstrated when public servants admitted responsibility for mistakes by apologising.

Just being accountable for their actions. If they do slip up, apologising and being professional about it. (North Shore, general public, male)

■ Judgmental

Confidence that public servants do a good job is undermined when they pre-judge people. Another form of unfairness, racial discrimination, emerged in the Asian groups.

[Has anyone else got an example where they felt like they have been prejudiced against?] I have sort of struck it visually. [In what way?] I have gone to council and waited to be served and I have been stared at rather than can I help you, looked up and stare and then carry on with what they are doing for another minute or so before they get up and say hello can I help you. I don't know whether it's just me I may feel more sensitive but when my husband is with me, I have a white Kiwi husband when he is with me we get attended to straight away. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

More detailed discussion about fair treatment can be found in the companion satisfaction and trust Chapters 5.4 and 6.4.

■ Best channels

While Chapter 5.7 discusses channels in more detail, it is important to note that face-to-face contact provides most confidence in a job being done well.

When you are face-to-face it's reality, that is a person just like you who has to go home at the end of the day. So I think if you want a good result it is best to do it in person. (Manukau, general public, female)

Respondents had least confidence in the phone which also presented more of a barrier for those for whom English was a second language.

I just feel more confidence because I can talk to that person face-to-face ... the problem sometimes over the phone I find it quite hard to communicate. I don't know why, maybe just my own personal reason or something like that, and sometimes because maybe my English sometimes it can be not really easy to understand through the phone or something like that. It would be easier to communicate face-to-face. (North Shore, Asian, female)

■ Asian perspective

Directly related to the need to appreciate the limitations of a member of the public for whom English is a second language is the need to exercise cultural sensitivity. This issue was raised only in the Asian groups, but was an important factor influencing whether they had confidence in public servants to do a good job.

It may be lack of understanding, given the diverse nature of the people that the agencies deal with. Sometimes that can be just a training issue where they do not fully understand a cultural group. (North Shore, Asian, male)

■ Rural-provincial perspectives

For rural-provincial areas confidence can be undermined by a lack of services.

We had a person come into our house, she was screaming she was being attacked, she came in and then her boyfriend or somebody came in after and threatened to push me through the walls, this is in my own place, we rang the Police and oh sorry there is nobody on duty in Balclutha or Milton tonight somebody is going to have to come from Dunedin. (Balclutha, general public, male)

There are also fewer opportunities for them to use the most trusted channel for communication, face-to-face contact.

Here you can't see anybody face-to-face in a region like ours. (Balclutha, general public, female)

6.2 The Public Service provides services that meet your needs

This driver was explored in the general public and Asian groups. The following table shows where groups were held:

	Auckland		Hamilton	Lower Hutt	Otago		
	North Shore	Manukau			Dunedin	Waitaki	Clutha
General public		1	1	2	1	2	
Asian	1	1			1		

6.2.1 Overview

This driver was seen as expounding an ideal rather than a reality that exists all the time for services that people need. While respondents concede that generally needs are met, there were several examples of poor core services and individual services to show that they felt there was plenty of room for improvement.

Respondents chose to interpret this driver in two quite different ways. Some understand 'your needs' to refer to the community or society's needs. These people identify those needs as core services, such as education, health, emergency services, policing and key infrastructural services like roading and sewerage.

Others understand 'your needs' as quite individual to themselves and as a result a wide range of needs are identified. Often these needs are closely linked to the core expectations of service, such as, being knowledgeable, helpful, understanding, accessible, providing fair treatment, being treated as an individual and solutions focused, all of which are important elements of meeting service expectations as discussed in Chapter 5.1 and in Chapter 5.3 which looked at *Your individual circumstances were taken into account*. Among the Asian groups there was a stronger focus on speed and efficiency.

6.2.2 Key themes

■ Driver seen as 'an ideal'

The driver was treated with cynicism when first presented without prompting in some groups. It was clear that respondents regarded this as a goal the Public Service might have, but it was certainly not being achieved.

Is that like a vision statement rather than a reality? (Manukau, general public, female)

Some respondents talked about the variable experience they had had with different public services.

I think a lot of it depends perhaps on the departments you use and what you are using them for and what your dealings are with them. (Oamaru, general public, female)

Some provided individual examples where they felt needs had not been met. This tended to arise either through errors, poor accountability or poor quality work.

The pressures of the system and poor staff training were blamed for a failure to meet needs.

I know sometimes it's the agencies fault new people come in and they are under so much pressure they are just kind of thrown in at the deep end, they are not actually taught the job properly, they don't have enough information and enough training. And it is their clients that suffer. (Manukau, general public, female)

And processes, including rules and regulations, were seen to frustrate needs being met at times.

I have two boys in wheelchairs and know the sheer amount of paper work as a family that we have to do to ensure that the kids get what they need just to be at the same level as other kids. Anything outside the norm doesn't work, there is always a lot of bureaucracy around it, there is always a lot of confusion, there is always interpretation on what should be or shouldn't be. (Oamaru, general public, female)

Although a specific service outcome may be met, some respondents said the service could be delivered more efficiently.

Yes, it met my needs in that I got out of the country, I got back into the country, it didn't exceed my expectations at all, but they provided basically the minimum service for you to achieve that outcome. So public services provided services I suppose that would meet your needs. They never exceed your expectations. (Lower Hutt, general public, male)

■ Universal needs

One of the principal ways in which people interpreted this driver, *The Public Service provides services that meet your needs*, was to see it as referring to meeting society's needs.

I saw the word 'your' meaning public. I didn't see it as a personal thing, but it could very well mean personal as well, but if it applies to me and it applies to all of us around the table, that 'your' applies to all of us. (North Shore, Asian, male)

Those that understood 'your needs' as the universal needs of those in society gave core services as examples of those needs the Public Service needed to provide. These were also the most important needs they felt had to be met. These included healthcare, Police, emergency services, welfare, education and other vital infrastructural services such as roading.

They are fulfilling basic human needs that everyone should have access to, like everyone should have access to education. (Manukau, general public, female)

All these services were seen as important for the Public Service to provide because individuals themselves could not do so.

■ Individual needs

The second way in which this driver was interpreted was that it referred to the individual service needs of respondents. These were wide ranging reflecting that everyone's needs were somewhat difference.

➤ *Taking account of individual circumstances*

Recognising that each individual had unique circumstances that should be taken into account was one need to be borne in mind. This was discussed more fully in Chapter 5.3.

The whole thing of providing a service is getting to know the unique circumstances and they don't seem to be doing that. (Manukau, general public, female)

They need to be knowledgeable and efficient, they need to be flexible and have some discretion without the need for a parliamentary inquiry as to why they made that specific decision. (Lower Hutt, general public, male)

➤ *Knowledge*

Staff were required to be knowledgeable in order to help. This requirement was critical to meeting expectations (see Chapter 5.1), important for competent staff (see Chapter 5.2) and for taking account of individual circumstances (see Chapter 5.3)

I believe you have trust if you feel they know what they are talking about. They are not just fobbing you off. (Lower Hutt, general public, female)

➤ *Listen, understand and explain*

It was important for people to know what they had to do or what would happen when dealing with a public servant. This need was particularly strong for those from Asian groups for whom English was a second language. The ability to listen, understand and explain were important features of competency as well as taking individual circumstances into account as detailed in Chapters 5.2 and 5.3 respectively.

You try and explain to them what you need and what you want and they should absorb that and try and figure out what the best option for you is. And they put up all the options they have, you having to ask for all the options isn't the right way to go about things. (Dunedin, Asian, female)

If you don't know something they should be professional enough to go through with you the process instead of hah, hah you don't know stuff. (Dunedin, Asian, male)

➤ **Customer focused**

To meet needs staff had to be customer focused which again is a core expectation that featured in Chapters 5.1-5.3. In terms of approachability, respondents in most groups talked about the need for staff to be friendly and that over the phone they should greet and identify themselves. Such courtesies make the interaction easier for the customer.

I put down being approachable because I think if it's a friendly face that you can go and talk to at a reception counter or whatever it makes you feel a bit more at ease that you are going to be listened to at whatever agency you are going to. I also put down that they would be able to sort the problem out quickly and not all this red tape of they have to have meetings or they are going to get back to you when they have talked to somebody else about it. (Lower Hutt, general public, female)

➤ **Follow through**

To get the desired result, requires staff to follow through to meet the public's needs and for staff to do what they say they will do. This requirement is also a general service expectation (see Chapter 5.1), a trait of competency (see Chapter 5.2), is a central focus of the promises driver discussions in Chapter 5.5 and 6.5 and helps provide confidence that public servants do a good job (see Chapter 6.1)

I don't like the idea of going to a lot of trouble to ring up a government department and talk earnestly to someone and then find out no one has done anything about it and just paid you lip service. (Lower Hutt, general public, male)

➤ **Empathy**

Associated with follow-through was the need for public servants to genuinely care and want to do their best for the public which required them to empathise with individuals and their situations. This is central to taking individual circumstances into account (see Chapter 5.3), but is also a component of meeting service expectations (see Chapter 5.1).

ACC I am almost permanently injured but they are pretty much brilliant as far as I am concerned in my dealings with them. They give me bits of paper that say go and get some free physio and they basically wish you luck with your rehabilitation in the letters which is actually quite nice. It is like you do feel a bit cared for and stuff like that and on the positive side it keeps the humanity side of things going as far as government departments go. (Hamilton, general public, male)

➤ **Fairness**

Fair treatment was also an expectation of service needs. This is discussed more fully in the discussion of the fairness drivers in Chapter 5.4 and 6.4.

If you make a mistake you pay interest but if it's the other way around – they sent me a letter to say there was child support owing from one of our workers and when I rung it was a mistake but they had owed us \$21 since 2004 so they said send them my bank account details and they would give it to me. They gave me the \$21 and whatever cents, there was no interest. What they expect from us we should be able to expect from them. (Hamilton, general public, female)

➤ **Asian perspectives**

The need for speed efficiency came through most strongly from the Asian groups. It is an aspect of meeting service expectations (see Chapter 5.1).

If I go somewhere and I want it done I want it done speedily, efficiently and competently. (Dunedin, Asian, male)

As the population increases, as the demands increase, there should be more efficiency, more promptness in the things, especially life and death scenarios. (Manukau, Asian, female)

Asian groups also drew on international examples to provide relative comparisons of needs being met.

Services are slower in New Zealand compared to other countries and I mean I don't mind it personally but as long as the job is done efficiently and competently, speed doesn't really matter to me but that is one thing that New Zealanders don't provide in most cases. (Dunedin, Asian, female)

6.3 The Public Service admits responsibility when it makes mistakes

This was explored in three general public groups in Manukau, Hamilton and Lower Hutt.

6.3.1 Overview

Respondents held the strong impression that the Public Service only begrudgingly admits responsibility when it makes mistakes and that often the admission occurs as a result of media publicity. Although perceptions of this driver are influenced by high profile incidents involving senior public servants, individual experiences also show that there is a reluctance to admit to mistakes at more junior levels in the service.

The scale of the mistake, which is judged by its impact on people, determines the level of response expected. Minor errors are expected to be acknowledged and fixed. In most instances, an apology is expected as well as an explanation to show that the mistake will not be repeated. In the case of serious mistakes, compensation and face-to-face reconciliation meetings are suggested.

Minor mistakes should be handled by the person who made the error and for more serious mistakes the responsibility should fall to a senior member of staff or the top public servant, possibly even the Minister in the most serious of cases. The scale of the mistake also impacts on whether there is a difference between a public servant making the mistake or the Public Service. The more serious the mistake, the more it is going to be viewed as the Public Service making the mistake. However, there is a degree of tolerance for mistakes on the grounds that it is human to err.

If a long period lapses between a serious mistake being made and the matter becoming public, it is likely to erode trust in the Public Service. Time lapses are interpreted as attempts to 'hush up' mistakes and lead people to wonder what else has occurred during that time.

6.3.2 Key themes

■ Begrudging admission

The Public Service is not regarded as being pro-active in admitting to its mistakes, rather the impression respondents have is a reluctance to admit to one unless the mistake has been publicised.

There is not a natural urge to admit responsibility unless the consequences or that are more severe. So it is almost like a reluctance of the admission of responsibility of some error. (Manukau, general public, male)

And it can seem that more emphasis is placed on the process of establishing whether a mistake has been made as a means of avoiding an admission.

They have an appeal process and you can have decisions reviewed but they do not make mistakes. (Hamilton, general public, male)

There is a perception that the Public Service admits to mistakes only as a result of media coverage.

An unsolicited admission that something had gone wrong, the learnings and the steps are taken to remedy it rather than waiting for it to be uncovered by whoever, be it the opposition, the media, a disgruntled public servant or what. Them being proactive rather than reactive. (Lower Hutt, general public, male)

■ Influence of high profile cases

In all three groups it was evident that respondents' perceptions of this driver had been influenced by several high profile cases where mistakes had been made by senior public servants. The time that had lapsed before the mistake had been brought to light also impacted on respondent's perceptions and their trust in the Public Service. It was clear this seeded doubts about whether this indicated other problems existed that had not been made public.

The problem is the time lag between when it is done and when it comes out is that if it's two years how do you know that in that two year period the same thing hasn't been done again and again and again? And that is the biggest problem with things not being made public sooner. Because it often happens that way. A perfect example is the Colonel that got Court-Marshalled he is only one of several and if it had come out when they first discovered it then maybe it wouldn't have gone on for so long. The judges were double dipping into funds a few years ago, if that had come out immediately maybe that would have been curtailed. (Manukau, general public, male)

High-profile mistakes can linger for years in people's minds.

When a person is dealt an injustice or aware of an injustice it hangs up in time, I just mentioned Arthur Allan Thomas and immediately you know what I am talking about because it hangs up in time. (Manukau, general public, male)

■ Repeated mistakes

The perceived regularity of reported, high-profile mistakes can build a picture of systemic problems that are not being addressed.

A lot of things that have happened ... Criminals being let out and people on bail and stuff, they all duck for cover and don't really take responsibility. (Manukau, general public, male)

■ Individual experiences

Respondents also drew on personal experiences to illustrate where mistakes had been made. For example:

They diagnosed my son with leukemia and he wasn't. He had a tumour on his lung instead which I am not sure was a good thing or a bad thing but at least one was inoperable and one was operable so he is fine. (Manukau, general public, female)

In the case of that misdiagnosis, a written apology was provided, but this meant nothing to the respondent because she did not have confidence that a similar mistake would not occur again. This points to the need to explain what steps have been taken to prevent a recurrence (see below).

■ What an admission entails

When the Public Service makes mistakes, the scale of the mistake determines the type of response expected. There is some tolerance for mistakes as human error is acknowledged as a fact of life. At one end of the scale, the most trivial mistakes are just expected to be corrected without necessarily requiring an apology. For some mistakes a simple apology will address matters for people.

However, in most instances an apology is expected to be accompanied by an explanation of what has happened and an assurance that steps have been taken to prevent a recurrence. The requirement for an apology and an explanation is important to keeping promises which is discussed in Chapters 5.5 and 6.5.

Apologise, acknowledge that they have done wrong and ensure that they will endeavour it does not happen again. (Manukau, general public, female)

➤ Who makes the apology?

Again the scale of the mistake sets the expectation as to who should apologise. In the case of minor mistakes it should be the public servant who made the mistake.

Where mistakes are more serious, then more senior staff should take responsibility for apologising.

If you have had to go up to your team leader and they have told you something wrong well then the team leader, maybe the both of you, I don't think it hurts to say hey I was wrong. (Manukau, general public, female)

And in the most serious of cases, the departmental head or Minister is expected to apologise.

Normally the Minister of that public department let's say minister of health he has to stand up in front because he is in parliament, we voted that person in and he has to explain his actions why he is the person responsible and how he has dealt with it. (Lower Hutt, general public, male)

➤ **Reconciliation**

It is not always the case though that an apology and an explanation are enough. In this case the respondent wanted a face-to-face meeting with those who had made the mistake.

They made a mistake in diagnosing my son and it made the wait for a proper diagnosis that much longer. And basically they admitted that they were wrong and they apologised in writing but really I mean it is meaningless the letter saying we are sorry... If we had less falling on the sword and more sitting around the table and actually facing the person. Two senior doctors sitting in a room with you and your entire family that were screwed up and them actually having to say look I am sorry this is what we did and then you say actually this is how it affected us. So next time that becomes really human then it is face-to-face and eyeball to eyeball. (Manukau, general public, female)

➤ **Rectifying the mistake**

There is also an expectation that if the Public Service makes a mistake that the error is fixed at their expense and not the public who have been affected.

I think set it right at their own expense as well, if they lost it they ought to pay for the person going around finding it again. [So there should be no expense to you if they made a mistake?] Their mistake shouldn't cost you any extra. (Hamilton, general public, male)

They expect you to go through paper work and fill out a whole pile of forms for a dog I never knew existed. I expect them to take it off our records. It doesn't really affect anyone but if we move suddenly we have another pile of paperwork to take our imaginary dog with us to our new home. It is a silly mistake, but it wasn't ours. (Manukau, general public, female)

➤ **Compensation**

In the most serious cases of errors being made there is an expectation of some form of compensation.

If you go into hospital and they cut the wrong leg off. If they can put it right I think they should put it right, if it is something that can't be put right then maybe compensation is in order. (Hamilton, general public, male)

■ **Public servants versus the Public Service making mistakes**

The scale of the mistake also influences whether people regard the responsibility for the mistake as attributable to the public servant in question or the Public Service.

Even so respondents were more inclined is to consider mistakes as ones that the Public Service is responsible for.

The public servant when they do their job they are acting in the name of the service. So whether they punch a wrong number on a calculator and stuff up your payments or whether it is to or from them really that is the whole service making that mistake. Even if it is just their computer failed. (Hamilton, general public, male)

6.4 Public servants treat people fairly

This driver was explored in the general public and Māori groups. In these groups the satisfaction driver *You were treated fairly* was also discussed at the same time (see Chapter 5.4). This has been comprehensively covered in Chapter 5.4 and as the distinctions respondents made between the companion satisfaction and trust drivers are few, this section will be brief to avoid repetition.

The following table shows where groups were held:

	Far North		Auckland		Lower Hutt
	Kaitaia	Kaikohe	North Shore	Manukau	
General public	1		1	1	1
Māori	1	1		1	1

6.4.1 Overview

There is a general presumption that public servants do treat people fairly though as exploration of the corresponding satisfaction driver showed in Chapter 5.4 individuals do experience unfair treatment at times and interpret fair treatment in quite different ways.

Respondents generally struggle to distinguish between the companion satisfaction and trust drivers *You were treated fairly* and *Public servants treat people fairly*. In the focus groups, initial discussion of the satisfaction driver focused on personal experiences of being treated fairly or unfairly before having a somewhat shorter discussion on the trust driver. Perhaps because of that and the fact the trust driver focuses on 'public servants', not the Public Service, interpretations of the trust driver were understood in terms of personal experiences with individual public servants. As the distinction between the two drivers was not clear to respondents, much of what was covered in Chapter 5.4 in terms of understanding fair treatment and how to improve satisfaction could be applied to *Public servants treat people fairly*.

Respondents did make allowances for individual staff working in stressful situations where the quality of service resulted in the perception of unfair treatment. For instance, the limited resources of a public service provider, or its systems or its culture were regarded as the reasons for the unfairness, not the staff member.

When the 'system' or rules and regulations, which are attributed to the public service providers, are perceived to provide unfair outcomes, respondents talk about the need for public servants to have flexibility (see also Chapters 5.3. and 5.4) in order to act fairly. The exercise of discretion is not something respondents trust will happen, but one they hope will happen depending on the individual public servant.

As noted in Chapter 5.4, Māori can attach a special interpretation to being treated fairly that relates to historical injustices since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. In this sense, the distinction between the Crown as a distinct entity from the Public Service or indeed the public servants that implement Government policy is blurred.

6.4.2 Key themes

■ Trust and satisfaction drivers overlap

There was considerable overlap between the companion satisfaction and trust drivers. For instance some respondents confirmed in their own words that the satisfaction driver *You were treated fairly* was about satisfaction.

[What does being treated fairly mean when it comes to public services?] *You're satisfied. If you think you've been treated fairly.* (North Shore, general public, male)

And it was largely understood as an experience with an individual public servant.

I equated being treated fairly with that I felt I mattered to the person I was dealing with. (North Shore, general public, male)

Numerous personal examples of fair and unfair treatment were given by respondents when discussing the satisfaction driver consistent with an individual public servant. However, when asked later in the discussion if there was a difference between the satisfaction driver and the trust driver, *Public servants treat people fairly*, respondents spoke about the satisfaction driver, *You were treated fairly*, in terms of the 'system' treating people fairly as opposed to individual public servants. This however only occurred when the two drivers were compared directly with each other as prior to that the satisfaction driver had elicited examples of fairness based on individual experiences with public servants.

In some cases a lack of resources influenced whether the treatment was fair.

Sometimes a public servant can be trying to do their best, like you're saying a nurse crying because she wants to do a great job but it's systematic, the way the system is that they can't because they're overworked or whatever. [Or they haven't got the resources. (Interjection.)] That's right. Sometimes the poor public servant is just up against it. They may want to be fair but they just can't be. (North Shore, general public, female)

However, even though the rules and regulations of the system may seem unfair, individual public servants can make a difference by trying to be fair themselves. Trust therefore was very much a reflection of the idiosyncrasies of the public servant in question.

[Is there a different reaction between you were treated fairly and public servants treat people fairly?] *They're working as a person or an individual, when working for the council, and as a person, would sympathise with you and would need to sort it out. But then stepping back, what are the rules about this? You'd have to go back and see but as a person I would treat you fairly.* (North Shore, general public, male)

However, consistent with the considerable over-lap between the two drivers some could provide a quite contrary interpretation of the trust driver. Again the satisfaction driver is referred to first.

[I have just put up another statement underneath that one along similar lines, what is the difference between the two statements, you will be treated fairly and public servants treat people fairly? What is your reaction to me putting that second one up?] *The first one could be pure dumb luck and the second one implies that everyone gets treated fairly.* (Manukau, general public, male)

For these reasons, much of what can be said of ways to improve satisfaction in Chapter 5.4 applies equally to ways of increasing trust.

■ Māori perspectives

Some Māori respondents interpreted an aspect of fair treatment in terms of injustices that resulted in a historic failure to uphold the Treaty of Waitangi which resulted in calls today for redress. This was described in one group as 'a constant push for fairness' which in the context of the discussion should reasonably be inferred to mean delivery of public services to Māori. This was particularly well articulated by one respondent in a Kaitaia group whose comments were agreed to by others in the group. Chapter 8 deals with unique Māori perspectives in more detail.

You are talking about Māori people being treated fairly and since the Treaty we have felt victimised so that is just a joke really. And considering you are dealing with public services it is all going to keep flowing from that. So I think it needs to get it right at the top and then maybe it will filter into all the other services coming down. [When you say get it right at the top what is the top?] I can see it slowly flowing in restoring what the Treaty originally meant and because a lot of that has really gotten quite cloudy for me really and I may not understand fully why there is so much tension but I can definitely see where if it was honoured, if the promises were kept there, there wouldn't be this constant pushing for fairness in all these other areas. Because there would already be that sense of equality. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

There is recognition though that fairness is being restored as this personal example from the same respondent shows.

Some good points I have seen is with my children's school my daughter being Māori has been offered this opportunity to go to Auckland 3 days all expenses paid to sit in at a university to help her look at whether she wants to further a medical career. And when you are in a low income bracket to have something for 3 days totally taken care of is a real asset. So, on a positive side of being Māori that is because she was Māori that she was offered that. So in a sense the European students at that school missed out on the opportunity because they weren't. Which seems pretty fair considering in the past what I missed out on. But that is a positive for the schooling. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

There was no sense that unfair treatment that related to the Treaty of Waitangi was directed at public servants per se, but rather to the Crown or even the Government of the day. The fact that this interpretation arose unprompted shows the distinction between being treated fairly and public servants treating people fairly and the Crown or the Government doing the same are blurred in this context.

6.5 The Public Service keeps its promises – that is, it does what it says it will do

This driver was explored in the general public and Asian groups. The satisfaction driver *Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do* was also discussed at the same time. This has been comprehensively covered in Chapter 5.4 and as the distinctions respondents made between the companion satisfaction and trust drivers are few, this section will be brief to avoid repetition.

The following table shows where groups were held:

	Auckland		Hamilton	Lower Hutt	Otago		
	North Shore	Manukau			Dunedin	Waitaki	Clutha
General public	1		2		1	1	
Asian	1			1			

6.5.1 Overview

Much of what was covered in Chapter 5.5 on the satisfaction driver *Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do* and how to improve satisfaction can be said of this trust driver to improve levels of trust. The main reason for this is that regardless of whether it is a public servant or the Public Service that breaks a promise, a broken promise is regarded by respondents as a breach of trust. For this reason, a distinction between the companion satisfaction and trust drivers is not always clear to respondents. Where respondents make a clear distinction between the two drivers is when they see that staff have tried to do what they said they would do, but have been let down by the 'system' or the Public Service provider they work for.

Respondents do not naturally associate the Public Service as making promises. They find it hard to think of examples where the Public Service has made a promise, but find it much easier to cite examples of staff doing or not doing what they said they would do.

This does not lessen the importance of the need for the Public Service to keep its promises. This is because it is the public service organisation - which often represents 'the Public Service' in respondents' minds - that sets the delivery goals that staff are required to achieve. And some respondents consider it more important for staff who serve them individually to deliver on their promises than the public service organisation.

Given the considerable over-lap between the satisfaction and trust drivers the most important things to focus on to improve trust are those identified in Chapter 5.5 to improve satisfaction. These are for public service organisations to establish standards of service expectation, measures of performance against these standards as well as apologising and explaining when promises are not kept. As it is clear that respondents are not aware of the promise the Public Service makes, public service organisations should clearly articulate what their service standards are. Setting clear, realistic service expectations that the public can hold public servants accountable for will also help engender trust.

6.5.2 Key themes

■ Trust and satisfaction drivers overlap

Due to the over-lap between the companion satisfaction and trust drivers, it is worth noting that the satisfaction driver is interpreted by some as a trust driver. A broken promise is a breach of trust.

[Staff keeping their promises. What is a promise?] *Earn your trust.* [How do they earn your trust?] *By getting back to you with what they say they will and then after that you realise that you trust them and will go back to them.* (North Shore, Asian, female)

And conversely some said a broken promise by the Public Service would lead to dissatisfaction.

[If the Public Service didn't keep its promises, what would happen?] *Be dissatisfied. We might get a bit more rude at the staff even though they might be doing their job but there might be wider things holding them back or whatever.* (Manukau, Asian, male)

➤ Promises not associated with the Public Service

Respondents found it hard to give any examples of the Public Service making promises though in earlier discussion of the satisfaction driver they had been able to provide examples of staff keeping promises. Discussion of the trust driver showed that there was a perception that the Public Service did not make promises or if it did they were not kept.

[Do you think the Public Service keeps its promises?] *No, but I don't have any concrete examples. It's just a feeling that you get. You get given the run around. You don't know who's pulling the strings behind. You've got no idea of why decisions are made or not made.* (North Shore, general public, female)

➤ Perceptions

Views were largely perceptions based.

I think in a lot of ways like none of us have specific concrete examples and what that's saying to me is it's an up-hill battle for the government because as soon as you say 'government' people go "ohhh" because there's this preconception and that's it. I don't know how you change the preconception, but there is because as soon as I think government service, I think dissatisfied. I don't know why, I don't have a concrete example, I just think that and I think a lot of people think that. (North Shore, general public, female)

For some, their lack of awareness of success stories suggested that the Public Service may not keep its promises.

I don't have a specific example, it's more just a perception. Sometimes, but I think the success rate is rather low for most people. [What makes you suspect that?] *Just from anecdotal evidence and from conversations with my associates and friends who have had dealings with them. You very rarely get any positive*

comments, like “oh wow, I went to [One department] the other day and they were great, they looked after my problem and they were really good”. You never hear that. (North Shore, general public, male)

And those that did trust the Public Service to keep its promises, based their view either on little or no specific knowledge, but a general presumption.

There is an element of trust that has to actually be involved here because none of us as citizens have expertise in every single role of public service in our community so therefore we don't know. (Oamaru, general public, female)

[Do you think the Public Service keeps its promises?] Most of the time. If they say they're going to do something like supply something, obviously they're going to do it. (North Shore, Asian, female)

➤ **Focus more on specific service than ‘the Public Service’**

Respondents found it challenging to make an objective assessment of whether the Public Service kept its promises. Whether the Public Service was perceived to be keeping its promise was largely put down to a particular public service organisation being able to meet service expectations.

When they say “I’m going to provide you with a scholarship if you go and do early childhood teaching”, on completion of your training and when you send in your transcript, they do actually pay for your fees. [So do you think about the Public Service as specific services like that, or were you thinking in broader terms?] Can you take all of that in just one view? The health system is not so good, so how do you say whether or not the Public Service has actually kept its promise. [How isn't health keeping its promise?] My grandmother was due for an X-ray. It took them five months for the waiting list to get down to her. Five months. In the end we just said “stuff this, I’m paying private”. (North Shore, Asian, female)

When the companion satisfaction and trust drivers were compared, the trust driver was understood in terms of what a specific organisation did than what individual staff did.

I think it's quite blurry. I guess the second statement [the trust driver] up there, probably in my mind if it's a hospital I'd be thinking it's the hospital providing the service to the wider public, keeping their promises to provide the service, providing health to the wider public, something like that, whereas with the staff I'd think are the staff being friendly, being efficient, things like that. (Manukau, Asian, male)

As the trust driver was associated with individual institutions rather than the generic Public Service, there was considerable variability in trust depending on which public service organisations were being rated.

■ **Relative importance of staff or the Public Service keeping promises**

Greater reliance is placed on the trust driver because staff are seen to be representatives of the Public Service organisation they are employed by and it ultimately carries the responsibility of delivering the promise. Further, it was the organisation that through lack of resources or other reasons could prevent staff from delivering on a promise.

[If all the staff kept their promises, would you feel that the Public Service keeps its promise then, or not?] *No, because if their feathers are clipped they can't do anything. Even if they want to keep their promise, they can't do nuts about it.* (North Shore, Asian, male)

However, due to over-lapping perceptions of the two drivers, a few saw it as more important for staff to keep their promises.

They're the ones that make contact and they're the ones that help you with your own solution. (North Shore, Asian, female)

■ Transparency

There is also a need to have transparency and openness of processes and rules as there was a view expressed that the Public Service could change the rules to suit itself.

I find like with the Public Service they're like judge, jury, executioner all rolled into one. They can make the rules and break them and do what they like. If they break promises it's just – often it seems to be par for the course. (North Shore, general public, male)

6.6 General trust

A discussion on general trust was added to the fieldwork after the first 14 groups had been completed in an attempt to gain more understanding about what people understood by trust when applied to the Public Service.

The following table shows where groups were held:

	Auckland		Lower Hutt	Otago		
	North Shore	Manukau		Dunedin	Waitaki	Clutha
General public		1		1	1	
Māori				1		
Asian	1		1			

6.6.1 Overview

Trust is understood in two broad ways by respondents. The first is values-based where ethical or moral standards need to be demonstrated to engender trust. The second is a functionally based interpretation which focuses on the ability to deliver the service expected and relates more to the reliability that a job will be done. There is a linkage between the two interpretations however as respondents regard it as a matter of integrity as to whether public servants do what they say they will do. This has obvious linkage to the promises satisfaction and trust drivers (see Chapters 5.5 and 6.5).

This research validates the trust drivers. As expected, trustworthy organisations are those that admit responsibility for and rectify their mistakes. They are also the ones that do what they say they will do, they treat people fairly and do a good job.

Trust is not universally applied to the Public Service. Some areas, such as the emergency services, enjoy a high level of trust, but others are less well trusted. Greater transparency, openness and accountability and codes of conduct are considered the key ways to improve levels of trust supported by staff training.

There is very little awareness of the standards of integrity and conduct for the Public Service. Once aware of it, respondents express concern that the standards are just words and should be actively implemented. Although these standards are used for internal purposes there is support for the standards to be made public and for there to be a means for the public to hold public servants to account for upholding them. This could extend to establishing a formal complaints procedure akin to the Broadcasting Standard Authority model.

High profile breaches of trust are regarded as suggestive of more problems that have not been brought to light. However, there is no sense that there is a significant problem of corruption or endemic breaches of conduct across the Public Service. It is just that breaches by a few can have far reaching consequences. Asian groups compare the New Zealand public service favourably with their experiences in other countries.

6.6.2 Key themes

■ Values-based and functional-based trust

Those who understood trust in terms of values often summed up their understanding of the concept in a single word like – values, ethics, morals, honesty or integrity. Others saw trust in terms of a commitment to the job at hand.

Taking ownership of a problem. We need to resolve this. (North Shore, Asian, male)

Their integrity to deliver the services they promise. (Oamaru, general public, male)

■ Promises

➤ *Linking values and reliability*

The linkage between the values and functional-based interpretations of trust was often having trust in the promise that a public servant will do what they said they would do. This, of course, is fundamental to keeping promises (see Chapters 5.5 and 6.5)

Reliable is more being there when they say they will be there, doing what they said they were going to do, calling you back when they say they will call you back. (North Shore, Asian, female)

Trust was also something that took time to build and had to be earned.

It's something that builds, it takes time. It is almost a life time thing especially with public service. (Dunedin, general public, male)

It can be harder to establish trust for those migrants who are less familiar with New Zealand and feel vulnerable.

It is pretty hard for immigrants, I am not sure about some of our seniors who have been here for 20 years, but if you haven't been here for more than 10 years it is pretty hard for you to truly count on something. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

■ Trusted services

Not all public services are trusted to the same extent. The most trusted services are the emergency services.

When you use the word reliability with regards to the ambulance or fire you certainly want to trust the 111 system. Those are the things that you trust if that service is reliable they will turn up. (Manukau, general public, male)

Although there have been high profile adverse media stories about some officers, the Police were nevertheless a highly trusted organisation. There was also a difference between the trust staff at some organisations were held in and the responsibilities they had.

Well I trust the military. [Why is it you trust the military, what is it about the military?] They have got honour. The Police are a bit further down. I think they have ethos about them that is different from say a rubber-stamper in births, deaths and marriages. [And what is that ethos?] Discipline. (Dunedin, general public, male)

From some comments, it was clear that building trust required reciprocity, that is, the public service provider needs to show it trusted its clients.

Because they don't trust their clients, they are really suspicious, there is that sense that people are just trying to do them over so they deliberately make it hard for the client. (Dunedin, general public, male)

■ Improving trust

Respondents in the groups were asked to work together in pairs to develop ways that the Public Service could use to improve trust. A strong and common theme across all groups was the need to be more open and accountable through guidelines and codes of practice as well as providers of good services.

For these places or institutions to be more open. More transparency, solid guidelines of codes of practice say for instance. (Manukau, general public, male)

We had a lot of the other things like openness, well trained, knowledgeable people, a human being to answer the phone. (Manukau, general public, female)

There was also a desire for more and better trained front-line staff to improve service delivery, a point that has been made on several occasions as important to improve satisfaction in public services.

Reallocation of some of the resources so they are actually put in the people on the ground who are providing the service rather than money being swallowed up by administration. (Dunedin, Māori, male)

Greater accountability in terms of objectively reporting on performance and improving performance were other ways of building trust as well as obtaining feedback from the public.

We were thinking more facts and figures we said if we called the fire brigade we expect they are going to come and they need to maybe not waste more rate payers money in leaflets telling us what they are supposed to be doing but publish their figures that we do arrive within 3 minutes or whatever. (Oamaru, general public, female)

Feedback from public and act on it. (North Shore, Asian, female)

■ Standards of integrity and conduct - Unprompted

There was limited awareness of whether standards of conduct existed for the Public Service.

[Okay, are you aware that there was a set of standards for public service to follow?]
No. (Dunedin, Māori, female)

Well if we don't know it exists, I have no faith that they know it exists, and you certainly have had many experiences that there's no way that they comply with this. (Dunedin, Māori, female)

Those who said they were aware had little knowledge of its contents.

I have seen codes of ethics or something, but I am not sure if the code of ethics is to do with the Public Service requirements. I don't remember actually. (North Shore, Asian, male)

There probably is - they have just been forgotten about for a while. (Dunedin, general public, female)

However, there was a common theme that if one existed it was not well known to public servants and certainly did not appear to be implemented.

I'm aware there is one, but I don't think they get given it. (Dunedin, Māori, female)

I would far rather someone had five guidelines than 25, five that they actually adhered to rather than 25 that just get ignored. (Manukau, general public, female)

If one key staff member resigns, who was probably the one who knew about them, and the next person may not even know they are tucked away in a file somewhere. (Dunedin, general public, female)

■ Standards of integrity and conduct - Prompted

When the standards of integrity and conduct for public servants was distributed to respondents, some expressed surprise at its contents.

Surprise, I never thought that anything like this existed. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

Some regarded it with cynicism.

This is a bunch of clichés, totally, a bunch of clichés, it doesn't mean anything. (Dunedin, general public, male)

It is just a piece of paper, it doesn't mean that they are going to do this. (Oamaru, general public, female)

Some had seen similar codes in hospitals advising of patients' rights and had found them reassuring.

The hospital now has all those on the walls. With the exception of that we have found them really good, it's having them there, it's a visual and they are everywhere so you can't miss it. (Manukau, general public, female)

It makes me think of those things in hospitals you know it says you have your rights and they are very well displayed. [Are those things important those signs in hospitals?] Absolutely. (Oamaru, general public, female)

What respondents wanted to see was the words translated into action.

If they turned around and did everything that was said on that piece of paper. Then a lot of people would have more trust in the service that they are supposed to get. (Dunedin, general public, female)

[But is it useful to have this?] It depends where it is, on a wall it does nothing, if it's in somebody's head then it is very effective. (Manukau, general public, male)

This has wonderful words in it and it has probably a set of guidelines and behavioural standards that we would aspire to and we would hope that the Public Service aspires to. But has something like this stopped for example the ongoing solace within the immigration department which is a joke to put it mildly. This talks about trustworthiness, integrity, everything like that, that is not being displayed time and again. It is not one incident it is repetitive. (Dunedin, general public, male)

And in terms of action that meant some ability to complain if the standards were not upheld, a point that some respondents noted was missing from the sheet that was distributed.

But there's also the thing that if everyone did know this, it still doesn't really tell you who you complain to and what would happen, what would the outcome be? (Dunedin, Māori, male)

■ Standards of integrity and conduct - Accountability

Despite some initial cynicism about the standards, it was seen as a way of holding public servants to account.

I think you can actually come back to them and say I don't think you are actually fulfilling your promise, I don't think you are actually doing what you say you do do. (Oamaru, general public, female)

Respondents wanted to see the standards made more visible because it was felt this would improve public servants' performance and make them more accountable to the public in terms of doing what the Public Service says it will do.

It's also something that they perhaps need even if you are dealing with them over the phone. On the wall of their cubicle or whatever, this is how we should treat people. We need to treat them fair. (Manukau, general public, female)

And the idea of an official complaints process, which emerged unprompted, received support.

Like on TV like what they do for the Broadcasting Standards Authority. You see this every now and then don't you. (Dunedin, Māori, female)

And if the standards were effectively implemented there was no doubt some felt that it would improve trust in the Public Service.

If this sets your expectations I mean if this is what I can expect from this service and then if you receive that then that would be trust. (Oamaru, general public, male)

■ High profile breaches of trust

High profile breaches of conduct by senior public servants are a key concern and damage trust in the Public Service. This point was also made in Chapter 6.3 in the discussion on the Public Service admitting to making mistakes.

It makes the whole system look bad even if it is just one individual person. It really makes a bad impression of the whole system, the whole service, the whole department. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

Your trust does drop off when you see something like that you think man that policeman shouldn't have been doing that because he swore an oath that he wouldn't do anything like that. But it does give you confidence that people who don't abide by the rules do get kicked out. (Oamaru, general public, male)

The media was acknowledged as quite influential over perceptions of trust in the way it presented high profile breaches of standards.

It takes time and also what the media does makes a difference. What they put in the papers, what they put on the TV has to be pretty balanced. [Does it influence the way you think about the Public Service at the moment the media?] Media always affects your way of thinking or your opinion. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

The balance of opinion among respondents was that media reports of serious breaches of conduct by senior public servants were indicative of other problems in the Public Service.

Tip of the iceberg because even in private companies, all of us have probably been in a company where something has happened and someone has done something wrong and while that person may be removed you still know that underneath there are about five or six people that aren't going to get any retribution or punishment. (Manukau, general public, female)

I think it's the tip of the iceberg because it seems to take so long. It takes years before they uncover it. And it is so well buried and there is so much covering, I will cover your back you cover mine. It is like the old boys' network. (Dunedin, general public, female)

I think it shows that certain parts of the system are working in that it is actually being identified but when it happens time and gain it shows that the underlying causes are not being dealt with. (Dunedin, general public, male)

Concerns are greater when some of these instances have taken some time to be made public, a point also brought out in the discussions the Public Service admitting responsibility for making mistakes (see Chapter 6.3).

It makes you quite paranoid what else has been going on I don't know about. (Dunedin, general public, female)

If the system was really working it would be uncovered say within a month or even less. When you hear about the latest immigration boss and then you hear that somebody actually knew about this when it happened a couple of years ago you start wondering what was the reason it wasn't actually taken any further (Dunedin, general public, male)

There was a desire for immediate action to be taken when high level breaches occurred.

I think another thing is there doesn't seem to be a high level of accountability. You hear on the news that something goes wrong and we are going to go and do a review and a year later here is the review, this is what we suggest you do but then the suggestions might not have to come into effect for another year or something. So from the time the issue has occurred to the time the issue is resolved it has been two years. So what does that do for us as the public thinking this is what is wrong but you are not fixing it straight away. (North Shore, Asian, female)

Some respondents accepted that breaches of the code would occur.

There are no laws or rules are perfect, there will always be someone getting caught, always someone breaking the law. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

■ Blurring of Public Service and political

It was evident from some comments made by respondents that there was some blurring of perceptions of the Public Service and politicians. Distrust of the latter could influence the level of trust attached to the former and this was an issue for new migrants.

In recent times one of the MPs said a few statements against Chinese and Asian immigrants and what happened, nothing they are still there in Parliament. No action has been taken. They deliver a couple of apologies on the news by the Prime Minister and that is it. No action has been taken so it makes no sense. (Lower Hutt, Asian, male)

■ International comparisons

Although respondents fell short of saying they trusted the Public Service, international comparisons were made that showed New Zealand's Public Service was a lot more trusted than many others respondents had experienced elsewhere.

From where I came to compare it New Zealand is better than my country. Less corruption, there is a lot of corruption. [But you don't think there is much corruption in New Zealand?] Services when you pay your taxes you see your roads no potholes, every month they check the roads. Philippines when you pay your taxes you don't get your roads done there. So basically from that it is good. (North Shore, Asian, male)

Honestly speaking there is no comparison. New Zealand is 200% better. [Than South Africa?] Yes. [In terms of trustworthiness you mean?] Yes. (North Shore, Asian, female)

To be honest with you I think one thing the Public Service is not is corrupt. There has been instances of individuals, I have worked in Jakarta and these guys are like squeaky clean. [So international comparisons.] The New Zealand public service for all its faults and the whinging they have done is in that regard pretty clean I feel. (Dunedin, general public, male)

7. General Public

7.1 Focus group locations

Thirteen focus groups were conducted with the general public drawn from the following locations:

- 1 x Far North (Kaitaia)
- 2 x North Shore
- 2x Manukau City
- 2x Hamilton
- 2 x Lower Hutt
- 1 x Dunedin
- 2 x Waitaki (Oamaru)
- 1 x Clutha (Balclutha).

All the satisfaction drivers were tested among the general public, namely:

- *The Service Experience Met Your Expectations.*
- *Staff Were Competent.*
- *Your Individual Circumstances Were Taken Into Account.*
- *You Were Treated Fairly.*
- *Staff Kept Their Promises – That is, They Did What They Said They Would Do.*
- *It's An Example of Good Value for Tax Dollars Spent.*

And all of the trust drivers were tested also, namely:

- *The Public Service Provides Services That Meet Your Needs.*
- *Public Servants Treat People Fairly.*
- *The Public Service Provides You With All the Information You Need.*
- *You Have Confidence Public Servants Do a Good Job.*
- *The Public Service Admits Responsibility When It Makes Mistakes.*
- *General Trust (not a driver, but discussed).*

The trust driver *The Public Service Admits Responsibility When It Makes Mistakes* was discussed only in the general public focus groups. This is because it was not a driver for other population groups.

The following chapters focus on the unique issues related to each population group. As this chapter is largely reflective of the earlier satisfaction driver chapters and trust driver sections, discussion in this chapter is brief and focuses on the main points only.

7.2 Key points

The following key points summarise essential traits of the drivers:

- The essential elements of a good service experience are to be listened to and understood by staff who know about the services their organisation offers and will follow through to find a solution. Over and above that, empathy, taking into account individual circumstances, clearly communicating information, politeness, respect and efficiency all add to the service experience.
- Competent staff are ones that deliver on those expectations. Confidence in public servants to do a good job is very much dependent upon the ability of staff to deliver on those expectations.
- Flexibility and discretion as well as knowledge, empathy and understanding are critical to taking into account individual circumstances. The most important circumstances to take into account are those with disabilities and income, social or household difficulties, particularly where children are involved.
- Being treated fairly is generally understood as treating according to needs, but also covers providing quality services, being non-judgmental and following due process. Little separates the companion satisfaction and trust drivers.
- Keeping promises is very much a question of follow through to do what one said one would do. Broken promises easily damage trust in public services. There is little to distinguish the companion satisfaction and trust drivers.
- Value for tax dollars spent is associated with core services like education, health and policing as well as to good, individual service experiences. Expectations are high for both private and public services where a direct payment is made. There is strong support for value for tax dollars spent to be demonstrated either through publicity about what departments do or publicly available financial data showing where tax dollars are spent. Respondents felt that increased investment to front-line services, as opposed to administrators, would also help.
- In terms of meeting 'your needs', the key ones the Public Service must meet are core services like education, health and policing and on an individual basis they are the service expectations outlined in the first bullet point above.
- There is a reasonable level of cynicism directed at the suggestion that public servants admit responsibility when they make mistakes. Admission is seen as somewhat begrudging, but an apology and an explanation are expected when mistakes do occur.
- Trust in the Public Service has a lot to do with being able to rely on public servants to do a job properly and with integrity. High profile incidents of misconduct undermines trust and leads to the view that there may be more that has not been brought to light. Greater openness and accountability to fully implemented standards of integrity and conduct may raise trust in public services.

7.3 The service experience met your expectations

This driver was discussed in two urban groups, North Shore and Dunedin, and three rural groups in the Far North (Kaitaia), Clutha (Balclutha) and Waitaki (Oamaru).

These groups expressed a wide range of expectations linked to the service experience. The most important of these are to be listened to, understood and to have contact with staff who have knowledge and the ability to follow through in order to achieve a result. Achievement of a solution can help mitigate failures to deliver on expectations in other areas.

If you have been mucked around to start with and someone comes along and sorts it for you then you feel okay. (Kaitaia, general public, female)

However, the importance of focusing on managing the process well for the public remains. Even if the desired outcome is achieved, the failure to meet expectations in other aspects of service may still mar the experience.

You can still perhaps get the outcome you were searching before but if a lot of these things aren't there you just probably feel negative about it. [So positive outcome being critical there?] But if it wasn't a pleasant experience getting there then you still end up resenting the whole process. (Dunedin, general public, female)

Other expectations include having a customer focus. These include the desire to be treated politely, respectfully and even for some with friendliness. Efficient service is also expected which covers promptness as well as an expectation to have matters dealt with in the minimum number of interactions, preferably a single one and the absence of errors.

Individual circumstances are also expected to be taken into account. These are seldom straightforward transactional interactions, but ones where some flexibility or discretion is expected. Respondents often spoke of being treated as an individual, not as a number.

Other expectations that link to having an individual focus are the need to show empathy, to treat people fairly and to ensure they understand what to do when dealing with public services.

I expect to be treated fairly. [What do you mean by that?] ... I don't want to be treated like I'm a criminal or an idiot. (North Shore, general public, female)

Helping you to understand the process. (Dunedin, general public, male)

Expectations of public services are generally slightly above average, not high, and expectations of private services are higher than for public services. This is largely explained by the existence of choice and competition in the private sector driving service levels higher. In addition, people tended to expect more from services that they had paid for. To raise expectations, respondents say more resources need to be put into front-line staff and their training.

Face-to-face contact is the most preferred channel, particularly for those who have more complex needs to be met because there is much higher trust that issues will be listened to, understood and addressed. Those in rural-provincial areas say that face-to-face is often not an option for them.

The phone channel is the one that attracts the most criticism. The most common criticisms of the phone are automatic voice systems, delays in waiting to talk to a real person, lack of continuity because of the need to repeat matters from the beginning with each new phone contact and failure to follow through effectively, such as, being passed from one person to another who is unable to assist.

Internet is regarded as an efficient channel and like mail has the ability to document transactions. Neither Internet nor mail have the ability to provide the level of interaction that is sometimes required to address complex issues.

7.4 Staff were competent

This driver was discussed in two urban groups, North Shore and Hamilton, and one rural-provincial group in the Far North (Kaitaia).

As noted in Chapter 5.2 and earlier, staff who are competent are those who meet expectations, so there is considerable over-lap between this and the previous section. To avoid repetition, the core expectation of competent staff is that they are helpful and helpful staff are those who listen, understand and are knowledgeable, capable and solutions focussed. Competent people do not necessarily need to have the knowledge to deal with someone's issues themselves, but they are knowledgeable enough to know who can assist and will follow through to ensure a connection with that person is made.

Important traits for competent staff to have include the ability to communicate and explain things that customers do not understand. It also includes treating people fairly.

It's them finding out what my issues are, or finding out the information, and if they don't know they'll go and find out. (North Shore, general public, female)

Respondents often associated confidence with competent staff and those who were polite and courteous. Correct spelling and grammar were indicators of competence in written communication channels.

7.5 Your individual circumstances were taken into account

This driver was discussed in three urban groups in Manukau City, Hamilton and Lower Hutt.

The need for people to be listened to is a critical first behaviour that respondents expect to encounter in order to deliver satisfaction with this driver. And in order to take individual circumstances into account it often requires the exercise of some discretion or flexibility.

Any rule has got a certain amount of wriggle in it, no two situations are exactly the same. (Hamilton, general public, male)

A general rule of thumb to satisfy people is to treat people the same way in similar circumstances.

Respondents expect an explanation when circumstances cannot be taken into account or where a desired outcome cannot be achieved. One important circumstance that respondents felt was important for public servants to take into account was lack of understanding about how to deal with public services and its procedures.

I want an explanation, a full and detailed explanation as to why it is you cannot have what it is you were told you should be able to get or what you expected to get. (Manukau, general public, female)

Knowledge, the public hasn't got the same knowledge that is one of the most important things that they should take into account. (Manukau, general public, male)

However, there are some respondents who believe the same rules should apply to everyone regardless.

The most important circumstances that respondents expect to have taken into account include physical or mental disabilities, emotional wellbeing, household circumstances particularly where children are involved, and financial circumstances.

7.6 You were treated fairly/Public servants treat people fairly

These drivers were discussed in five groups from the Far North (Kaitaia), North Shore City, Manukau City, Hamilton and Lower Hutt. The companion satisfaction and trust drivers are dealt with together here in light of the over-lap between the two. Both drivers are covered in detail in Chapters 5.4 and 6.4.

Of the different interpretations of 'fair treatment', the ones general public groups focussed on were fair treatment relative to other people, the quality of the service received and fairness in terms of a just outcome.

Although the spontaneous response for some was that fair treatment meant equal treatment or the same treatment for all, respondents recognised that not everyone's circumstances were the same, so fair treatment necessitated treating people according to their needs or providing flexibility in certain circumstances.

Even so, there were some respondents who said people had to be treated the same.

My personal view is they should treat everybody the same and whether the rules that they have are fair are a whole different issues. And if you go down the track of dealing with everybody in their circumstance then that can be a very slippery slope where you have rules for some and rules for others. (Hamilton, general public, male)

Poor quality service or inconsistent service quality were other examples of unfair treatment. A respondent gave an example of a year-long delay in receiving the correct medical treatment for his daughter. An example to illustrate inconsistent service quality was the disparity of resources available for autistic children below the age of five and once they had entered the primary school system.

I work in early childhood and if we see a child who is within the autistic spectrum we try and get as much help pumped into them while they are in early childhood because it is so much easier to access. Once they hit school it disappears and you are fighting tooth and nail to get help for that child whose needs haven't changed, probably increased but that help that is available is just not there. (Manukau, general public, female)

Fair treatment also related to just processes. One respondent spoke of how she had been treated fairly by a process which saw a Court order award her a payment. Other respondents described the importance of fairness in terms of being listened to and receiving an explanation even though the result was not what they wanted.

Where unfair treatment occurs, some respondents will make allowances for individual public servants and blame the 'system' which they may mean rules and regulations or lack of resources to do the job properly. There is considerable overlap between the companion satisfaction and trust drivers.

There is a presumption that people are treated fairly most of the time.

To be honest I don't really think about it, when you are dealing with WINZ or IRD or getting a passport or something like that I mean you hope they apply the rules the same to everybody. (Hamilton, general public, male)

7.7 Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do/the Public Service keeps its promises - that is, it does what it says it will do

These drivers were discussed in three groups from North Shore City, Dunedin and Waitaki (Oamaru). The companion satisfaction and trust drivers are dealt with together here in light of the over-lap between the two which are covered in Chapters 5.5 and 6.5.

When asked what 'keeping a promise meant', most respondents explained it in terms of doing what one said one would do.

A 'promise' also conveyed integrity which distinguished it from merely an intention to do something. As a result though, broken promises easily destroy trust. Indeed, as noted earlier in this report, failure to deliver on this driver is one of the strongest destroyers of trust.

A promise to me is somebody saying they are going to do something with a degree of integrity and professionalism otherwise it is simply a platitude to put off for today something they might get around to doing tomorrow. (Oamaru, general public, male)

This meant that the service expectations of follow through and accountability have special significance in terms of delivering on this driver. And if promises are broken there is an expectation of an apology and an explanation.

There was a significant over-lap in understanding of these companion satisfaction and trust drivers. Respondents did not articulate a difference between the two. In discussion of the satisfaction driver, some respondents gave examples of personal experiences.

[Any particular example that comes to mind?] *Just home renovations when I was trying to get building permits and things like that they promise to ring you back and you are going to have it by such and such, promise you will have it by that date, I will ring you back and let you know what is happening, yeah sure.* (Dunedin, general public, female)

However, when asked whether the Public Service keeps its promises (the trust driver) respondents clearly had the perception that it did not, but this was not based on any personal experience of their own.

[Do you think the public service keeps its promises?] *No, but I don't have any concrete examples. It's just a feeling that you get.* (Auckland, North Shore, general public, female)

I don't have a specific example, it's more just a perception. (Auckland, North Shore, general public, male)

The least trustworthy channel is the phone. Written communications are regarded as the most reliable channel because public servants can be held directly to account for any documented promises. Face-to-face contact is trusted more than the phone which is the least trusted channel.

7.8 It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent

This driver was discussed in five groups from North Shore City, Hamilton, Dunedin, Clutha (Balclutha) and Waitaki (Oamaru).

Respondents predominantly cite core public services – education, health, Police and emergency services – as examples of good value for tax dollars spent. This is largely because they are seen as “free”, essential and available to everyone to access. These services are also regarded as under-funded and under-resourced and involve staff in tough jobs, thus reinforcing the sense of value they provide.

Respondents also identify as examples of good value for tax dollars spent instances where they have personally experienced their service expectations being met, often comprehensively met.

ACC are good value for money [Why is that?] They offer a prompt and efficient service...They put a name to a person, you get a case manager, they have good systems, they have good phone systems and you can contact the person, that is your only contact. (Balclutha, general public, male)

Most respondents assume that private equivalent services will provide better service which generally leads them to infer that it will be better value, though a few question that inference. The presumption is that if people are prepared to pay there must be better value or why else would they do so. Indeed, while it was conceded that medical treatment might be the same in public and private hospitals, respondents placed a huge value on the ability to avoid waiting for treatment. Thus, the value of time in accessing treatment was valued far more highly than other aspects of service.

There was also a tendency to expect more value from public services when a fee was paid than when no fee applied such as when the service was provided out of general taxation.

Respondents found it difficult to assess the value of advisors and administrators and placed more value on front-line staff largely because the latter's work was visible or tangible and to some degree assessable and because the former were seen to be relatively over-paid.

A common suggestion for demonstrating value for tax dollars spent was to provide financial data so people could evaluate the value of spending or by improving service experiences some doubt was cast over whether people would bother to read the data. The use of television programmes about public service agencies had been a useful way of enabling people to understand the extent of what they did and the value of the services they provided. Others simply interpreted good value for tax dollars spent as receiving the quality of service that met their expectations.

If you go somewhere and you get the service that you want, the results that you want in a quick then aren't you getting good value for your tax dollar. (Hamilton, general public, female)

7.9 You have confidence that public servants do a good job

This driver was discussed in two groups from North Shore City, and in one group from Manukau City, Clutha (Balclutha) and Waitaki (Oamaru).

There was a strong linkage between this trust driver and the satisfaction driver *Staff Were Competent* because competent staff met service expectations and meeting expectations related directly to having trust in whether public servants do a good job. Consequently, many of the attributes associated with staff competency also emerged in discussion of this driver. Thus, public servants engendered confidence most importantly when they were able to listen, understand and be knowledgeable as well as committed to follow through to meet people's needs.

These attributes were further reinforced when respondents were asked to do a projective exercise where they wrote down what the ideal public servant would be saying, thinking and doing if they were doing a good job. There was a high degree of consistency across groups with many respondents describing the public servant as thinking how they can help, doing their best to help and deriving a feeling of self-satisfaction from helping to their best.

I'm thinking "let's work together, I want to get a good result". That would be like my ideal public servant really, somebody who's in that mind frame, "hey I'm actually here to help, I really am interested in this person on the outside and I want to get a good result. (North Shore, general public, male)

Confidence was established when other expectations such as promptness, empathy, politeness and the ability to explain processes and requirements to people were in evidence.

7.10 The Public Service provides services that meet your needs

This driver was discussed in one group from Manukau City and Hamilton and in two groups in Lower Hutt and Waitaki (Oamaru).

The Public Service lacked credibility with some respondents when measured against this driver. Some wanted to heavily qualify this statement and said it applied to some departments, but not others.

I would say 'sometimes' meets your needs and add 'at a cost' at the end. (Lower Hutt, general public, male)

Needs were classified by respondents as either universal ones that society as a whole needed or individual needs. In the case of universal needs, the most important needs were identified as emergency services as well as core services such as education, health and security and essential infrastructure.

Individual needs drew suggestions that identified many basic service expectations, such as: to be listened to, to have things explained, to be treated fairly, to have approachable, knowledgeable and competent staff and to be able to obtain a satisfactory outcome.

In general, respondents said they thought of 'your needs' in the driver as more than their own personal needs.

7.11 The Public Service admits responsibility when it makes mistakes

This driver was discussed in three groups from Manukau City, Hamilton and Lower Hutt.

Respondents understand this driver to mean that public servants should pro-actively admit to a mistake, apologise for it and explain what has been done to prevent a recurrence. Thus, the expectation of accountability was particularly high.

I had being accountable and I guess that includes making an apology where it's needed and fixing the problem. (Hamilton, general public, male)

Respondents were somewhat divided in how they related to the driver. Some identified it with high profile mistakes that had attracted media attention. These were seen to have been made public due to the media and there was concern that the time lapse between actual events occurring and coming to public attention was indicative of public servants covering up.

Others related it to their own experiences where an apology and an explanation had helped to address their concerns.

I had the same thing with [name deleted] same kind of thing and they admitted they were wrong and I actually felt better. (Manukau, general public, female)

There was a general perception that public servants did not admit to their mistakes readily.

7.12 General trust

This was discussed in four groups from Manukau City, Lower Hutt, Dunedin, and Waitaki (Oamaru).

The main meanings respondents ascribed to 'trust' were integrity and reliability and underlying both was an association with ethical behaviour. For a few respondents trust also means 'confidentiality'. Reliability and dependability were somewhat interchangeable and referred to keeping one's word by doing what one said one was going to do.

Trust is not something that is easily acquired.

It's something that builds, it takes time. It is almost a life time thing especially with public service. (Dunedin, general public, male)

Those public services that are trusted most are emergency services, police and hospitals because of their commitment to help regardless of the circumstances. Most respondents think that in order to increase trust in other public services they will need to be more open, transparent and accountable. This is consistent with support in the groups for the public to be aware of the standards of integrity and conduct for public servants and for there to be a means to hold public servants accountable for implementing. At present, respondents suspect the standards are little more than words on paper.

High profile media stories of breaches of conduct do tend to lead respondents to believe that they are not isolated cases. Some respondents stated that if managers were acting inappropriately it made them think there was more out of place at levels below management. Even so, this did not mean that respondents had a high degree of distrust of public services. Indeed, there was a reasonable level of trust for rank and file public servants.

I trust the workers not the people at the top. (Lower Hutt, general public, female)

8. Māori

8.1 Focus group locations

Nine focus groups were with Māori drawn from the following locations:

- 3 x Far North (2 x Kaitaia and 1 x Kaikohe)
- 2 x Manukau City
- 2 x Hamilton
- 1 x Lower Hutt
- 1 x Dunedin.

The trust driver *The Public Service Provides You With All the Information You Need* was discussed only in the Māori focus groups and is covered in detail in this chapter. This is because it was not a driver for other population groups. For all other drivers (see below) only points unique or important to Māori are covered.

The drivers tested among Māori were the following satisfaction drivers:

- *Staff Were Competent.*
- *Your Individual Circumstances Were Taken Into Account.*
- *You Were Treated Fairly.*
- *Staff Kept Their Promises – That is, They Did What They Said They Would Do.*
- *It's An Example of Good Value for Tax Dollars Spent.*

and the following trust drivers:

- *The Public Service Provides Services That Meet Your Needs.*
- *Public Servants Treat People Fairly.*
- *The Public Service Provides You With All the Information You Need.*
- *You Have Confidence Public Servants Do a Good Job.*
- *General Trust* (not a driver, but discussed).

8.2 Key points

8.2.1 Unique themes

The Māori groups shared many of the same perceptions of drivers as other groups. The key differences with the general public groups are highlighted in this section. Expectations that were either unique or more strongly articulated in the Māori groups than the general public groups were:

- Past injustices committed since the signing of The Treaty of Waitangi have an influence on Māori perceptions of being treated fairly. The degree to which the Crown through the government and public services have made right these wrongs influences perceptions of fair treatment.
- There are perceptions, though not widespread, of discrimination on the basis of race and income.
- The concept of *whakama* emerged whereby some Māori may be too ashamed to access services they need or to admit they do not understand all the information when engaging with a public service.
- Māori groups appeared to place a stronger emphasis on honour and integrity when using the word 'promise' suggesting it should not be used unless it is a pledge that will be kept.
- Māori groups also seemed to place more emphasis on competent staff being those who took individual circumstances into account.
- In terms of having information needs met, a driver specific to Māori, the main focus points were:
 - Māori do not feel they are provided with all the information they need
 - Some feel information about entitlements is deliberately withheld
 - While there is a need to pro-actively ensure Māori have all the information they need, care needs to be taken not to overload people with information
 - A multi-channel approach to information provision is needed

8.3 The Public Service provides information that meets your needs

This trust driver is specific to Māori and is covered in full in this section. Focus groups were held in the Far North (Kaitaia), Manukau, Hamilton and Dunedin.

■ Overview

Poor experiences of information not being provided, particularly with respect to entitlements, had a strong influence on perceptions.

There is a desire for public service organisations to be more pro-active with the provision of information which importantly includes information about how processes work. There may also be a need to pro-actively find out the kind of information that people feel they need than to assume what their information needs are. Public servants need to be aware that some Māori may not admit that they do not understand all the information they have been provided. There is therefore an onus on public servants to provide simple and easily understood communications.

Trust is likely to be improved with knowledgeable and understanding front-line staff who are effective communicators and are prepared to proactively ensure people understand the information they need. Special assistance is required for those who have reading problems.

■ Key themes

➤ Counter to actual experience

There was initial cynicism expressed when this driver was presented to respondents as it did not match their actual experiences.

My first thought is disbelief because I don't believe that dealing with public servants they always have to check with somebody, there should be just someone who you can go to and ask and they should be able to tell you. [So you are saying disbelief?] That if you go to one person they are going to be able to supply you with the information you need. There is no way they are not going to pass the buck to somebody else. (Manukau, Māori, female)

I can't have the sense that they are providing the information that we need. (Hamilton, Māori, male)

An important point was made by one respondent that the problematic areas appeared to be confined to a small number of departments.

It's probably though we're focusing a bit in each one of those organisations we are adversely speaking about. It's not all of them and when you look at that list up there we're probably only talking about three there and you tend to focus on the things that aren't working rather than the things that are. There's lots of them there that are or there's the only very few that – [There's lots of those public services that should be fine. (Interjection.)] (Dunedin, Māori, female)

➤ Information deliberately withheld

The experience of one department had a strong influence on opinions and the impressions given here were similar to ones expressed in many other groups, namely, that there was a policy of not informing people of their full entitlements.

They don't tell you [I totally agree they should and it should be easily available but it's not. (Interjection.)] Be lovely if you were given all the information you needed. (Dunedin, Māori, male)

The rationale for why the Public Service would withhold information was seen largely as an expenditure-saving strategy.

➤ Barriers to access

Cost can be a barrier to access information where fees apply. This made some respondents qualify the word 'provides' in the driver.

They could provide you with that information but they might charge you for that information. (Manukau, Māori, female)

The apparent complexity of processes can also act as a barrier.

To try and get info off the [Department] website if you don't know where you are going and it is like all these millions of forms and downloading this and that. (Manukau, Māori, female)

➤ **Pro-activity**

Respondents interpreted the driver as implying an onus on the Public Service to anticipate what information the public might need.

They provide information whether you need it or not, it comes in a particular form but I am unaware of whatever process they might have to determine exactly what your need for information is. (Hamilton, Māori, male)

One respondent emphasised that information was often required to provide solutions for people.

Information to me means answers. That is what information means to me. (Manukau, Māori, female)

➤ **Information provided**

Information that was wanted included full information on entitlements as well as the rationale for decisions including fees that people are required to pay. As was the case in some of the Asian groups, there was also a desire for public servants to provide information on the range of options available to people and to understand what is available.

So therefore in saying that if they had given you all the information she would have been able to make different choices because then the information is there. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

➤ **Simple, effective communications**

Some respondents complained that at times too much information was provided and if that occurred people needed to be told which parts were relevant to them and their circumstances.

If you are just after one thing and you have got a pile like sometimes they give you they should be able to say this is where it is and this is how to find it. (Manukau, Māori, female)

It was felt that sometimes the language used was too complex.

Having it in plain English. Not legal talk with clause this and clause that. (Manukau, Māori, male)

Computer-based information also needs to be simple and easy to access and not all people are computer literate.

All this information you have gone around a number of websites ... and it is easy to get very lost in it. It is not the most user-friendly and then you have got people who haven't got access to that sort of information mainly because they don't know where to find it. (Hamilton, Māori, male)

I am too old for the Internet. (Manukau, Māori, male)

Information also needs to be tailored for those who have difficulty reading.

People get confused and when they go into the agencies they are already confused before they begin. So how is a normal person meant to go and know all the knowledge. I am dyslexic the problem is it was designed for a certain type of creed and that was how it was made so a lot of people miss out. (Manukau, Māori, male)

➤ **Knowledge of the system**

For some, knowledge of how the 'system' worked was often the key to being able to access information. This suggested a need to provide information on how processes work.

There is also a group of people ... like myself at the moment who are trying to move from Point A to Point B and still trying to find out how it works. And they are not actually providing that information to get us to understand how it works and how we can actually progress smoothly. [So understanding how it works is part of that?] To an extent yes. (Hamilton, Māori, male)

➤ **Whakama**

In the Kaitaia group, the concept of *whakama*, which had been raised in other groups, emerged in the context of providing information. This is understood as the concept of being ashamed. In this context, some Māori were too embarrassed to admit to not understanding the information they had been provided.

The older Māori people. They will walk away if they can't understand people. They will just walk out the door without saying. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

In the Manukau group, the lack of confidence to obtain the right information showed a parallel to the Kaitaia group.

Yes my sister would just smile and say thank you and come home and go oh my God they didn't do this and I am like well why didn't you tell them and she is like oh no I didn't want to do that. ... I say to her let's go down and she is like nah I have already talked to them. (Manukau, Māori, female)

➤ **Improving information provision**

Respondents identified several ways to improve information provision from having knowledgeable, understanding, empathetic, culturally sensitive front-line staff and the provision of advocates for those who have difficulty understanding.

Advocates to work on behalf of people who are unable or unwilling to do that for themselves. Perhaps people who have had English as a second language or are illiterate or just don't feel confident about approaching an organisation. There are advocates around and advocacy organisations but only a certain number of people access those. (Dunedin, Māori, female)

There was also interest in better information exchange across government departments to improve the quality and efficiency of the information provided.

Improvements could also be made by monitoring the types of inquiries people make or by pro-actively finding out what information needs people have. Such information could be provided to front-line staff tailored through the most appropriate communication channels to ensure information needs are met.

8.4 Staff were competent

Discussions about this driver revealed no significant differences between Māori and general public groups. However, the Māori groups tended to emphasise more that competent staff could be relied upon and trusted to do a job and fully explain their entitlements to them.

8.5 Your individual circumstances were taken into account

What most distinguished Māori groups from the general public was the need to take into account Māori culture.

Your individual situation your background, culture. [What was important about culture?] Different cultures have different needs. Different levels of understanding, language. (Hamilton, Māori, male)

Within the cultural context the concept of *whakama* emerged. From the group discussions this was understood as a sense of shame which prevented some Māori from seeking or accepting help. This obviously has implications for ensuring those in need of public services receive what they are entitled to.

8.6 You were treated fairly

As noted in Chapter 5.4, fair treatment was open to different interpretations. Māori shared many of those interpretations, but what was unique for the Māori groups was the link between this driver and injustices under the Treaty of Waitangi.

You are talking about Māori people being treated fairly and since the Treaty we have felt victimised so that is just a joke really. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

I think a lot of it is because Māori or the ones I know say that they have got a right to be here whereas they are a minority. But they are the original inhabitants that have a certain status. (Kaikohe, Māori, male)

This was particularly significant in the context of public services treating people fairly.

There was also perceived unfairness due to discrimination on the basis of race which was shared with the Asian group in discussions on this driver.

Differences in income and ethnicity can also help to reinforce feelings of being discriminated against. Something as simple as someone's name can lead to different expectations and behaviour towards someone.

It is just past experiences that people have had and how they judge people. You even get judged on your name. My daughter's name is [a Maori name], so they are expecting this real staunch as Māori girl to come bolting in and then there is this little petite thing that comes bolting in and they go no we called out [this name] and she is going yeah that is me. And she says mum it makes me feel my name is Māori and I am proud of my name but it makes me feel like I don't deserve it. (Lower Hutt, Māori, female)

Stereotypical impressions can also lead to judgments being made that are unwarranted.

8.7 Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do

Although it was not universal among Māori respondents, the impression was given that 'a promise' was regarded as something stronger than a verbal commitment which was the tenor of views in the general public groups. There was a sense that an individual's personal integrity was at stake in keeping promises with words like 'honour' being used and with individual's saying that they use 'promise' quite selectively and carefully.

So when you promise somebody something there is no room for manoeuvre, there is your promise. If I was to promise somebody something then I would have to do it. (Lower Hutt, Māori, male)

8.8 It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent

There were strong similarities with the general public groups that core services were examples of good value for tax dollars spent. Those from the Manukau group found most difficulty in providing examples and other respondents more readily gave examples they had seen in the media of poor value for tax dollars spent.

8.9 The Public Service provides services that meet your needs

Again there were many similarities with the general public groups as core services featured among the most important needs. There did appear to be more emphasis placed on meeting the needs of those on low incomes among Māori respondents.

Māori community needs also emerged in one group when a respondent spoke about the need for grants to be available to upgrade marae facilities.

There was also more emphasis placed on providing information, particularly about entitlements, as one of the services that was needed.

There are a lot of benefits that people don't know about. (Kaikohe, Māori, female)

Another point of difference with the general public groups was that Māori almost unanimously interpreted 'your needs' as universal needs for everyone.

We all make up the public, individually we are not the public are we. It wouldn't be a public service for an individual we all have to participate. (Hamilton, Māori, male)

8.10 You have confidence public servants do a good job

There were little differences between Māori and general public groups' interpretations and experiences with respect to this driver. The most that could be said was that the Māori groups gave the impression of putting more emphasis on having staff take individual circumstances into account and on integrity.

In line with keeping promises they should be honest. (Hamilton, Māori, female)

8.11 General trust

General Trust was only discussed in the Dunedin Māori group. That group raised lack of consistent, reliable service which may be an indicator of distrust in public services for Māori.

You talk to one person one day and you get one answer and you ring back the next day and talk to someone else and you get exactly the opposite answer. (Dunedin, Māori, female)

The main ways the Māori group saw for improving trust were to provide more front-line staff and to provide people with the information they needed.

9. Asian

9.1 Focus group locations

Eight focus groups were undertaken with Asian participants drawn from the following locations:

- 3 x North Shore
- 2 x Manukau
- 1 x Hamilton
- 1 x Lower Hutt
- 1 x Dunedin.

These groups discussed the following satisfaction drivers:

- *The Service Experience Met Your Expectations.*
- *You Were Treated Fairly.*
- *Staff Were Competent.*
- *Staff Kept Their Promises – That Is, They Did What They Said They Would Do.*
- *It's an Example of Good Value for Tax Dollars Spent.*

and the following trust drivers:

- *You Have Confidence That Public Servants Do a Good Job.*
- *The Public Service Provides Services That Meet Your Needs.*
- *The Public Service Keeps Its Promises – That It Does What It Says It Will Do.*

9.2 Key points

9.2.1 Unique themes

The Asian groups shared many of the same perceptions of drivers as other groups. The key differences with the general public groups are highlighted in this section. It was clear that some Asian respondents, particularly some who had migrated to New Zealand, interpreted some drivers differently to other groups. Expectations that were more strongly articulated in the Asian than the general public groups were:

- Asian respondents tended to have a higher expectation of public services that are fast and efficient.
- Asian respondents interpreted staff competency differently to other groups, tending to view it as implying 'outstanding' as opposed to 'somewhat above average' service which was the interpretation given by other groups.

- Asian respondents are sensitive to being treated differently. There is a need for public servants to avoid appearing to be judgmental or discriminatory in their actions, particularly on the grounds of race.
- Satisfaction with public services is often based on international comparisons for those who have migrated. Often New Zealand public services compare favourably.
- There is a need to explain processes and be sensitive to those for whom English is a second language.
- Asian respondents rated the value of the New Zealand passport highly.

9.3 The service experience met your expectations

It appeared Asian respondents were more likely to expect and want public services to be fast and efficient. Actual experiences highlighted speed of service as a key issue in driving dissatisfaction among the Asian respondents.

You'll be more happy, faster rate, rather than waiting for a long time. (Manukau, Asian, male)

Asian respondents appeared to be more sensitive than other audiences to any perception that staff made pre-conceived judgements about them and in their case often due to their ethnic background. Some Asian respondents believed they received inconsistent service or service different from others because of their race.

Consistency. [Consistency?] This is my experience using the bus some bus drivers are nice, other bus drivers they say hi to everyone in front of you but I don't know if it is a racist thing. It could just be my experience but some of them are really rude. (Dunedin, Asian, male)

9.4 Staff were competent

There was some evidence that Asian respondents interpreted this driver differently to other groups. Competency was more likely to be viewed as outstanding which was quite different than across most audiences.

I think a competent person would be outstanding because not everyone can deliver any kind of service to the best of their ability because in New Zealand we have all kinds of cultures coming together and in order to get satisfaction from it you must be able to gain that kind of knowledge and the skill that comes with the job satisfaction. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

I think outstanding because everyone who does a job feels above average so to be competent obviously you have to be outstanding. (Hamilton, Asian, male)

Being culturally sensitive was an expectation raised by Asian respondents as a criteria for being viewed as competent.

Flexible what I mean by that is they have got access to any situation so they would understand about ethnicity, they would understand each and every ethnicity equal.
(Hamilton, Asian, male)

Asian respondents were also more sensitive to any sense that staff made pre-conceived judgements and treated customers differently as a result.

Again with the public services, again sometimes people prejudge you by your looks and whether to give you something that is written in law or to – they don't declare to you what your rights are. Don't pre-judge. (Manukau, Asian, male)

9.5 Your individual circumstances were taken into account

Discrimination also arose in discussion of this driver. Asian respondents felt they were treated poorly due to their ethnic background and some felt that public services needed to be conscious of a person's background and take this into account when dealing with them.

9.6 You were treated fairly

While discrimination was raised by most population groups in reference to being treated fairly, Asian respondents were more intensely vocal on the issue. Asian respondents were also more likely to provide examples where they felt they were treated differently or were discriminated against by the Public Service on the basis of their ethnicity.

Reinforcing this view, some New Zealand born Asian respondents felt that unfair treatment was evident when they fronted up in person, but they were treated fairly when accessing services over the phone, by mail or Internet where it was not obvious they were of Asian descent.

A few respondents felt that public services had improved on this basis with an increasingly diverse population living in New Zealand.

[In what way has it got better?] Well, with more migration of people here, they're more used to – more interaction with other cultures and then obviously a new generation gets into the workforce as well. (Manukau, Asian, male)

Some felt that being treated fairly meant that no assumptions would be made about a person which would impact on the level of service they received.

To treat people fairly, most Asian respondents felt that public services should be more aware of how to deal sensitively with those from different ethnic backgrounds. This might include speaking slower, showing more patience and taking care to explain things.

But where we all come from some of us have different accents, different knowledge and like I work with different girls at work, some are Chinese and Japanese and they have an accent and lots of Kiwi girls are impatient with the way they speak. And they say can you speak up I don't understand you and they do it very rudely. If they treated with that individuality or give them some consideration for their accent they have then eventually they will be treated fairly. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

However, a small number of respondents were sensitive to any perceived differences in treatment due to their ethnic background.

9.7 Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do/the Public Service keeps its promises – that is, it does what it says it will do

There was little difference between the Asian groups and the general public groups in discussion of these drivers with a strong over-lap between them. Asian respondents carried a strong expectation of fulfilment.

When you go to the Post Office you expect them to help you with everything and the staff do that, so the Public Service and the staff, they're both keeping their promises. In case I go there for my car registration and they say "no we can't do it", that would be where they break a promise because I expect the Post Office to do it. It's listed in their responsibilities and since they do it, they're keeping their promise. (Manukau, Asian, female)

9.8 It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent

Asian respondents were sometimes more likely to see services as good value when comparing the same service in their country of origin.

Overall, compared to other places and other countries, I think health is better value for money here. (Manukau, Asian, female)

A number of Asian respondents felt that New Zealand passports were good value as they were accepted worldwide and were of high quality. The passport was rated more highly by the Asian groups than the general public and Māori groups, but about as highly as the Pacific People groups.

Passports, yes good value for money. We have world class passports. [They can take you anywhere in the world. (Interjection.)] They will take you anywhere in the world and they've got some security measures. It's one of the hardest to forge, the New Zealand passport. (Manukau, Asian, male)

9.9 You have confidence public servants do a good job

Experiences of discrimination resulted in Asian respondents believing public servants did a poor job. Similarly, evidence of a lack of cultural sensitivity such as when dealing with those with poor English language skills was seen to reflect negatively on public servants.

Just that they must give you the correct information and manners. And they must talk a bit slower because I speak only English, but sometimes when you can't understand them because they speak so fast Kiwis. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

Most Asian respondents felt it would make little difference what a public servant was thinking or feeling so long as their behaviour was polite and they did their best to meet the customer's needs. This was quite unlike the general public groups where consistency between thinking, saying and feeling the same thing was expected.

And so long as they speak nicely to you, even if they are thinking something else. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

What they think and what they say to us it doesn't matter because we don't know what they are thinking about but we can only hear what they are saying. If they say something offensive we wouldn't be happy most definitely, even if they are doing a good job but it doesn't matter what they are thinking because we don't know what it is. So we want them to be courteous to us when we are in front of them. (Hamilton, Asian, male)

9.10 The Public Service provides services that meet your needs

As found with several other drivers, Asian respondents were more likely to raise 'fast and efficient' service as a way for the Public Service to meet their needs.

My needs are very simple, speed. Speed of what things get processed, my mother will not go to public services because of the speed. (Dunedin, Asian, male)

9.11 Trust

Almost unanimously, Asian respondents felt that the New Zealand public services could be trusted more than the Public Service in their country of origin.

Honestly speaking there is no comparison. New Zealand is 200% better. [Than South Africa?] Yes. [In terms of trustworthiness you mean?] Yes. (North Shore, Asian, female)

From where I came to compare it New Zealand is better than my country. Less corruption, there is a lot of corruption. [But you don't think there is much corruption in New Zealand?] Services when you pay your taxes you see your roads no potholes, every month they check the roads. Philippines when you pay your taxes you don't get your roads done there. So basically from that it is good. (North Shore, Asian, male)

10. Pacific People

10.1 Focus group locations

Five focus groups were with Pacific People drawn from the following locations:

- 1 x Far North (Kaikohe)
- 2 x Manukau City
- 2 x Lower Hutt

The satisfaction drivers *They [public servants] admitted responsibility when they made mistakes* and *You were aware of what you needed to do every step of the process* were discussed only in the Pacific focus groups and are covered in detail in this chapter. This is because these drivers were unique for Pacific People. For all other satisfaction drivers (see below) only points unique or important to Pacific People are covered.

- *Staff Were Competent.*
- *Staff Kept Their Promises – That Is, They Did What They Said They Would Do.*
- *It's an Example of Good Value for Tax Dollars Spent.*

10.2 Key points

10.2.1 Unique themes

The Pacific People groups shared many of the same perceptions of drivers as other groups. The key differences with the general public groups are highlighted in this section. Expectations and perceptions that were unique or strongly illustrated by Pacific People as opposed to the general public groups were:

- A greater lack of confidence and understanding of how to deal with public services among recent migrants and first generation New Zealanders for whom English is a second language.
- Treating Pacific People with respect and being sensitive to their cultural needs will encourage engagement and trust.
- Proactively admitting to mistakes, apologising and taking appropriate remedial action will make Pacific People feel that they are being treated as equals; something that tends not to be felt when dealing with public services. This too will build trust.
- Pacific People are not inclined to admit they do not understand public service processes and requirements and will seek intermediaries from within their own family and community to assist them.

- Those who lack confidence or for whom English is a second language are more likely to prefer written or face-to-face communications than over the phone. Written communications enable people to read and understand things in their own time or to seek an intermediary to assist them.
- Respondents identify Pacific community channels as important ways for public services to build trust and understanding between themselves and Pacific People. Such channels could include:
 - Pacific Churches
 - Pacific community leaders
 - Communicating with Pacific People at their key community sports and cultural events
 - Using Pacific People's radio stations.
- Those who have migrated make favourable comparisons with New Zealand's public services.

10.3 [Public Servants] admitted responsibility when they made mistakes

This driver is unique to Pacific People and is covered in full in this section. Focus groups were conducted in the Far North (Kaikohe), Manukau City and Lower Hutt.

■ Overview

Few Pacific People said they had experienced public servants admitting responsibility to mistakes. Some, particularly those for whom English is a second language and who are unfamiliar with processes lack the confidence to raise concerns if they feel a mistake has been made. Such respondents tend to rely heavily on family and friends to help them deal with public services.

Pacific People place a lot of importance on public servants admitting responsibility to mistakes. Such admissions when accompanied by an apology are seen as a mark of respect as well as a sign that there will not be a recurrence.

■ Key themes

➤ *Admitting responsibility an exception*

Respondents said they had had very few experiences of public servants admitting responsibility for a mistake.

*I've never come across a person that will say he's admitted he's made a mistake.
[Not in any public service] No. (Manukau, Pacific People, male)*

➤ **Importance of admitting responsibility**

Respondents were able to provide several examples where mistakes had been made and no admission had been forthcoming. However, there was no doubt that admitting responsibility was important. It was a sign that things would be put right.

[Why do you think that's important to us that they admit they're wrong?] So they recognise what they've done wrong and they know they're going to correct it. (Lower Hutt, Pacific people, female)

It was also important because Pacific People viewed the admission of a mistake as an act of respect, a sign that the public servant was treating the Pacific person with respect as an 'equal'.

I think it's important for them to admit it because Pacific Islanders, I reckon, their opinions aren't as valued as they should. People have that stereotype of Pacific Islanders as if we don't know as much as they do, so when they admit, especially public services, when they admit – they're pretty much representing government, if they admit that they're in the wrong then it's like we are quite equal to everyone else. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

Because our knowledge is not as great, not being racist, but as with Pakehas they seem to be at another level when it comes to thinking and getting them to apologise to us kind of puts us a bit even with everyone else. (Kaikohe, Pacific people, male)

➤ **Reluctance to challenge mistakes**

While being treated as an equal should be the norm, it is clear Pacific People do not feel this is the case when dealing with public servants. Respondents said Pacific People regard themselves as less inclined to complain about mistakes or to challenge public servants if they think a mistake has been made.

I think PIs are more tolerant. People snap faster if they're palangi instead of like the PIs. (Manukau, Pacific People, female)

➤ **Lack of confidence**

Respondents said there was a reluctance among some Pacific People, particularly those with limited understanding of rules, regulations and processes or the English language, to challenge authority if they felt a mistake may have been made. This was because they lacked the confidence to do so.

I think on the whole PIs are not direct enough. [Why do you think that is?] I don't know, maybe embarrassment, maybe thinking they might be wrong, not having enough faith in themselves. (Manukau, Pacific People, female)

Sometimes you do come across PIs that are quite like "oh no, shouldn't tell a palangi that they're wrong." (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

➤ **Intermediaries**

Younger Pacific People were the ones most likely to act on behalf of older relatives to sort things out if mistakes had been made. Thus, they act as intermediaries able to challenge when mistakes have been made.

That's when your parents make you talk for them. "You can talk to the palangi man." I'm more than happy to help them out. Mum and Dad don't speak English. I'm not going to try and belittle them or anything, but when it gets to the point where Mum and Dad are trying to make a point or something, especially Dad, that's when I talk to the public servant. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

■ **Linkages across drivers**

➤ **Staff kept their promises – that is, they did what they said they would do**

There was some linkage to this satisfaction driver in so far as an admission to a mistake was a reflection that staff were not doing what they were supposed to do.

[Why do you think it's important that we want someone to admit responsibility when things like that happen?] *Because we're the public and the service is there for us so we should be able to rely on them when we need them, and if they're not pulling through, then they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing. (Manukau, Pacific people, female)*

And in the case of both drivers there was an expectation that the admission of a mistake would be accompanied by an apology and an explanation as to how things would be put right.

Just an apology or a letter why what happened, why did it happen and how they will rectify it perhaps. That personal touch, apology, will suffice I suppose depending on what's happened, depending on the level of what's actually happened. (Manukau, Pacific People, female)

➤ **The Public Service admits responsibility when it makes mistakes**

There was a strong linkage to this trust driver. Pacific People stated that public servants were not generally pro-active about admitting to mistakes. However, admitting to mistakes can help build trust because it demonstrates that the public servant is a good person who can be trusted upon to do the right thing in future.

I guess it contributes to their reputation. If they're willing to take responsibility for it, then I'd take them to be a good person. (Lower Hutt, Pacific people, female)

You can trust that they're going to do the right thing the next time around. That's fair enough. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

■ Areas to focus on to improve satisfaction levels

➤ *Onus on apology*

Public servants should be trained to ensure that if they have made a mistake that an apology is made and steps are taken to ensure that it does not recur. This should help engender respect and trust between themselves and the public.

10.4 You were aware of what you needed to do every step of the way

This driver is unique to Pacific People and is covered in full in this section. Focus groups were conducted in the Far North (Kaikohe), Manukau City and Lower Hutt.

■ Overview

While Pacific People expect public servants to ensure they are aware of what they need to do, some are less likely to admit to not knowing what to do out of a sense of pride. This can present a challenge which can be addressed to some extent by being more culturally aware and having information available that can be easily understood including in the appropriate Pacific language. The ability to ensure people are aware of what they need to do is seen as a sign of competence.

■ Key themes

➤ *Less likely to admit lack of knowledge*

Pacific People are less likely to admit that they do not understand the Public Service 'system' of rules, regulations, processes and similar requirements. This can be due to what respondents described as pride and shyness. This can result in situations when Pacific People say that they do understand when in fact they do not in order to avoid any perceived 'shame' in admitting ignorance.

They say all this information to you and then you go – especially our people, we're too proud sometimes, because you stand there and go "yes, yes, yes, okay, thank you" and walk out the door and have no idea what they were just told. (Manukau, Pacific People, male)

Therefore staff should ensure people understand what to do every step of the way.

A good public services makes sure that the client has gone away understanding what to do, and the process to make. (Manukau, Pacific People, male)

Pacific People staffing front-line positions who can assist with language issues or even other staff demonstrating sensitivity to Pacific cultures can encourage engagement, trust and understanding.

I think if you get within your own culture you're a little bit more relaxed as well. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, male)

I think that helps like having somebody from your own culture who can explain to you in your own native tongue to make you feel comfortable because a lot of people have language barriers. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

In particular, respondents spoke of the usefulness of being able to draw on the assistance of a Pacific staff member, who might be able to interpret, and increasing the number of Pacific People at the front-line of public services, particularly in areas where proportionately more Pacific People access services.

Language barriers and concerns about one's immigration status can inhibit engagement and understanding. And as noted in discussion about the driver in 10.3, those for whom English is a second language rely on close friends and family members to act as intermediaries.

➤ **Special efforts needed**

Particular care needs to be taken to try to enable Pacific People to understand what they need to do when interacting with public servants. Where it is apparent a Pacific person may have some difficulty in understanding or interacting, public servants should show respect and politeness in order to make themselves more approachable.

I think all people who are just culturally aware of the do's and the don'ts. Like you can phrase it, like whatever it is, to help somebody but not in your face like "this is how you have to do it", just "oh you know", like in a polite, respectful way, not making you feel like you're dumb or making you feel – like making you feel comfortable I think. It's more about being comfortable and of course maybe we find it hard to even ask for help anyway so somebody who makes you feel comfortable that it is okay. I think it's just cultural awareness. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

There is also the need to speak more slowly if there are language issues in play. Providing clearly written information, preferably in the Pacific person's language, is also a means of ensuring better understanding. The phone tended to be the least preferred channel for those for whom English is a second language.

Just break it down so we understand and just get to the point rather than all the fancy words ... Why don't you just put basically put it on the paper. I'd rather just read that. (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

A letter. [What is better about a letter?] Easier to read and understand. Not the big words we don't understand and makes us go to that dumb world and not too sure what they are on about...When they say something real big like a word I don't understand I just say yeah. And the paper I do understand, it is more easy. (Kaikohe, Pacific People, male)

Pacific People also suggested working through community organisations and channels to inform people about what to do. These included churches, having a presence at Pacific sports and cultural festivals and working through Pacific radio stations to keep people informed.

■ Linkages across drivers

➤ *Staff were competent*

The strongest linkage was with the competency driver. Being culturally aware of the limitations some people may have due to their background was seen as important in order to ensure that Pacific People understood what to do.

I think everyone would have to have some kind of knowledge of at least cultural awareness and values and beliefs and maybe courses or seminars on how to deal with those kinds of clients. [I think that would go under competent as well, the whole fact of being aware. (Interjection.)] (Lower Hutt, Pacific People, female)

■ Areas to focus on to improve satisfaction levels

➤ *Cultural awareness*

Being culturally aware and sensitive to the needs of those unfamiliar with public service processes and requirements will go a long way toward ensuring people do understand what to do. This can include:

- treating people with respect, so they feel more comfortable engaging
- speaking simply and slowly to those for whom English is a second language, particularly over the phone
- identifying intermediary family members who may be able to help someone to understand, and
- providing written material in an appropriate Pacific language.

Public service organisations should also work through the Pacific People's community Channels to provide generic information so individuals are more aware of what they should do. Respondents suggested:

- working through Pacific churches
- providing information at major Pacific festivals and sports events
- providing information to Pacific radio stations
- having information available to parents at gyms and school groups

Respondents also suggested increasing the number of Pacific People at the front-line of public services, particularly in areas where proportionately more Pacific People access services.

10.5 Staff were competent

The key distinction between Pacific People and the general public groups with respect to this driver was that satisfaction with public servants' competency was also linked to staff's cultural sensitivity and ability to ensure Pacific People understood what they need to when dealing with public services.

Know a bit about cultural things, Pacific Island cultures. [Is that important?] I think so.

Those public servants who are considered competent are trusted.

Straight upfront, you will understand who you can trust because one is either being restricted with knowledge and the other one is providing the full knowledge or full products of what they provide, so that's how I'll weigh up the trust factor with public services. (Auckland, Pacific People, female)

Pacific People say they are likely to avoid accessing those services that are not helpful, understanding and approachable; traits that build trust in public services for them.

10.6 It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent

Pacific People struggled to provide examples of good value for tax dollars spent, though those that could gave examples of core services. Pacific People who have migrated to New Zealand tend to rate New Zealand's public services better relatively to the services they were used to in the islands.

11. Young People

11.1 Focus group locations

Five focus groups were undertaken with Young People (aged 15-30 years). As life experiences and life stages vary considerably across this age span, five different types of groups were recruited.

- School students (15-17 years), Lower Hutt
- Young working (18-23 years), North Shore City
- Older working (24-30 years), Hamilton
- Young family (18-30 years), Balclutha
- Tertiary students, Dunedin.

The discussion guide was adjusted significantly for the school students. This was because there was concern that they might not be able to engage with the subject matter due to their limited experience with public services and the drivers being tested. Thus, for example, they were asked to assess their expectations of the school they attended as a lead into discussion about their expectations of public services in general. The discussion guide for young people and for the school students group are appended to show the changes that were made.

Earlier quantitative research had identified five drivers of satisfaction that most influenced young people's satisfaction with public services. These were

- *The Service Experience Met Your Expectations.*
- *Staff Were Competent.*
- *You Were Treated Fairly.*
- *Staff Kept Their Promises – That Is, They Did What They Said They Would Do.*
- *It's an Example of Good Value for Tax Dollars Spent.*

11.2 Key points

The key differences between the young people and general public groups are highlighted in this section. Expectations and perceptions that were unique or strongly illustrated by Young People as opposed to the general public groups were:

- Speed of service appeared to be more important to Young People than for the general public, particularly school and tertiary students.
- Respondents with young families tended to have more complex interactions with public services, and this placed a high expectation on accountability for service delivery.
- Young People appear to have greater comfort with using the Internet to interact with public services and see it as a quicker option.

- Young families on low to moderate incomes place high value on financial benefits, such as those arising from Working for Families tax credits.
- The older working group (24-30 years) and those with young families tended to report more negative experiences of public services.
- Being treated with respect and in a consistent manner are particularly important aspects of fair treatment for school students. School students are particularly sensitive to feeling discriminated against or not treated with respect due to their age. This can lead to strong perceptions that they are being treated unfairly.
- As school students, tertiary and younger working respondent's expectations of public services are somewhat unformed, simply doing a job properly can lead to expectations being exceeded.

11.3 The service experience met your expectations

Speed and timeliness of service delivery appeared to be more important to Young People, particularly those in the school student (15-17 years) and tertiary groups, than the general public groups. Public transport was one of the main public services these groups used.

As school students, tertiary and younger working respondent's expectations of public services are somewhat unformed, particularly the more limited their experience with them, simply doing a job properly can lead to expectations being exceeded.

Respondents with young families tended to have more complex interactions with public services and this placed a high expectation on accountability for service delivery.

Young People appear to have greater comfort with using the Internet to interact with public services. It was also expected to be a quick deliverer of services.

The Internet I expect to be much easier to do. It should be really straightforward and really easy to use. (North Shore, young people, younger working, female)

11.4 Staff were competent

There was only one significant difference between the Young People and the general public groups in discussion of this driver. The youngest of the groups placed more emphasis than other groups on the need for competent staff to treat them with respect. This emerged among this age group in discussions of other drivers too.

Show respectfulness. [What does respectfulness mean to you?] Just like treating you in a nice way. (Lower Hutt, 16-18 years, male)

11.5 You were treated fairly

The school students stressed the need to be treated with respect was a sign of fairness. There was a presumption across all groups that people were generally treated fairly most of the time.

There was an example of perceived unfairness that came up in the tertiary student group that was somewhat unique among all groups. This was an example of the introduction of a new service – the National Certificate of Education - for a specific age cohort. These respondents had been in Year 11 when it was introduced and felt they had been treated as guinea-pigs to the detriment of their education which they perceived as unfair.

11.6 It's an example of good value for tax dollars spent

As in the general public groups core services that were available to everyone were consistently identified as good value for tax dollars spent. However, the Balclutha group with young families - more than the general public groups - identified examples that brought financial benefit to their household income and of government programmes and services that were especially important and valuable to their children.

*Childcare subsidy for working people. [Tell us how come that is a good example?]
Because I am a solo dad with two kids and one is at school, the other one is in day care all day so I wouldn't worry about going to work if it didn't get subsidised.
(Balclutha, young family, male)*

*The family tax credit that is just brilliant. [Just talk me through the reasons why?]
It just helps you that little bit more helps you get along like my partner gets paid fortnightly so I know I get paid weekly so that is fine but if any bill pops up I know that money is coming in there that I can pay it and so I don't get a collection fee or something ridiculous like that. (Balclutha, young family, female)*

12. General impressions of the Public Services

As a warm up for the focus group discussion, respondents were asked to give their impressions of 'the Public Service'. The initial wave of groups did not provide sufficient depth or insight about impressions, so two projective exercises were introduced to gain a better understanding. One exercise involved respondents identifying from a long list of descriptors the three words that most applied to the Public Service and the three words that applied the least to it. The second exercise invited respondents individually to think of an animal that best summed up their impression of the Public Service. In both exercises respondents were asked to give reasons for their choices. Only one projective exercise was carried out in any group.

12.1 Overview

Perceptions of the Public Service can be categorised in four broad ways covering:

- the type of relationship the public have with it
- its dominant traits
- the quality of service it provides and,
- the role it plays in society.

The extent to which individuals perceive the Public Service in each of these categories can have a direct bearing on their expectations of public services and the way they interact with them.

Those respondents who characterise the Public Service in terms of their relationship with it see the relationship as asymmetric. They perceive the Public Service as powerful relative to themselves and some feel threatened by this.

Respondents perceived the Public Service as complex, closed, difficult to deal with, and rule-bound. On the positive side it was also seen as helpful, culturally sensitive and accessible.

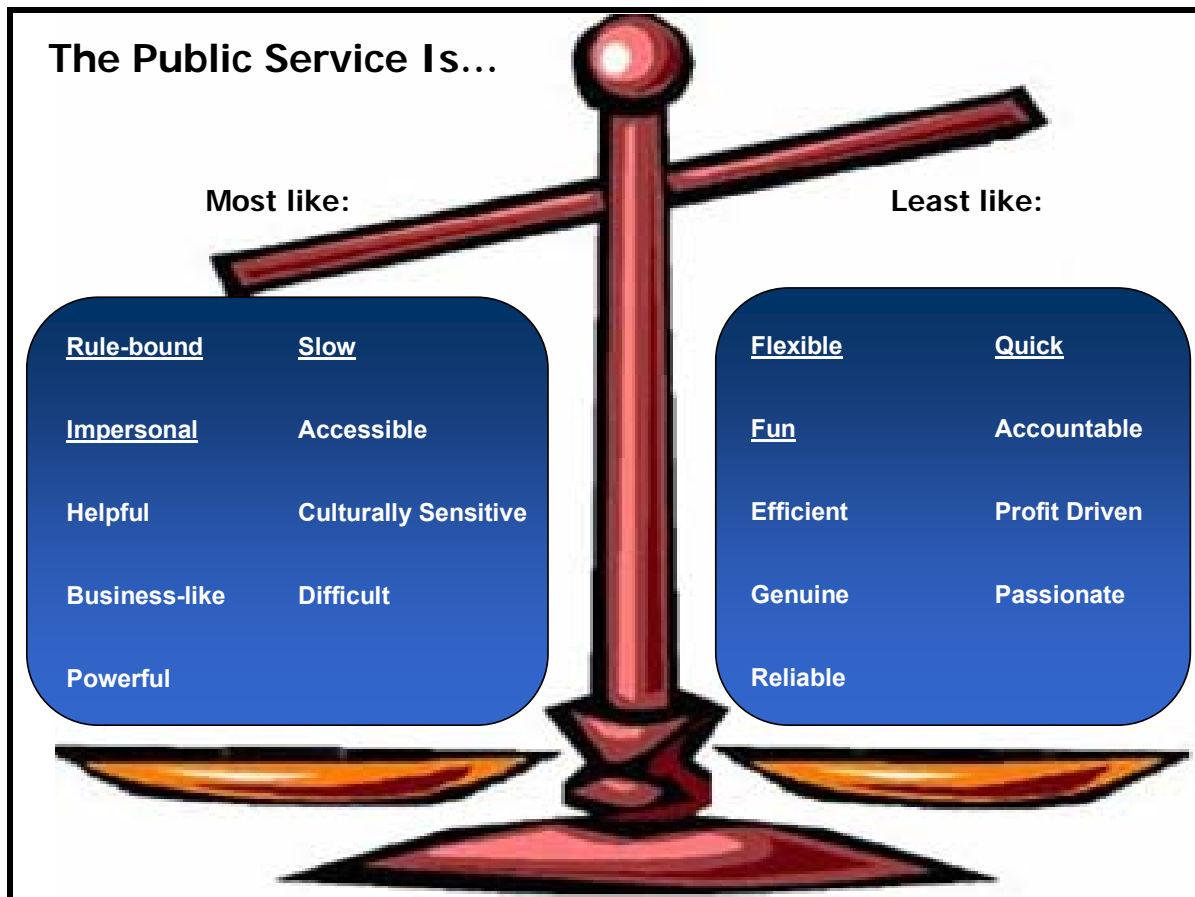
The Public Service is generally perceived to provide poorer quality services than the private sector. Respondents reported that the Public Service lacked a strong customer focus and did not appear to be accountable to the public it serves. As the sole provider of many services to the public respondents felt they had little ability to influence service improvements. These perceptions appeared to reinforce feelings of disempowerment.

A small number of respondents had a more benign impression of the Public Service reflecting their view of its role as a provider of services including essential services that everyone needs.

Improvements to the perception of the public services may result from attention to a strong, publicly accountable and customer/solutions focused culture. It may lead people to feel less disempowered.

12.2 Descriptors

The top descriptors of what the service is most and least like are listed in the diagram below. This shows that perceptions are not all negative. The three descriptors that respondents most identified with the Public Service, and what it was least like, are underlined.



When asked for the reasons why they chose these descriptors, respondents mostly related to personal experiences though some respondents' views were perceptions not based on personal experience.

Rule-bound was the descriptor that was chosen most often and highlighted the lack of flexibility respondents felt when dealing with the Public Service.

Rule bound they stick to the rules ... just what the book says because the book says. (North Shore, Asian, male)

The two other most commonly selected descriptors were slow and impersonal. Those who chose slow and impersonal often expressed frustration with delays in contacting public servants on the phone or dealing with different people each time they phoned up. This was because they were never actually able to establish a personal relationship.

Slow to get a result and impersonal with the telephone calls you have got to hang on for ages and ages and then you get cut off and you have to go through it all again (Lower Hutt, general public, female)

Some were dissatisfied with the slowness of processes and paperwork.

They say quick and it is usually quite a drawn out process in some of the stuff they want you to go through or it is quite a stack of paper work. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)

One respondent described the slowness of services as due to the fact that there was no ability to deal with joined-up departments.

Because if you want to do certain things you have to go to this department and this department and this department. It is not inter-linked, the departments are not inter linked so it is a slow process when you have to go to each department individually. (North Shore, Asian, female)

12.3 Animal projective

➤ **Stubborn and inflexible**

The choice of animals were consistent with the descriptor exercise. Animals like donkeys, mules, oxen and pigs were chosen for their stubbornness, inflexibility and undeviating approach to matters.



A mule. Stubborn and hard to shift from fixed opinions. No flexibility or very little. (Kaikohe, Māori, male)



All I could come to was an ox, moving through mud, slowly, steadily but pretty much a straight line from one point to another and whoever is in control chooses the direction so it is pretty much someone decides which way it's going and that is it. (Kaikohe, Māori, male)

➤ **Slow**

Slow services were also highlighted.



I think of a turtle, quite slow but at some stage it may happen. (Balclutha, general public, female)

➤ **Large and powerful**

However, the most common animals chosen were large and powerful, for example, the lion and the elephant. The lion represented the image of the all-powerful public service.



Well a lion is the king of the jungle and really our councils and the government are the kings of the land, they can dictate to us and tell us what we can and what we can't do. That is how I feel about them. (Hamilton, Asian, female)

I had lion too. Strong, I give them respect so I am probably scared of them a little. They are the big thing. (Lower Hutt, general public, male)

The elephant, though representing power and size, was also chosen because it created an image of slowness and somewhat undeviating qualities. In addition, the elephant had a threatening dimension to it.



It's big, lumbering, it has got an endless appetite and when it's on a rampage you can't stop it and it is not really in touch with humanity. (Balclutha, young family, female)

➤ **Grey and boring**

To young respondents, the elephant also appeared somewhat grey and boring.

I chose an elephant because compared to other animals it is quite big and public services seem like massive. Elephant is kind of a plain grey colour and public transport can be pretty boring looking. It should be a rainbow. It would be nicer to go into a pretty kind of environment rather than something dirty. (Lower Hutt, 16-18 years, female)

➤ **Lack customer focus**

The hyena was chosen for its lack of customer focus.



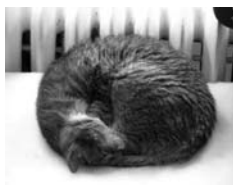
We can ask for the simplest thing and it could be reasonable but it takes forever to get the answer. And the other reason hyena is because of the constant processes that you have to go through sometimes you wonder if they are sitting back at morning tea time laughing. And how many people we have actually had to talk to to get what we wanted. (Oamaru, general public, female)

➤ **Taker versus provider**

There were a few that saw the Public Service as a taker, rather than a provider of service.



Well a tick. Getting fat off the little man. (Balclutha, general public, male)



Well some are like a cat, happy to consume as much as you give them and then lie around sleeping for the day. A lot of public services don't have a lot of incentives to excel and just cruise along every day. And some outfits are like a ferret, they are out for themselves and sneaky, sly and British. (Oamaru, general public, male)

Some respondents chose to focus on their more benign impressions of the Public Service. The cow was seen as a useful provider, but even this generally positive image had some shortcomings to it. For instance, cows could be stubborn and on occasion potentially dangerous too.



I thought of a cow. They are generally benign and pretty useful at times for a lot of stuff, but you wouldn't want one to stand on your toe particularly. There is something about cows they are stubborn and you can't really get them to do what you want them to do. (Dunedin, general public, male)

➤ **Harm**

Some feared the potential harm the Public Service could inflict.



I think like a big Alsatian or Rottweiler ... as in they can be nice but they've got the sharp teeth as well. You've got to be wary. (Dunedin, Māori, female).

➤ **Hidden and complex**

Some respondents' perceptions were of a public service that was complex, closed and difficult to deal with. The hermit crab and the mole represented the hidden complexity of the Public Service and the difficulty encountered in trying to contact the right person.



Hermit crab. My issue was to do with when I was applying for permanent residency and three times frustrations not getting in touch with the case manager my case officer getting fobbed off sometimes. (Kaikohe, Pacific People, female)



I have got a mole. I pictured network tunnels, tracks, busy and not a lot of communication. (Lower Hutt, general public, female)

The octopus was a favourite for those who wanted to capture what seemed to be the complexity of the Public Service with its tentacles spread over many areas.



I have put an octopus because it's something with a little brain but lots of legs in different departments. (Oamaru, general public, female)

➤ **Inconsistent service**

Some wanted to express views about poor service experiences. Occasionally, monkeys were referred to as well as rabbits for the erratic and inconsistent service experienced.



Rabbit because it is quite erratic at times ... (Balclutha, general public, female)

➤ **Friendly and helpful**

Horses and dogs represented a friendly and helpful side to the Public Service.



Horse because I think they all carry the load for us. So they are the ones that support. (Kaitaia, Māori, female)



I have got a dog I work with dogs all day and they are very willing to work for me and that is how I have found the Public Service. All the public services that I can think of. (Oamaru, general public, male)