



HOW MAIL ENGAGES YOUR CITIZENS

The impact of local authority mail on your communities

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	5
WHICH COMMUNICATIONS ARE PEOPLE AWARE OF?	6
HOW LONG IS LOCAL AUTHORITY MAIL KEPT?	10
HOW DO DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS ENGAGE WITH MAIL?	15
WHICH MAIL FORMATS ARE ENGAGED WITH?	16
TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS	18
HOW DO PEOPLE INTERACT WITH MAGAZINES?	20
CONCLUSIONS	23
HOW MARKETREACH CAN HELP	24



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local government uses a variety of channels to communicate to people in its communities, and we wanted to understand the impact these had on citizens.

Within these channels, mail represents a significant investment for local government bodies.

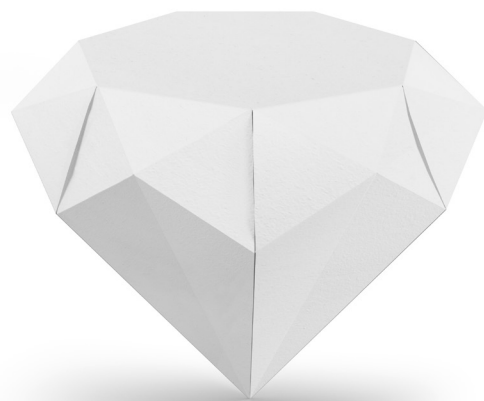
So we needed to evaluate the role mail plays, especially in light of the enormous financial pressures facing these bodies and the continued drive to deliver more for less.

Here's what we found:

- Mail is considered the key and correct method by which local government communicates with its citizens
- This is consistent across all age groups and is not impacted by the availability of internet access
- Mail or door drop communications stick most in people's minds, and are also most likely to be retained within the household
- Mail stands out as the most desired communications format across all subject areas. It provides the necessary 'seriousness' to convey information that's either personal or relevant to the recipients' local area

Mail is therefore the key channel on which local government is evaluated and understood by its citizens. Ultimately it informs the recipient's relationship with their local government, the decisions taken about their local services and how they are delivered.

It also impacts the extent to which people feel part of the community and their levels of engagement with that local government organisation, helping people understand what it represents.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Royal Mail MarketReach tasked Illuminas with conducting this research.

Illuminas is an award-winning, full-service research consultancy that delivers strategic marketing intelligence across B2B and consumer markets worldwide.

The research was conducted in three parts:

PHASE 1

Initially we undertook six interviews with communications and marketing decision makers in selected local authorities. We chose contrasting geographical areas to ensure we would pick up issues that might only be relevant in areas where, for example, there is an older population. The interviews took place in Broadland (Norfolk), Ealing (London), Eastbourne, Gateshead, the Isle of Wight and Stoke on Trent. This helped inform what type of communications we should be covering in our interviews with citizens in these areas.

PHASE 2

We recruited 2,861 people who identified as being the household co-ordinator, that is the person who generally takes charge of mail and co-ordinates sorting, sharing and saving mail in the house. The sample was recruited to be nationally representative of all demographics and age groups.

- 2,661 interviews took place via an online questionnaire
- 200 face-to-face interviews took place where respondents didn't have access to the internet. These were conducted in Eastbourne and Gateshead

PHASE 3

Six in-depth interviews were carried out in Gateshead, Solihull, Lewes, Lambeth (London) and Liverpool. We selected these areas to ensure coverage of the main types of Local Authority, ranging from urban to rural and across age groups and gender. This stage allowed us to talk to people face-to-face about individual communications.

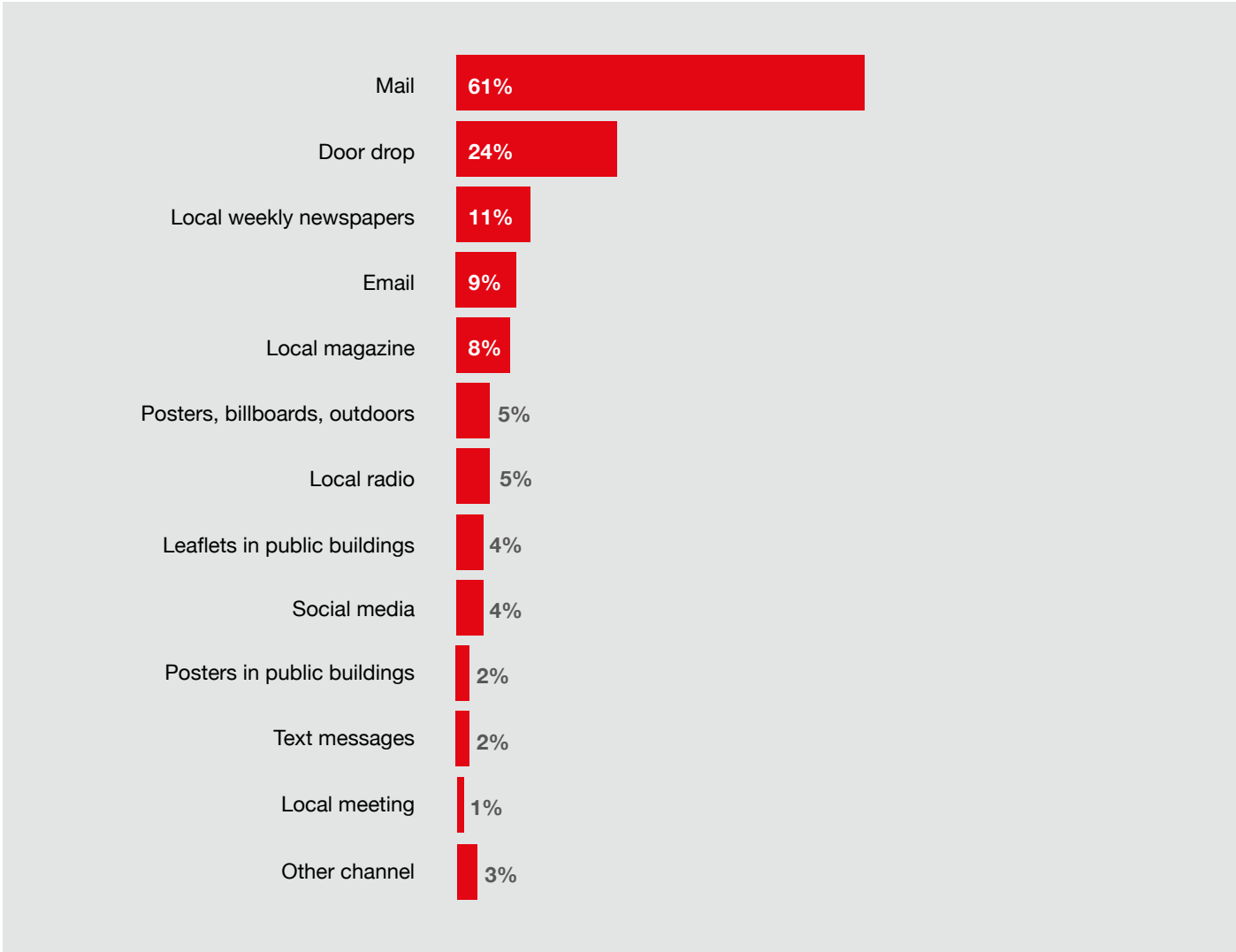
WHICH COMMUNICATIONS ARE PEOPLE AWARE OF?

81% of people recalled receiving some form of communication from local government in the past 12 months.

Which communication channels do people recall?

The communication channels recalled by people are shown below. By far the highest channel is mail addressed to them at 61%, followed by door drop at 24%.

The next nearest channels are local newspaper, then email and local magazine.

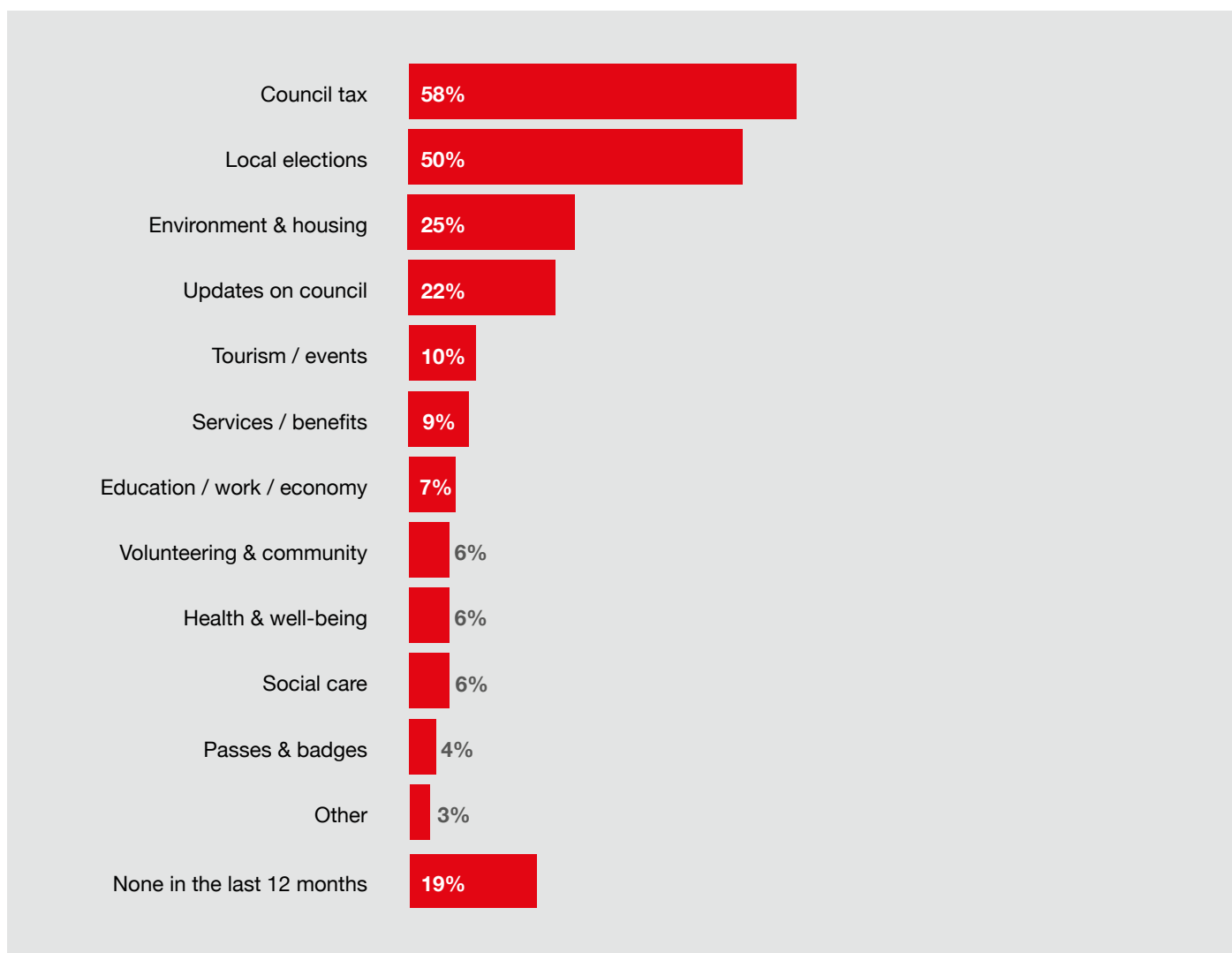


Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: Topics: All (2,661), Channels: Those that have received comms (2,210)

What types of messages do people recall receiving?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most recalled piece of communication is a council tax bill, followed by information about local elections, which includes electoral registration communications and poll cards.

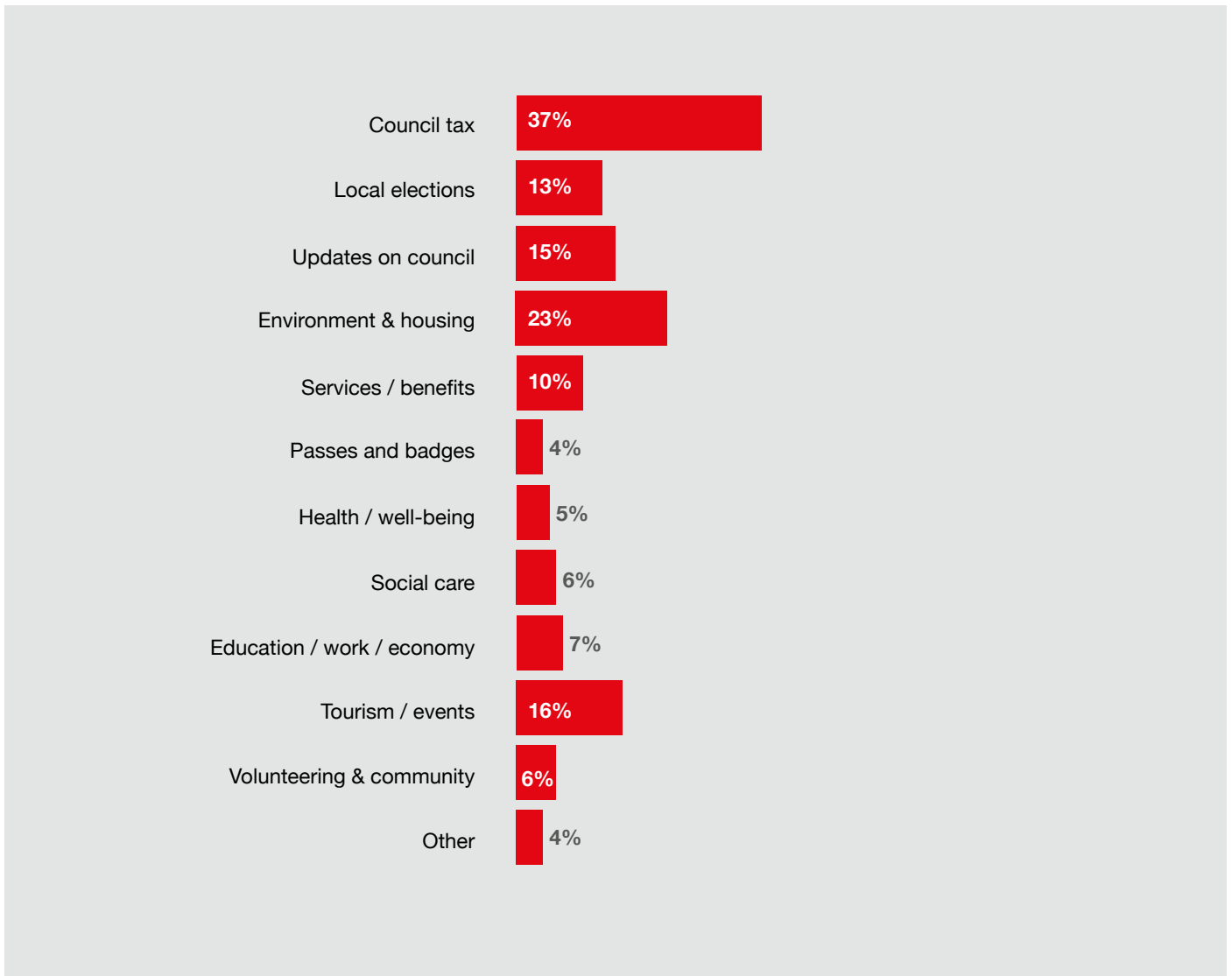
63% of people surveyed remembered receiving something from their Local Authority on one of the subjects below in the past six months.



Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: Topics: All (2,661), Channels: Those that have received comms (2,210)

How are those topics recalled by email?

10% of people recalled receiving something from their Local Authority by email, and 37% of those recalled the communication being about council tax, followed by something about the environment or housing.

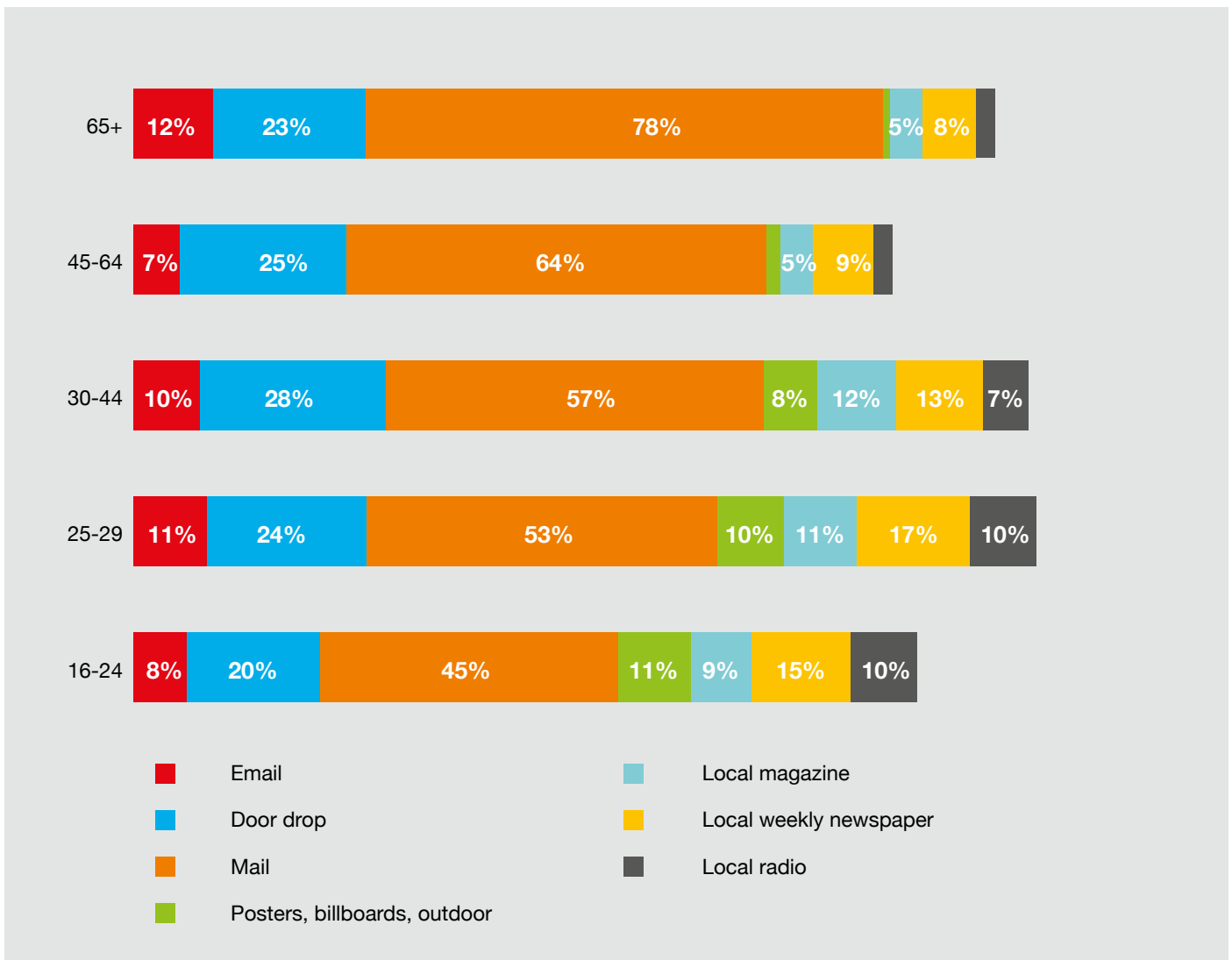


Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: Topics: All (2,661), Channels: Those that have received comms (2,210)

How well is Local Authority mail recalled?

89% of those aged 65 and over recall mail addressed to them or receiving door drop in the past 12 months. The recall is 82% for those aged 45-64 and 84% for those aged 30-44. The lowest recall is amongst 16-24 year-olds who may either still be living at home or going to and from college.

Engagement is highest in the 65-plus age group, with their recall of email at 12%, the highest level of any group. This reflects the fact that those who are retired are more likely to be engaged with local government than younger age groups.



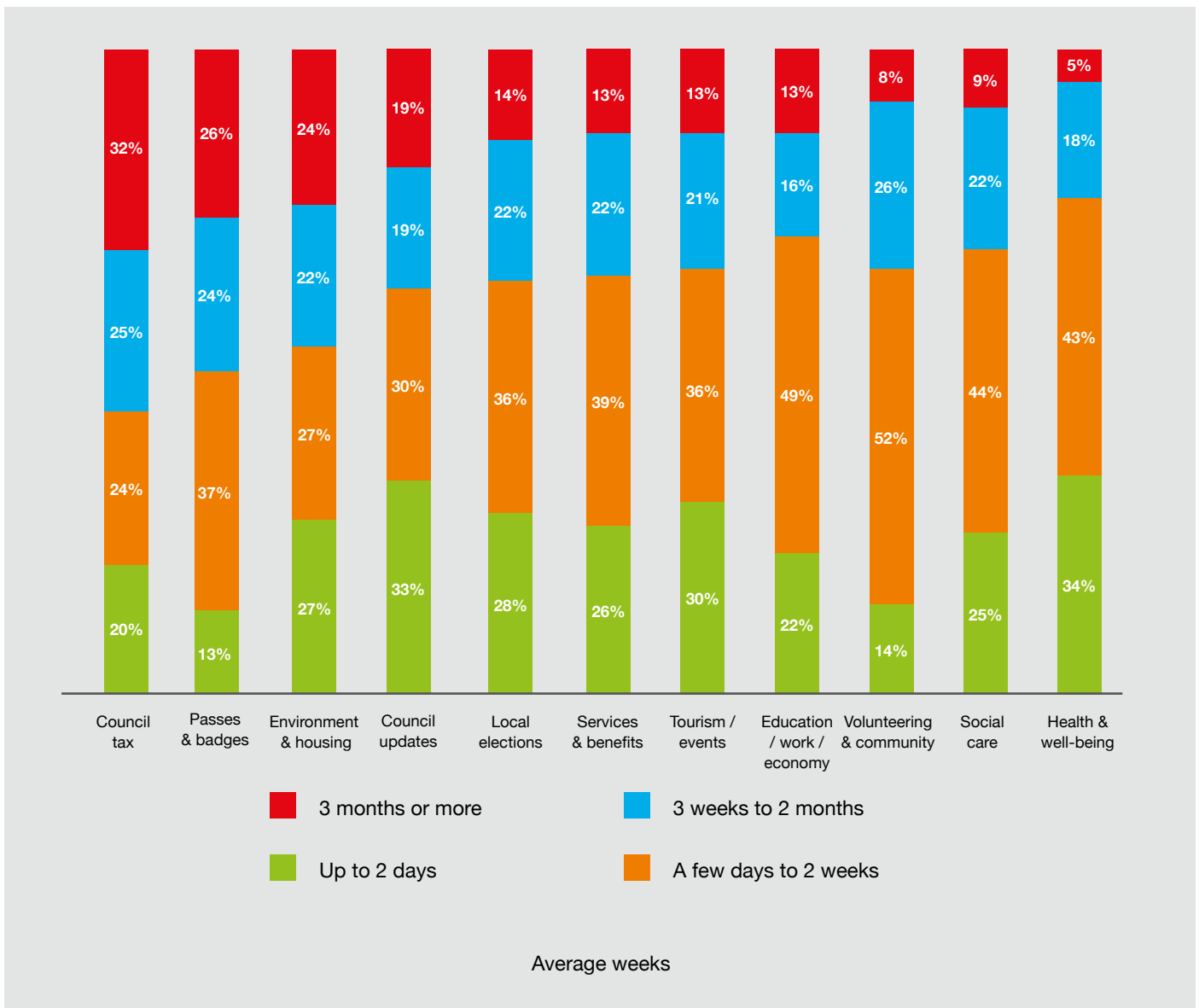
Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017 Base: All (2,661)

HOW LONG IS LOCAL AUTHORITY MAIL KEPT?

The single piece of information that stays in the home the longest is council tax information – 32% stays in the home for three months or longer. This is followed by passes and badges (26%) and environment and housing (24%).

Council tax information is clearly deemed an important proof of identity, as it is often needed to verify an address as well as being used to confirm that the bill has been paid.

Information that might be useful at a later date, such as updates from the council, or messages about tourism or events, does stick around, but not for long.



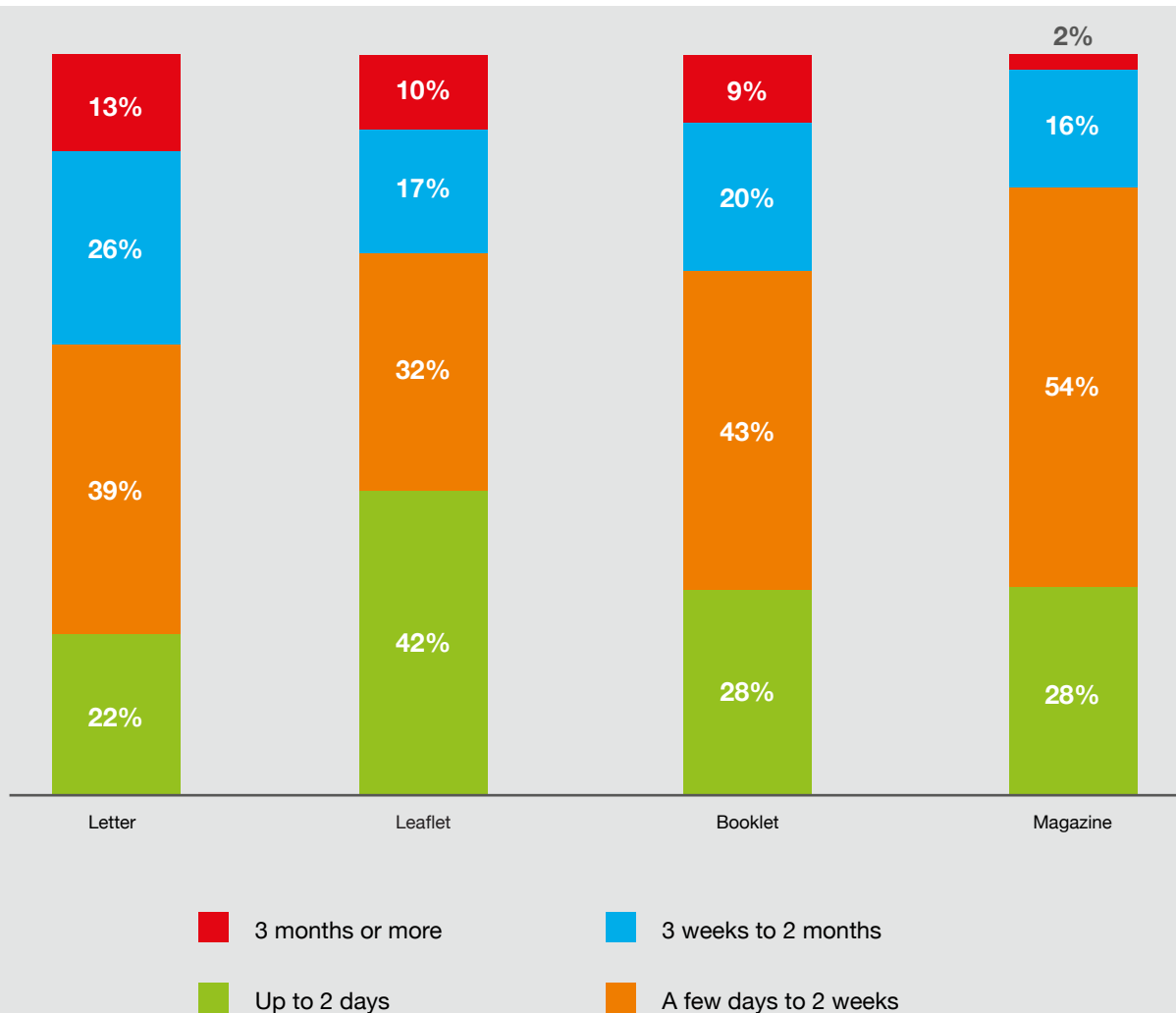
Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: All (2,661)

Which formats of mail are kept the longest?

By removing council tax mail - as this was kept the longest by far - we discovered that 22% of letters are dealt with within two days of receiving them. But some letters stay around much longer; 39% for a few days to two weeks, and 39% for more than three weeks and as long as three months or more.

This is a result of 77% of those receiving letters from local government saying they provided useful information that they needed to know.

Notably magazines persist in the home the longest, with 55% staying around for a few days to two weeks and 18% sticking around for over three weeks.



Data excludes mail related to Council Tax

Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: A letter (482), A leaflet (582), A booklet (99), A magazine (84)

“I think with a letter, like with registering at a school and having a letter saved, this is what you’ve got to do and these are the deadlines and it breaks it down – it’s there as a reference. An email is... on my phone but if it’s in my inbox after a week it disappears on my phone so I have to log in separately... I’d have a letter saying you’ve got to respond by this deadline whereas an email I think for some people would disappear into the ether and not be remembered.”

Younger family,
Solihull

For many respondents there’s a fundamental understanding that mailed information is important and has been provided in that format for good reason.

This is strongest for addressed mail, which people feel is personalised to them, contains private information and may well be something they’ll need to refer back to at a later date. Addressed mail from a Local Authority can also be seen as a proof of identity for things like making a payment or having to apply for something by a certain date.

We found there was even a slight paranoia that if it were disposed of it might become impossible to prove that an action had been taken. Therefore people are much more likely to keep mail filed carefully for a long time.

Even Local Authority emails are kept and people often print them out to ensure the record is preserved for later.

“I feel like if it’s from Gateshead Council it’s something that I would need in the future. So I’d like to hold on to it.”

Sharer
Gateshead

“It’s actually a bit out of date now so I should probably throw it away, but it’s the sort of thing you recognise is important so you keep it.”

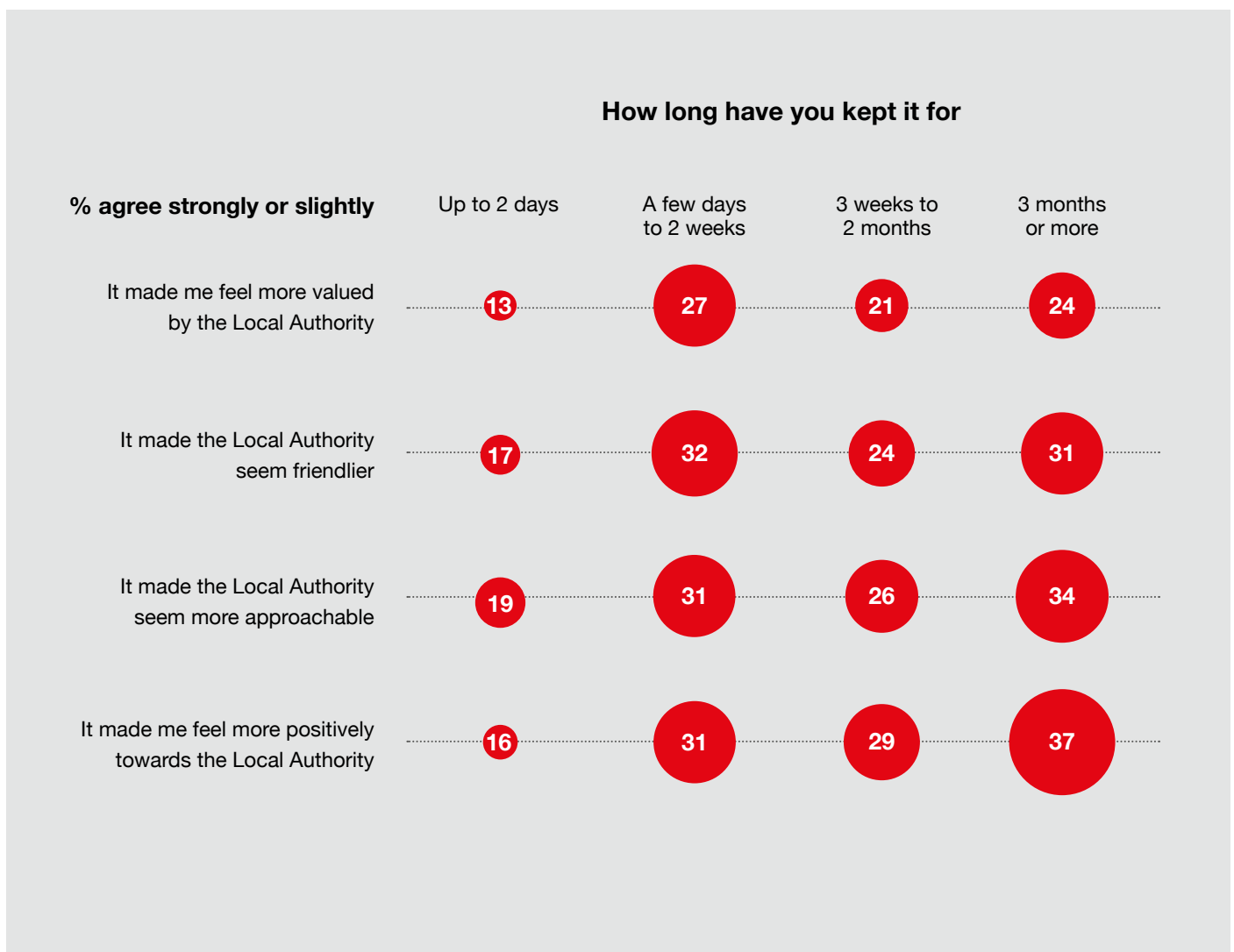
Pre-family
London

Mail has more impact the longer it's kept

Mailed communications kept beyond a couple of days have a greater positive effect on perceptions of the Local Authority.

So, the longer mail is retained, the more impact it's likely to have. The comment "It made me feel more positively towards the Local Authority" achieves 31% agreement where the person has kept it longer than a few days.

This continues at 29% if they've kept it for three weeks to two months, and then increases to 37% if it's kept for three months or longer. This shows that if the person keeps it and it stays around the home, the impact increases over time.



Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: all received mail comms for topics other than Council Tax: Up to 2 days (210); A few days to 2 weeks (240); 3 weeks to 2 months (253); 3 months or more (340).

How do people like to be communicated to with different messages?

Which of the following is the most effective way for your Local Authority to communicate with you on each of the following subjects?

	Mail	Email	Social media	Text message
Council tax	62% ▲	29%	5%	3%
Local elections	62% ▲	28%	8%	3%
Council updates	53% ▲	36%	8%	3%
Environment & housing	53% ▲	36%	8%	3%
Passes & badges	52% ▲	37%	9%	3%
Social care	51% ▲	36%	10%	3%
Health & well-being	49% ▲	36%	11%	4%
Services & benefits	49% ▲	36%	11%	3%
Education / work / economy	48% ▲	38%	11%	3%
Volunteering & community	45% ▲	38%	14%	3%
Tourism & events	44% ▲	37%	16%	3%

▲ Mail significantly higher than email

This table shows how people would like to be communicated to by their Local Authority across all communication channels.

Mail is the preferred choice for all types but especially for council tax and local elections, which are both more than 30% above email. People want information given to them in the most convenient and useful manner possible.

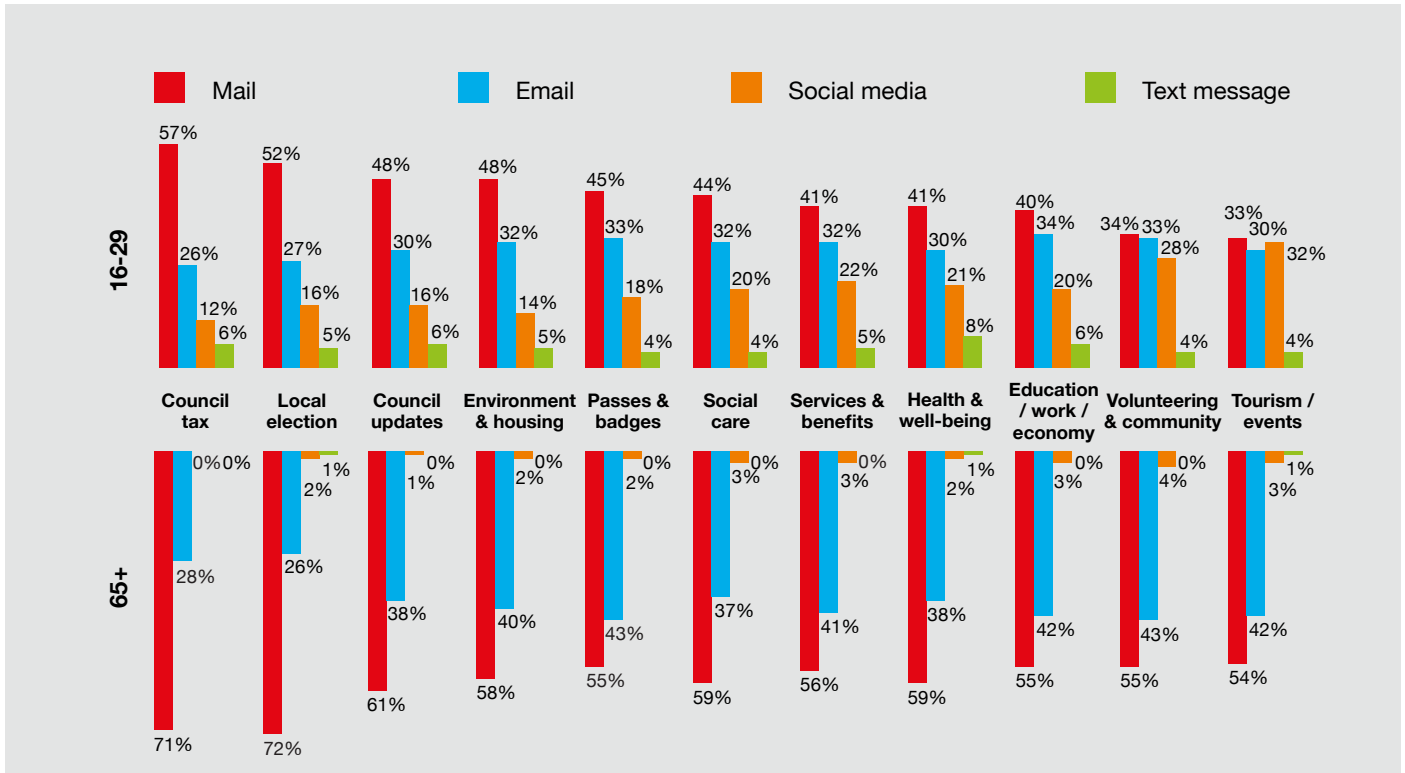
Mail is ahead for all types of communication from Local Authorities, ranging from tourism and events through to health and well-being messages.

Fewer people want to receive messages of any sort by email, but for some they are more disposed towards them. And fewer people want messages from their Local Authority through social media or text message.

Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: All (2,661)

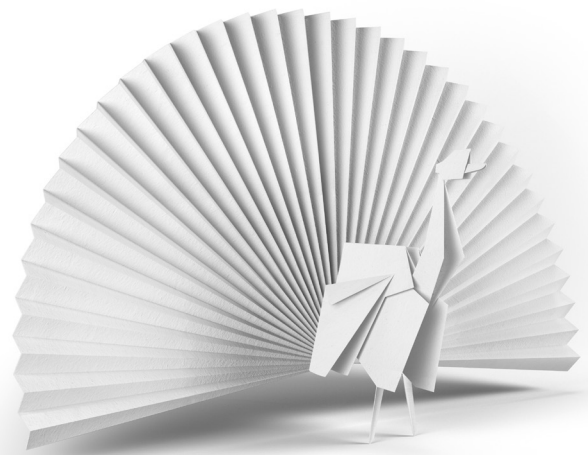
HOW DO DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS ENGAGE WITH MAIL?

While younger people are undoubtedly more engaged with digital channels, they are only slightly less disposed towards mail.



Mail is the strong favourite for those aged 65 and over, but for those aged 16-29 mail is also the preferred channel for all types of communication. Millennials are more open to email and social media than those who are older, particularly for information about community and entertainment.

This is interesting as mail does not fall into the category of being a dated channel of communication. Mail is the preferred channel across all ages and all Local Authority topics.



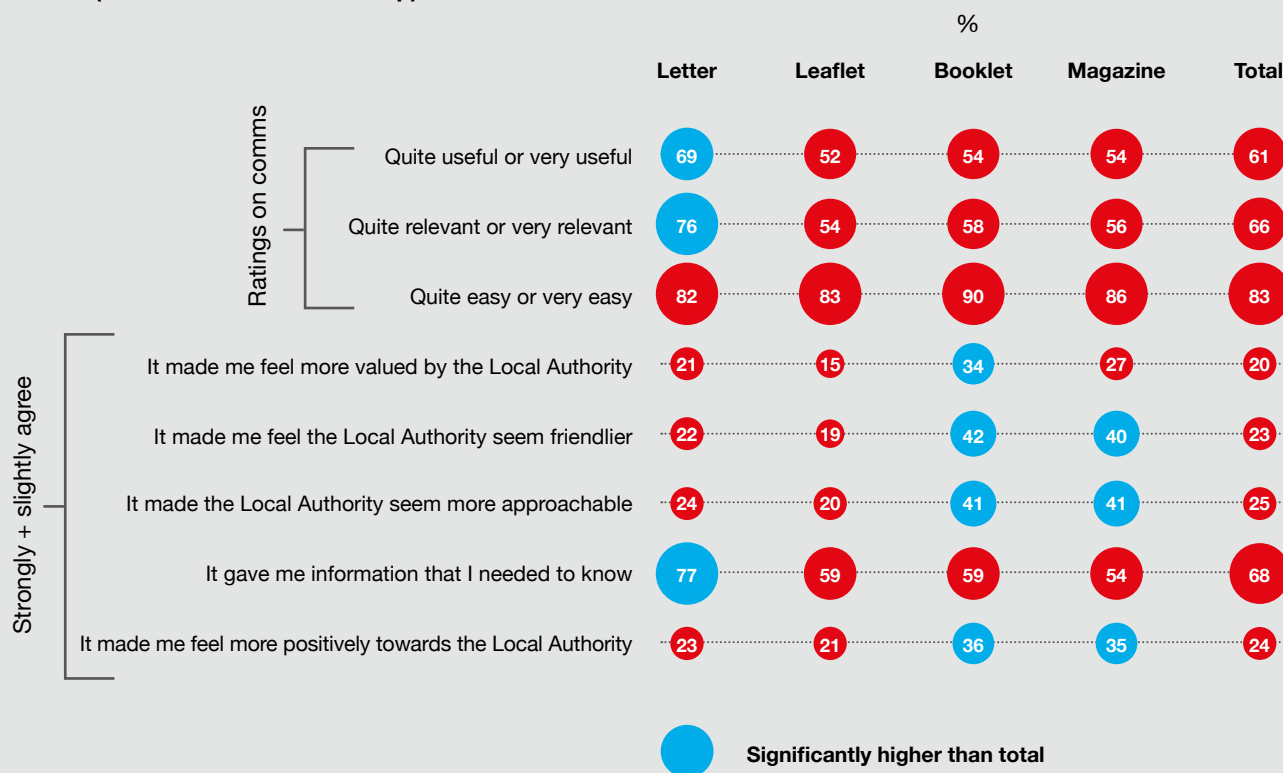
Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: 16-29, 469; 65+, 457

WHICH MAIL FORMATS ARE ENGAGED WITH?

Different formats have a different impact on the recipient. Letters are seen as the most useful and relevant format. They are also most likely to give the recipient the information they need to know, perhaps because letters are often associated with addressed mail and more targeted communications.

Booklets and magazines are more likely to make the Local Authority seem friendlier and more approachable.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about receiving (addressed mail / door drop)?



The blue circles are statistically more significant, showing us that citizens rate letters as the most useful format of communication, agreeing strongly that “It gave me information that I needed to know”.

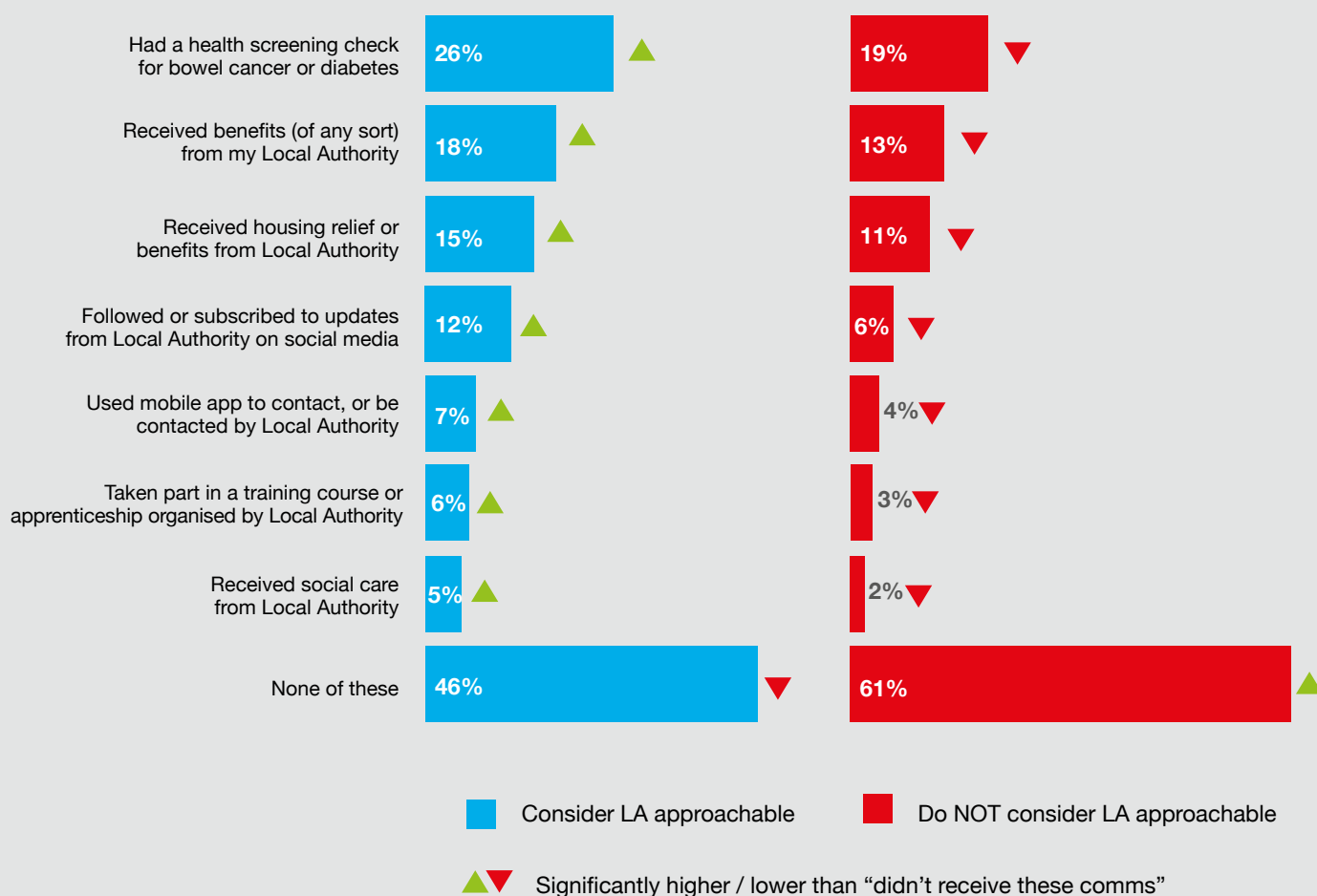
36% said a booklet “made them feel more positively towards the sender”, while a similar number said the same about receiving a magazine.

Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: all received mail comms for topics other than Council Tax: Up to 2 days (210); A few days to 2 weeks (240); 3 weeks to 2 months (253); 3 months or more (340).

How engagement impacts compliance

Those who consider their Local Authority to be approachable are more likely to have taken an action that the Local Authority was promoting.

Which of the following have you / members of your family done in the last year?



Those who felt engaged were more likely to have gone for a health screening, received benefits and so on. These numbers were higher than for those who didn’t consider their Local Authority to be approachable.

Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: those that have seen / heard / received comms from Local Authority: online (2,511), offline (150)

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS

In previous research we've undertaken, a trend emerged that health and well-being communications are highly valued pieces of mail, especially those relating to appointments or health checks.

% Agree	It is vital to keep warm in winter	I am trying to eat more healthily	I am trying to lose weight	I aim to schedule regular health checks	Base (n)
All local media	84	▲ 86	55	▲ 68	74
Mail	90	▲ 88	45	▲ 65	42
Door drop	▲ 96	▲ 94	55	▲ 71	45
All digital channels	83	79	55	55	34
Didn't receive Health & Well-being comms	86	70	49	39	2501

▲/▼ Significantly higher / lower than 'didn't receive these comms'

We found that 6.3% of recipients recalled seeing or receiving communications on health and well-being from their Local Authority.

What was particularly significant was that those who recalled receiving this type of information through the post (addressed mail and door drop) were more likely to agree with key health statements than those who received messages through digital channels (email, text and social media).

The fundamental association of mail with important and personal / confidential matters means it is considered highly suitable to convey messages about health, similarly seen as important and very private.

Mail provides a consistent, tangible reminder, allowing the recipient to write an appointment in their diary or simply remember a date because they have encountered the paperwork several times. It also allows information that needs consideration and understanding to be digested in a peaceful environment and in one's own time.

Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: 195

Changing or modifying our behaviour is a process rather than an action, and if the idea of doing so sinks in more gradually there is a better chance of consideration and understanding.

“It works well because a letter invites a response – it’s a prime example of where mail can encourage you to respond if it’s made easy to do so.”

Retiree, Lambeth

“I would prefer to have hospital appointments on paper so I could refer to it quickly than having to go through and sort through emails.”

Sharer, Gateshead

“If you’ve got a letter for an appointment... I can keep referring back to that to know when the appointment is... for me with health matters then I do like to have it through the post.”

Empty Nester, Solihull
(Keeps her health correspondence in her diary until she has ‘completed’ the task or appointment)

Source: Communications in Electoral Engagement, Royal Mail MarketReach, Illuminas 2017. Base: All answers by media (Wave 2)

HOW DO PEOPLE INTERACT WITH MAGAZINES?

We also took a look at two different types of regular communication from Local Authorities.

Eastbourne produce a quarterly 12-page update and Gateshead a bigger and glossier 60-page magazine.

Recognition for both is high, but is higher for the Gateshead publication with 52% recalling having received it and 63% recognising it as being from their Local Authority.

GATESHEAD

A 60-page magazine sent out quarterly to all homes



63% recognise the communication is from their Local Authority

52% recall receiving it through the post

EASTBOURNE

A 12-page newspaper-style booklet sent out quarterly to all homes

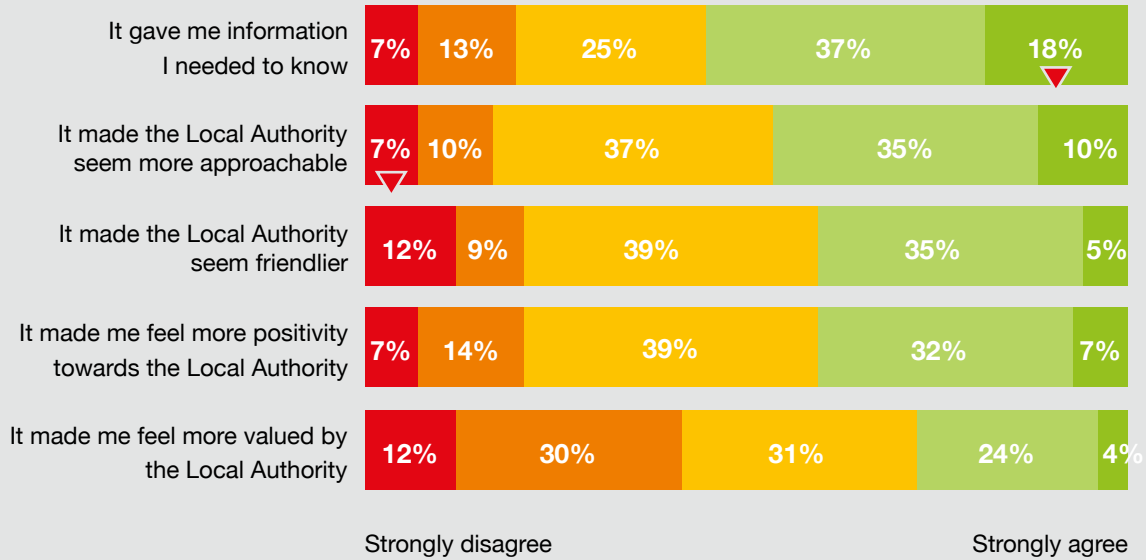


51% recognise the communication is from their Local Authority

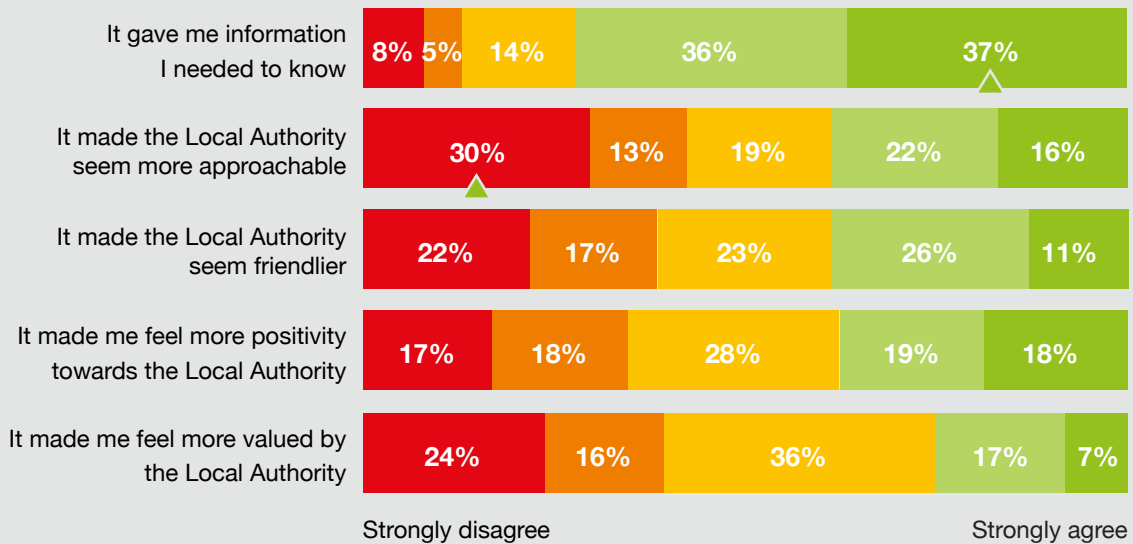
42% recall receiving it through the post

The newspaper-style booklet conveys information more efficiently than the magazine, but may make the Local Authority appear less approachable and more remote.

Gateshead



Eastbourne



▲ ▼ Significantly higher / lower than other LA

37% of recipients in Eastbourne “strongly agreed” that the magazine “gave me information that I needed to know”, and 36% “agreed” with the same statement. This was lower in Gateshead where only 55% collectively “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement.

On the flip side, the Gateshead magazine scored higher for making the Local Authority seem

more approachable and had slightly higher scores around improving positivity towards them.

Magazines are appreciated on a functional level for providing information on what’s happening locally. There is also an understanding that given the low budgets for promotional communications, people need to ‘keep their eye out’ for these publications rather than expect to see them heavily advertised.

Source: Royal Mail Local Government Research, Illuminas, 2017. Base: All participants that received the comms: Eastbourne (42); Gateshead (56)

Discussions revealed that magazines are more important and valued for creating a sense of community. That's especially true where people are new to the area and don't feel they know what's going on or the sorts of activities they could get involved in.

This content covers events, sports centres, adult education and so on, but also the feeling of being part of a wider area with friendly faces and a sense of inclusion.

“I personally prefer that [referring to and holding magazine] to an email, because I can flick through and find... this festival, rather than scrolling through your emails.”

Sharer
Gateshead

“I think less people are likely to read the magazine if it's digitised. I'm in front of a screen ten hours a day... if they emailed it to me, you'd think 'oh, that's just junk'. I think there is some value in post because people are more likely to actually look at it.”

Sharer
Gateshead

“It feels more personal and important than just getting an email. When I moved here it would have been nice for Gateshead Council to send a pack saying 'Welcome to Gateshead Council' and be notified of the perks of the area.”

Sharer
Gateshead

CONCLUSIONS

- Mail is highly recalled, alongside door drop, with 61% of people saying they recalled a piece of mail from their Local Authority during the past 12 months
- People most readily recall communications about council tax (58%) and local elections (50%)
- Email is recalled, but at a much lower rate (10%)
- Recall of mail and door drop is consistent across all ages, except for 16-24 year-olds where it is slightly lower
- Mail is retained – 32% of council tax bills are kept for three months or longer
- Letters are likely to be kept the longest – 39% are kept for over three weeks
- And the longer something is kept the more impact it has against measures such as feeling valued and making the Local Authority seem friendlier and more approachable, making the recipient feel more positive towards them
- Overwhelmingly, mail was selected as the preferred channel of communication for council tax, elections, updates, etc
- Current trends might suggest that younger people only engage digitally, whereas they're only slightly lower than over 65s on most measures
- Different formats have different impacts, and letters are seen as the most relevant and useful – “good at providing the information I needed to know”
- Those citizens who thought their Local Authority was more approachable were more likely to have engaged with them on some level
- Mail also motivates people to engage in health matters
- And magazines are engaged with at a functional level but they also go deeper and engage people in their local community



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