TRUST in
public institutions

"Whether we're selling a political message or a packet of cereal, everyone in the communications business is now faced with a fundamental decline in trust ... You can have all the facts and figures, all the supporting evidence, all the endorsement that you want, but if you don't command trust, you won't get anywhere. And trust, of course, is the one thing that can't be built in a one-off spate of advertising. Trust is built over the long term, on the basis not of communication but of action. And then again, trust, once established, can be lost in an instant - one ill-judged remark and it's gone forever."

Neil Fitzgerald, Chairman, Unilever, Address to the Advertising Association, May 2001

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Introduction

This volume contains the key findings of a research study conducted by MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the Audit Commission.

Research Objectives

The purpose of the research is to explore the concept of trust in public institutions. In addition to considering trust in institutions at a general level, the research specifically focuses on the National Health Service, the Criminal Justice System and Local Government.

The study examines the following research questions:

- How do the public define trust?

- Is trust declining or increasing?

- What are the key drivers of trust and distrust – how is trust established and lost?

- What impact does trust have on public engagement with, and use of, services and organisations?

- How does trust vary between public and private institutions? How do the public perceive and react to high profile scandals in the public (e.g. Alder Hey) and private sectors (e.g. Enron)?

- How can public institutions begin to foster greater levels of trust in themselves and the services they provide?

Methodology

MORI undertook two phases of research for this study:

- Desk research to scope the project and gather the findings of research conducted to date, predominantly quantitative, concerning trust;

- Original qualitative research.

The review of existing research summarises the findings of recent public opinion surveys undertaken by MORI and other research organisations. It draws predominantly upon national studies but also incorporates, where appropriate, studies at the level of an individual local authority.

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The original qualitative research involved four focus groups conducted between 3rd – 11th December 2002. Participants were selected according to specific criteria using a recruitment questionnaire. Recruitment was guided by:

- Geographic factors – to reflect and compare different locations across England;

- Levels of trust – a mix of participants who are naturally trusting or distrusting, which was determined according to a standard British Social Attitudes Survey question at the recruitment stage;

- Socio-demographic factors – to investigate trust according to factors such as ethnicity, age, and social class.

The group compositions were as follows:

Group 1: Bristol, White British, mix of men and women, aged 45-60, social class ABC1, mix of those naturally trusting or distrusting.

Group 2: Sheffield, White British, mix of men and women, aged 18-35, social class C1C2D, mix of those naturally trusting or distrusting.

Group 3: Newham (London), Black/Black British, mix of men and women, aged 18-35, social class C2DE, mix of those naturally trusting or distrusting.

Group 4: Birmingham, Asian/Asian British, mix of men and women, aged 18-35, social class C2DE, mix of those naturally trusting or distrusting.

The topic guide (used as an *aide memoir* by the moderator) was designed by MORI in conjunction with the Audit Commission, and is included in the Appendices.

Interpretation of the Data / Report structure

This report presents the findings of quantitative and qualitative research, which have been used as complementary research methodologies in this study. It is therefore important to note the differences between the two types of research and the conclusions we can reasonably draw from them.

The quantitative research provides 'hard' data that is statistically representative. In this respect it is possible to quantify observations and extrapolate findings to the wider public, for example 'one in three people trust the government to tell the truth'. Nevertheless it should still be noted that in each case a *sample*, not the entire population, has been interviewed. Therefore all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means not all differences are statistically significant.

The qualitative research is an interactive process between researcher and participants: it allows respondents' attitudes and opinions to be explored in detail, and provides an insight into the key reasons underlying their views. However, discussion results are based only on a small cross-section of the public and so findings are *illustrative* and *indicative*, not statistically representative. It is not possible to quantify findings or suggest they reflect the attitudes of the wider public, and so these findings are attributed to the *participants* rather than the *public.*

Transcripts

The discussions were taped with participants' permission and edited only to remove the names of the participants and individuals mentioned in the discussions. They are included in an accompanying report under separate cover.

Acknowledgements

MORI would like to thank Mark Wardman and Sasha Morgan at the Audit Commission for their help in developing the project, topic guide and this report.

Publication of Data

As with all our studies, findings from this study are subject to our Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract. In order to protect the Audit Commission, any press release or publication of the findings of this survey requires the advance approval of MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

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Bobby Duffy

Philip Downing

Gideon Skinner

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Summary & Conclusions

Defining trust

There is no one universal definition of trust. In one sense trust is about honesty and 'telling the truth', but in the context of public services it can also be about wider considerations around service delivery. Here, trust is synonymous with 'confidence' and 'satisfaction', and based on the *outcome* of the service and the *way it is delivered.*

The impact of trust: does it matter?

The level of trust in an organisation affects levels of use and engagement with services. Where there is some choice, for example with NHS hospitals, several participants choose the hospital they think will provide the best quality of care. Where there are no alternatives, for example with some local Council services or the police, some avoid contact with services they do not trust unless it is absolutely essential. This can have a direct impact on how well services meet the wider community's needs – particularly if people are less willing to assist services, for example in the case of police, in reporting crimes or acting as witnesses.

Another consequence of a lack of trust in services appears to be a greater public vigilance, for example in terms of collecting relevant information, keeping records to 'cover' themselves, and asking additional questions. In this sense a decline in trust imposes an additional, unnecessary burden on both service users and providers.

How does trust vary?

Levels of trust vary considerably across different organisations and groups. For example, doctors, teachers, professors and judges are all highly trusted, whereas politicians, journalists and business leaders are not trusted. Trust also varies markedly *within* systems. For example, within the political system, trust is low in political parties, but higher in the Government and higher still in Parliament.

People make a distinction between *individuals* working for an organisation and the *organisation* as a whole. The former tend to be trusted more; people trust those they have most contact with (such as front-line staff), while they are more suspicious of 'bureaucrats' or 'management'. Also significant is a perception that there is something about 'the system' in itself that is inherently untrustworthy; whether it be internal targets or covering up mistakes, people perceive the organisation to subordinate the good intentions of individuals.

Is trust declining?

While trust in individual professions has generally remained static, trust in institutions has declined, in some cases quite significantly. This pattern is not restricted to the UK; declining trust in institutions is also apparent internationally. While the distinction between trust in individuals and organisations clearly explains part of this trend, other factors are also significant.

First, public expectations have risen over time; people expect more from organisations and the individuals representing them. This demonstrates the need to manage public expectations. However, it is important to note that it is very difficult to manage expectations downwards; rather than making expectations easier to meet, this can actually lead to a loss of confidence in the service itself. In this sense there is a clear need for more considered communications.

The second factor is a decline in deference to authority; people are less willing to accept Government or 'expert' advice without question. This appears to result from a combination of the power of local knowledge, the rise in individualism, and distrust in the wake of past mistakes on public safety issues such as BSE.

What determines trust?

People are influenced by a range of information sources. One of the most powerful appears to be personal experience and, likewise, the experiences of friends and family. The media also represent a significant influence, although there is widespread recognition that newspapers exaggerate.

While there are drivers of trust that are universal across the public, it is too simplistic to think of the public as a homogenous group; rather, sections within society will interpret trust differently and utilise alternative sources of information. The challenge for organisations is to understand these perspectives and engage them accordingly. For example, among some there is a desire to receive traditional information and advice from experts. However, others do not accept that experts have a monopoly on the 'right' answer, and believe they have valid concerns that should be addressed through dialogue and consent rather than by instruction.

Variations according to ethnicity are also significant. Loss of trust appears more pronounced among black and minority ethnic communities, who feel they are not treated equally or sufficiently represented in public services. This remains a particularly important issue for the relationship between the police and the Black community.

Trust and accountability

Trust is closely linked to the issue of accountability. A key concern of participants is the need for someone to take overall responsibility for services, for example having a single phone number to call about, say, the refuse service, and either the Council or the subcontractor taking action rather than passing the blame.

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Accountability is also significant in terms of reassuring people following mistakes, which they accept will happen. Participants agree that there needs to be three elements to this; an open admission of the incident, an apology, and positive steps to address the problem. However, there is a perception that the current practice is very different, with covering up mistakes, manipulating information and closing ranks to protect the organisation commonplace. Trust appears to be easily lost through mistakes and, because of a perception lack of accountability, very difficult to regain.

Public versus private institutions

While there is agreement among participants that the public sector is inefficient in comparison to the private sector, this is subject to two qualifications. First, inefficiency is not only confined to the public sector; participants believe that some private sector organisations are just as inefficient, while others believe that inefficiency is a function of size rather than any public-private divide.

Second, many participants do not consider inefficiency to always be a crucial consideration; irrespective of efficiency, people often trust the public sector more because the service is accountable to the public, whereas the private sector is governed by the needs of shareholders. Because of this, there remains strong support for public sector ethos. Participants already perceive there to be a lack of clear responsibility in terms of the subcontracting of basic council services and this impacts negatively on support for wider relations between the public and private sectors. Indeed, the public appear more accepting of some public-private partnerships *if* the public sector retains overall management, and hence accountability, of the service.

Developing trust

In addition to the conditions already noted for developing a trusting relationship between organisations and the public, four further criteria appear important. First, there is a strong desire for more information and openness. The impact of small aspects of the communication, such as tone and style, can be significant, and these nuances are very difficult to get right. Nevertheless, the significance of this issue is sufficient to warrant further attention by public agencies.

The second criterion is independence; 'independent' groups and scientists are trusted more across a range of issues (for example, pollution or BSE) than those working for business or government. Independence has also increased significantly as a quality people want to see in an MP. There is support for independent organisations to audit public agencies, *so long* as they have the power to hold the agency to account and bring about organisational change.

Third, public organisations need to be more personable in the way they deliver services and communicate. This encompasses the *information* they provide, the *visibility* of services, and *direct contact* with service users (for example, the friendliness and helpfulness). Front line staff are vital in initiating and then developing the trust relationship, but this is also an important issue for the corporate centre or organisations and their corporate governance arrangements.

Finally, leadership has an important impact on levels of trust in organisations. Honesty and trustworthiness are seen as the two most important qualities for public leaders, whether they be elected representatives or senior public managers. Given the distrust of corporate management and 'the system' already mentioned, visible leadership becomes a key factor in addressing the public's perception of remote and unaccountable organisations and 'bureaucrats'.

The diagram below summarises some of these key factors that influence levels of trust in public services.
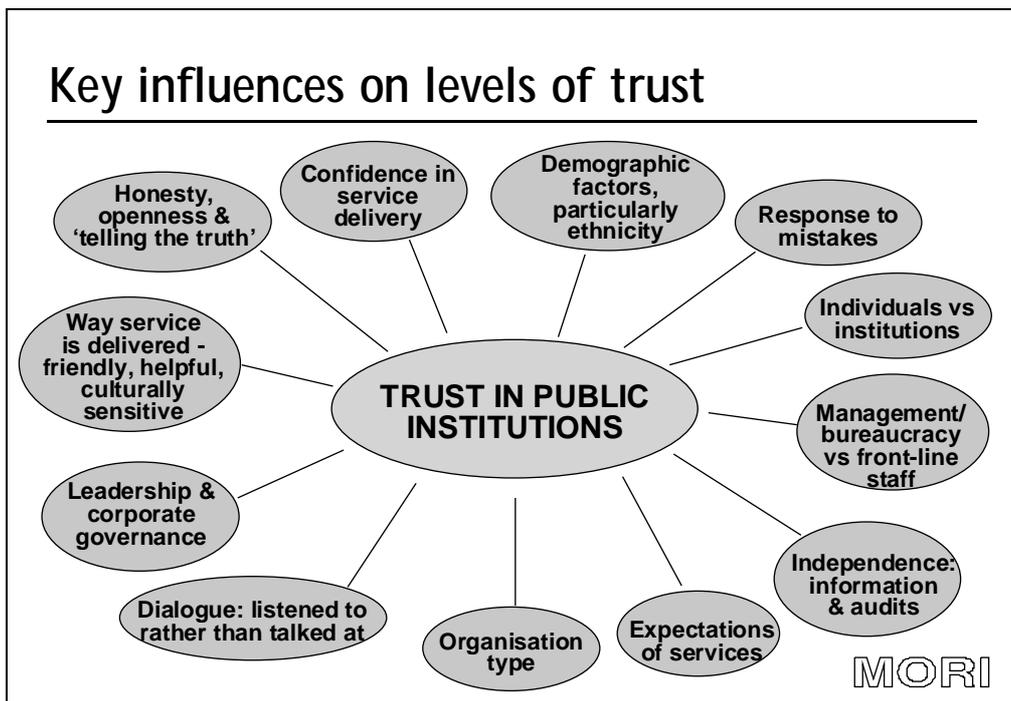
Defining trust

Trust is a multi-faceted concept that can mean several things to people; it does not appear to conform to any one universal definition. In one sense trust can be considered in a context of *information*, where 'honesty' and 'telling the truth' are the critical factors. Participants in the qualitative research appear to feel comfortable with trust in this sense because of its strong resonance with the way in which they conduct relationships in daily life (with friends, family and work colleagues, for example):

> *I think it's about a belief that what people or institutions say is true*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

> *We could have some more honesty in the way they [the council] report things. I would appreciate that*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

Trust also operates at the level of *service delivery*, relating to both the service itself (for example whether they can be trusted to keep their promises in delivering the service) and to the way in which the service is delivered (for example in a friendly and culturally sensitive manner). In this way trust is regarded by participants not to be an issue of truth and honesty, but rather one that is synonymous with 'confidence' and 'satisfaction' in the service:

> *I suppose you would trust them if they were there on time but if they are not going to be there when you need them then you lose trust*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

> *If they treated you nicely then you would probably say the police was ok but if they don't then you won't*
>
> Asian Female, 18-35, Birmingham

In either context, deciding whether to trust or distrust something or someone is not always a conscious process. Rather, it appears to often operate as an instinctive and intuitive reaction:

> *I hadn't thought about how much I trust them. If I am going in for an operation, I didn't think 'hang on, my life rests in this guy's hands'*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

> *I immediately think of faith and the implication that you have faith in something*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

The impact of trust: does it matter?

Prior to this research there appears to have been little information as to whether variations in trust actually impact on the way people interact and engage with public services. The focus group discussions suggest that the level of trust does indeed affect the way in which people use services, and there are three main responses. First, under circumstances where there is choice, most participants have experience of transferring their custom to an alternative:

> *A woman comes out and says you have got a seven hour wait, so I took him to Solihull and the nurse saw his bleeding finger and before she took any details she bandaged it up. It was a very different service there*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

However, with some public institutions such as the police and local authority, residents have no alternative provider and hence no choice, other than to use the service or not. Here, many participants continue to use and trust because they have no choice but to do so:

> *With something like the NHS your life is in their hands, and on a lot of occasions you have to trust them*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

> *My grandson was diagnosed with meningitis, and absolutely superb, you can't believe the service. But I spent three days with a finger half hanging off and they couldn't even get me a bed – so I think it depends where you go and which department you're in*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

> *You have got to use it basically because when you need it you need it. That's it*
>
> Asian Female, 18-35, Birmingham

> *Whether we don't like them we still have to stick with them*
>
> Asian Female, 18-35, Birmingham

> *You can withdraw your services, but public services you cannot, you have no ultimate threat*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

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Nevertheless, even under this 'enforced' use and trust of some public services, there is evidence that participants modify their behaviour. One impact appears to be greater client awareness and responsibility for obtaining information about the service and the questions they should be asking; again, a lack of trust that they will be provided with all the relevant information seems to cause them to gather it in order to 'cover themselves':

I've got all the letters documented

White Female, 45-60, Bristol

I mean you have got to have registered post and take photocopies of things to take to insurance companies. You've got to have a paper trail now

White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

That's made me become more aware of asking the right questions like the figures for a particular consultant

White Female, 45-60, Bristol

I think the public's much more aware of what's happening and I think some of that's come around with auditing and figures being available

White Female, 45-60, Bristol

Of concern is the fact that several participants claim they don't use the service, or only do so when it is absolutely necessary. In this way loss of trust can have a detrimental impact on engaging the public:

I just don't bother

White Female, 45-60, Bristol

I absolutely dread having to deal with them [the council], absolutely dread it. If I can possibly avoid it I will

White Female, 45-60, Bristol

You don't bother calling them [the police] because you know they are going to take ages or are not going to turn up

Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

I just don't bother with them [the council] because I know it is going to be long and they are going to stress my head out, I'd rather do it on my own

Black Female, 18-35, London

If I have problems I wouldn't call the police

Black Male, 18-35, London

Furthermore, there are indications from some participants in the groups that trust is hard to regain once it has been lost. There is a sense that suspicion and scepticism are the norm:

> *It would be a fairly long haul I think [to start being positive about them again]*
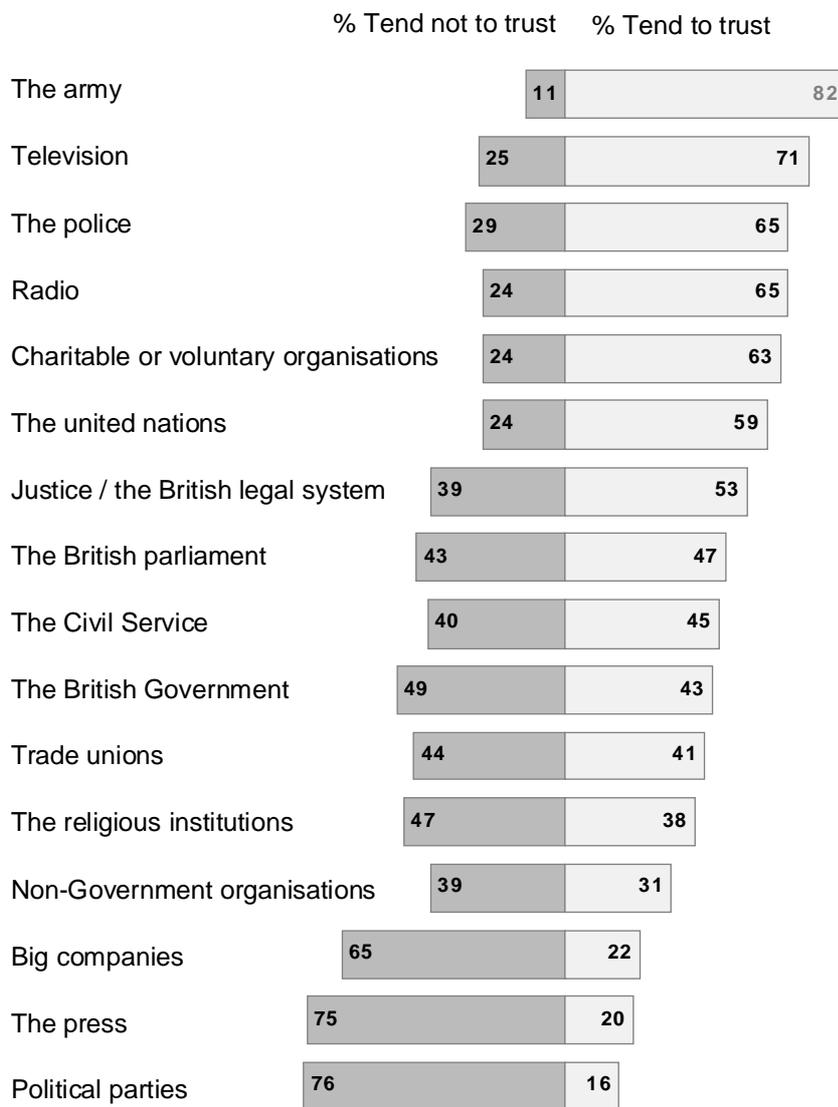>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

> *With the police nothing is going to change it, it has been like that from day one*
>
> Black Male, 18-35, London

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How does trust vary?

Existing survey evidence suggests that public trust *varies considerably* across different organisations. For example, as many as four in five (82%) trust the army, while significant numbers also trust the Police (65%), the United Nations (59%) and the British Criminal Justice system (53%). Contrast this with large companies (22%), the press (20%) and political parties (16%).

Q   I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?

% Tend not to trust   % Tend to trust

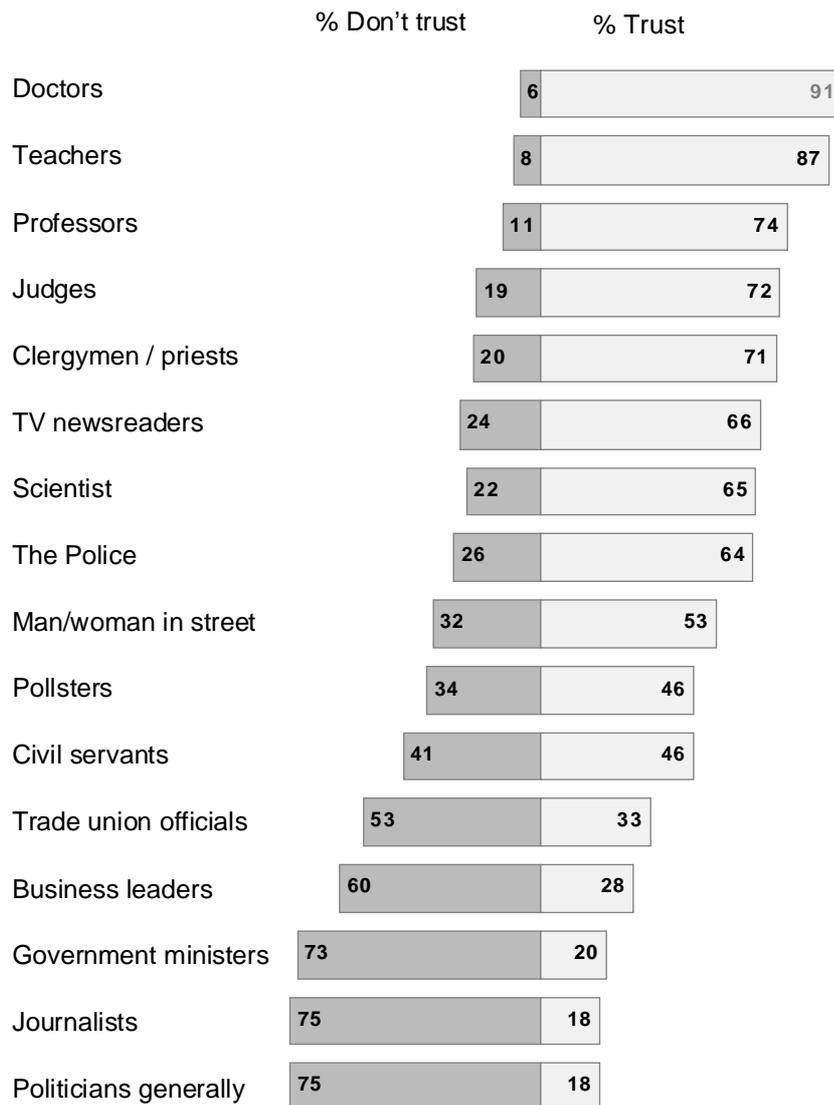| Institution	% Tend not to trust	% Tend to trust
The army	11	82
Television	25	71
The police	29	65
Radio	24	65
Charitable or voluntary organisations	24	63
The united nations	24	59
Justice / the British legal system	39	53
The British parliament	43	47
The Civil Service	40	45
The British Government	49	43
Trade unions	44	41
The religious institutions	47	38
Non-Government organisations	39	31
Big companies	65	22
The press	75	20
Political parties	76	16

Base: 1,000 Adults in Great Britain, 2001, Eurobarometer 56   Source: MORI

Trust in the *individuals* that represent an organisation follows a similar pattern, and is indeed often higher than in the organisation itself. Doctors are very highly trusted (91%), as are teachers (85%), priests (80%) and judges (77%). In contrast, business leaders, politicians in general and journalists tend to not be trusted.

Q *Now I will read out a list of different types of people. For each, would you tell me whether you generally trust them to tell the truth or not?*

	% Don't trust	% Trust
Doctors	6	91
Teachers	8	87
Professors	11	74
Judges	19	72
Clergymen / priests	20	71
TV newsreaders	24	66
Scientist	22	65
The Police	26	64
Man/woman in street	32	53
Pollsters	34	46
Civil servants	41	46
Trade union officials	53	33
Business leaders	60	28
Government ministers	73	20
Journalists	75	18
Politicians generally	75	18

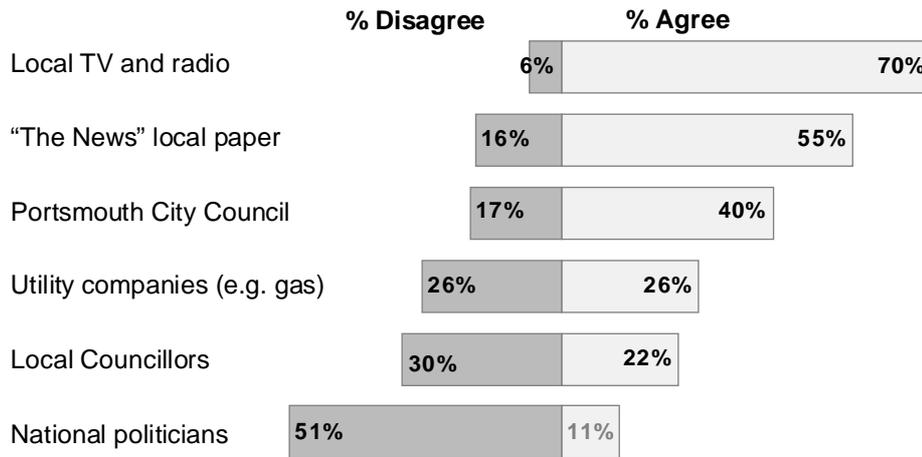Base: 2,141 British Adults 15+, MORI/BMA   Source: MORI

While distrust is typical in politics, it is noteworthy that levels of trust vary quite markedly *within* the political system. Political parties fare the worst (only 16% trust them), in contrast to the British Parliament which achieves much higher levels of trust (47%). Levels of trust in the Government itself (43%) are not as low as political parties, but remain on balance negative, with more people distrusting.

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Exploring Trust in Public Institutions, Report for the Audit Commission

Similarly, research in Portsmouth[1] on trust in information indicates that residents are able to make a distinction between the Council as a whole (which fares relatively well in gaining public trust), local councillors (who are less trusted than the authority overall) and finally MPs who are the least trusted of the three. Both of these examples demonstrate that the public feel informed enough to make distinctions on the issue of trust, both *between* and *within* organisations.

Trust in local area

Q   To what extent do you agree or disagree that the information from the following sources is accurate and trustworthy?

	% Disagree	**% Agree**
Local TV and radio	6%	70%
"The News" local paper	16%	55%
Portsmouth City Council	17%	40%
Utility companies (e.g. gas)	26%	26%
Local Councillors	30%	22%
National politicians	51%	11%

Base: 575 Portsmouth residents, 2001   Source: MORI

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[1] Portsmouth Citizens' Panel, October-November 2001, MORI

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Is trust declining?

The data on levels of trust over time is mixed. MORI time-series data back to 1983 suggests that trust has remained relatively static across most groups.

Q   Would you tell me whether you generally trust . . . . to tell the truth or not?

■ 1983   ■ 1993   □ 1997   ■ 2000   □ 2002
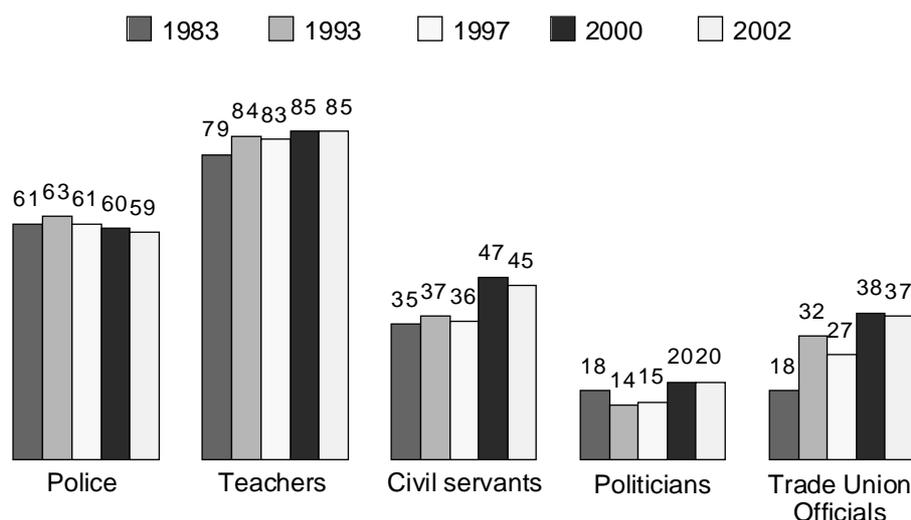
Base: c.1,000/2,000 British Adults aged 18+

Source: 1983/1993 MORI/The Times
1997 MORI/Cancer Research Campaign
2002/3 MORI/BMA

In contrast, time-series data from the Henley Centre, as reported in the Strategy Unit's[2] work on risk, suggests that *'a wide range of UK institutions have suffered a significant drop in trust over the past two decades'*. For example, the proportion of the public who said they have either "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of trust in Parliament fell from 54 per cent in 1983 to 10 per cent in 1996. Trust in the Civil Service fell from 46 per cent to 14 per cent over the same period. Since then, levels have recovered, although only slightly (14% and 17% respectively).

Other evidence also suggests that trust in public institutions has declined. At an international level, a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report[3] confirms that *"several driving forces have led OECD countries to focus attention on strengthening their relations with citizens, including the steady erosion of voter turnout in elections, falling membership in political parties and surveys showing declining confidence in key public institutions"*. The Strategy Unit's report on risk also draws attention to the variety of commentators and academics who have noted declining trust internationally, including the World Values Survey[4] and the work of Ronald Inglehart[5] on trust, well-being and democracy.

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[2] *Risk: Improving government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty,* Strategy Unit, 2002
[3] OECD, *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy Making,* 2001
[4] World Values Survey http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/papers/trust.html
[5] Inglehart, R, *Trust, well-being and democracy,* in Warren (ed.), *Democracy and Trust,* Cambridge University Press, 1999 (pp.88-120)

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Accounting for variations in trust

On first reading these two data sets appear to contradict each other, and may suggest that the evidence at this time is inconclusive. However, it is likely that the subtle differences in wording between the two question sets has caused the public to consider trust in different contexts, and hence respond differently to each. Principally, there appears to be a difference between trust in the context of honesty and trust in service delivery. Variations in trust also appear to reflect a difference between trust in individuals and trust in organisations. Furthermore, the research suggests that two other factors are significant in helping to explain variations in trust: shifts in public expectations and declining deference to authority. These are now considered in turn.

A. Confidence in delivery versus 'telling the truth'

Given that, as already discussed, there are multiple interpretations of the term 'trust', perceptions of trust vary between these different interpretations. For example, the MORI question wording is tightly focused on trust in 'telling the truth', and in this sense trust appears to have remained relatively stable. In contrast, the Henley Centre question considers trust in a broader context, and is likely to include confidence in service delivery as well as honesty of information.

If this is indeed the distinction, then the results would suggest that while there has been no real change in expectations that, for example, the Civil Service will tell the truth, people now rate them less highly on service delivery. Indeed, the focus groups suggest that trust in service delivery is now a more salient issue than trust in more classical sense of 'telling the truth':
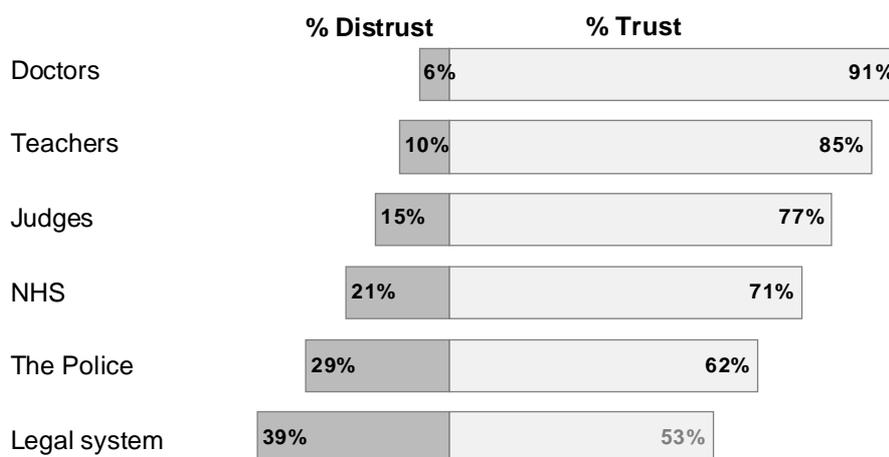
> *It isn't a matter of trust, if they do their job we are happy*
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

B. Trust in individuals versus organisations

The two questions also point to the possible influence of whether people are being asked their trust in *individuals* or their trust in *organisations*. For example, the MORI question wording focuses on individuals telling the truth, while the Henley Centre wording focuses on organisations as a whole. This suggests that trust in individuals has remained relatively stable while trust in institutions has declined, which has implications for organisations' governance arrangements.

Indeed, other research strongly supports the hypothesis that trust in individuals working for an organisation and trust in the organisation itself are two different things. For example, while public trust in doctors to tell the truth is very high (91%), the level of trust falls to 71% when the same question is asked of the NHS as a whole. This pattern is evident for other groups, for example judges and the Criminal Justice System as a whole.

Trust in organisations

	% Distrust	% Trust
Doctors	6%	91%
Teachers	10%	85%
Judges	15%	77%
NHS	21%	71%
The Police	29%	62%
Legal system	39%	53%

Base: 1,972 British Adults 15+, MORI/BMA   Source: MORI

This finding is supported by the focus group discussions; participants generally make a distinction between the individuals representing an organisation and the wider organisation itself. Indeed, even though participants for the focus groups were recruited to either be naturally trusting or distrusting, this distinction was in fact too general and missed the nuances of trust; participants are trusting in one context (for example, towards individuals) and not in others. The reason appears to be that trust in individuals is more personal and specific, based upon relationships and familiarity:

> *You trust individuals rather than the organisation they represent. So you trust doctors and nurses, for example, but you wouldn't trust the NHS as a whole*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

> *You can judge from things like the tone of their voice. You're talking directly to them*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

> *You trust in human nature. If you were that person you'd do whatever you could to help them, so you trust they've got the same attitude.*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

Another reason is that participants believe that there are other individuals within the organisation – referred to collectively as the '*management*' or '*bureaucrats*' – who counterbalance the good work of the 'frontline' staff. This has significant implications for the relationship between the corporate centre and frontline service divisions. The corporate centre has little identity to service users, and consequently they are unable to relate to - and hence trust - them:

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> *You trust the staff but you don't trust the bureaucrats behind them, and you probably don't trust bureaucrats anywhere*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

> *The management don't care and they are only there to do 9am to 5pm or whatever and go home*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

> *I just think that if people in a position of power actually cared about the people underneath them then you would see a better service*
>
> Black Female, 18-35, London

Finally, there appears to be a perception that there is something about organisations *themselves* that is inherently untrustworthy. Several participants across all the groups make negative references to '*the system*'. Examples include management targets for doctors to see a certain number of patients (therefore decreasing the amount of time they can spend with any one patient), or organisations 'closing ranks' following a mistake or scandal. In a political sense this translates to a dislike of 'party politics', whereby participants perceive a local MP to be constrained to their party's line on an issue irrespective of local need. In this sense there is some evidence that participants resent targets that are not locally-driven, which has implications for agencies driven more from central government:

> *You might actually think your local MP is good, but as soon as they become part of the Labour Party and has to vote in line, then that worries us greatly*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

The dislike of party politics is something that is well documented in quantitative research, with trend data available back as far as 1974. While even at this time just over half of people (56%) did not trust the Government to place the needs of the nation before the interests of the Party, this has now increased steadily to as many as seven in ten people. Counter to this growing dislike of Party politics, there is an increasing desire for MPs to be more independent-minded; while 37% said this was an important quality in 1983, this had increased to 52% by 1996.

Q   How much do you trust British Government of any party to place the needs of the nation before the interests of their own political party?
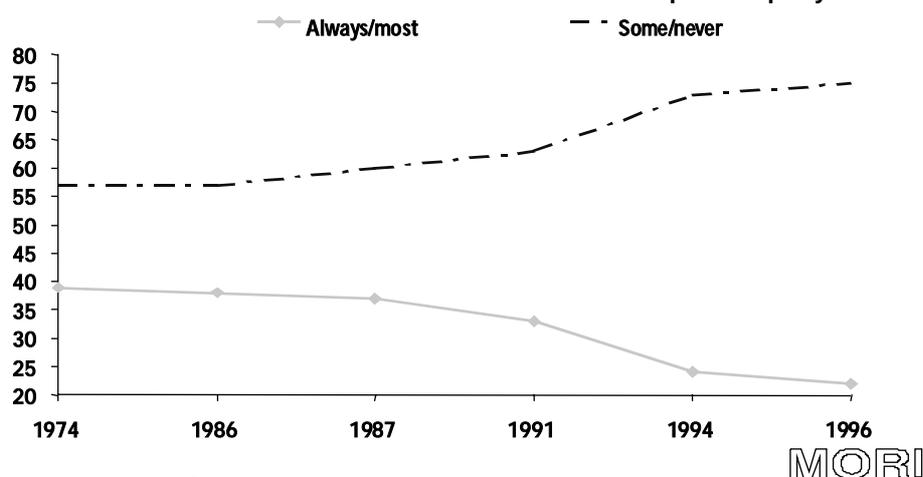
Base: SCRP's *British Social Attitudes* Survey series

C. Rising expectations

Part of the driving force behind increasing distrust or falling confidence are levels of public expectations which appear to have risen over time. For example, the British Social Attitudes surveys reveal that the personal criteria by which politicians are judged have become more stringent.

Expectations in politicians (1983-1996) - % saying following "important"			
	1983	**1994**	**1996**
Base: All respondents (1180)	*%*	*%*	*%*
Well educated	50	55	61
Brought up in the local area	48	60	62
Loyal to party	42	45	45
To be independent-minded	37	48	52
To know what being poor means	27	41	47
To have business experience	22	30	34
			Source: British Social Attitudes

The Government's Strategy Unit[6] also acknowledges the rise in public expectations. They report that the People's Panel surveys[7] found that half of respondents gave a high priority to increased access to public services at evenings and weekends, while a Cabinet Office survey[8] found that three quarters of respondents expected faster services and 46% expected greater simplicity. Furthermore, participants in the group discussions acknowledge their rising expectations:

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[6] *Risk: Improving government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty*, Strategy Unit, 2002

[7] People's Panel, 4th wave results, Open all hours, 2000

[8] *Electronic Government: the view from the queue*, Cabinet Office, 1998

> *Our expectations rise all the time, so even if the service does improve our perception of it perhaps is that it's either standing still or not improving*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

Clearly it is important not to raise expectations to unrealistic levels by communications on service ability; indeed, one of the responsibilities of public agencies is to manage expectations. However, the research suggests this is a particularly difficult balance to strike without impacting negatively on public confidence in the service. The group discussions suggest it is very difficult to manage expectations *downwards*; rather than making them easier to meet, the evidence suggests that it may simply make it more likely that people will lose confidence in the service. In the context of the group discussions this was discussed in relation to the police; participants believe they have given up investigating crimes such as burglary:

> *I have had a friend beaten up, a Police car went by and we stopped it and they said 'there is nothing we can do, it's just the society we live in'. And I was like, hang on a minute*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

> *We had our house broken into a few times. They come round and they have a look around but they say 'we won't find them, we can't really do much about it'. Fair enough they are being honest, but it doesn't really help, you know*
>
> White Female, 18-35, Sheffield

> *When you phone about a crime they just give you an insurance number. They don't help you*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

D. Declining deference to 'experts'

The focus group discussions suggest that deference to authority or experts - for example the acceptance of Government or scientific advice on public health issues - is declining. Many participants simply do not accept that experts know the 'right' answer:

> *This is assuming they have a right or wrong answer. The whole point is they don't have a monopoly to any one thing*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

This reaction again seems linked to the powerful impact of personal experience and knowledge; local knowledge that people acquire through their daily lives and their own observations is enough to offset official information or advice where they come into conflict. It also results from experience of past mistakes; participants are aware that 'experts' were wrong about issues such as BSE, and that statistics can be manipulated to suit a particular viewpoint:

If someone said to me 'you can trust my committee or whatever, we're experts', I'd think 'yes, I can trust you to do exactly what you want and try to bamboozle me'

White Male, 45-60, Bristol

He came back with three pages of statistical rubbish, and he said 'the traffic has not increased since 1992', which I find incredibly hard to believe. I mean I've lived there for the whole of that time

White Male, 45-60, Bristol

I think it's too important to leave to so-called scientific experts. There are scientific opinions just as there are opinions of ordinary people and depending on your training or your upbringing you will have a [bias]

White Male, 45-60, Bristol

The Strategy Unit[9] acknowledge the close relationship between declining trust and the decline in deference, and note the *"significant implications for risk management because often risks can only be successfully managed if there is sufficient trust to ensure government can exercise leadership".* Further, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee[10] reports that *"Public confidence in scientific advice to government has been rocked by BSE, and many people are uneasy about the rapid advance of areas such as biotechnology and IT…This crisis of confidence is of great importance to both British Society and to British Science".*

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[9] Risk: Improving government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty, Strategy Unit, 2002
[10] House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee, Third Report: Science and Society, 2000

MORI

What determines trust?

There appear to be certain key influences behind public trust or distrust. Participants in the group discussions acknowledge that they are influenced by a range of information sources. Accordingly, the first point to note is people seek out a range of different perspectives from which to form their own opinion:

> *I don't think I would trust any [one thing]. I would always like to have somebody behind me asking a different set of questions and interpreting answers in a different way*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

Recent qualitative research[11] also suggests that given time limitations and the sheer number of information sources now available to the public, they often respond by trying to establish two main sides of the argument, and then seek where possible the 'middle' or 'moderate' solution that tries to take both sides into account.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that even though different sources of information may be taken into account, there are certain sources that are relied upon and trusted more than others. By far the most significant influence, without exception, is personal experience, closely followed by the experience of friends, family and other people:

> *It was a keyhole surgery job and I was very impressed. I was only in for two days and was walking again by the end of the week. So my only experience was really very positive*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

> *A cousin of mine went to his GP, he just fobbed him off with different things. It turns out he's got a brain tumour.*
>
> White Female, 18-35, Sheffield

> *My friend is on a [NHS] placement and she has to do a lot of work on her own that she doesn't feel qualified to do*
>
> White Female, 18-35, Sheffield

> *I think you're more likely to trust the nurses and doctors that you actually know as friends and your own experience because that's the final analysis you can really trust*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

---

[11] *Public Attitudes to Waste Management and Recycling*, Strategy Unit/MORI, 2002

> *I think [the NHS] is alright, because on two occasions I went to the hospital and it was alright*
>
> Asian Female, 18-35, Birmingham

> *If something has happened to your mates or something has happened in the area and you are having a chat and you listen to what is going on and it just feeds into your brain*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

The media is prominent in helping to shape public opinion. Newspapers are particularly significant, although there is acknowledgement that they exaggerate and only focus on negative stories (and so participants make an 'adjustment' for this, in effect toning their reporting down). Therefore, without discounting the impact of the media, other sources of information (such as personal experience) seem to play a more significant role:

> *I think you trust the media on the basis that they do reveal the truth but exaggerate, so I take it with a pinch of salt*
>
> White Female, 18-35, Sheffield

Of course, while there are drivers of trust that are universal across the public as a whole, it is also evident that it is overly simplistic to treat the public as a uniform group. For example, the group discussions reveal different opinions on the issue of how much 'expert' advice should be trusted. Some participants believe in the process whereby the agency provides advice which the public then listens to and obeys. Others take a much more individualistic view, and, while not ignoring advice from experts, reject the idea that the experts know best:

> *I would go for a professional opinion or a doctor*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

> *The thing with jabs, the doctors know a bit of information*
>
> Asian Female, 18-35, Birmingham

> *This assumes scientists have a right or wrong answer. The point is they don't have a monopoly to say yes or no*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

> *Each individual goes on our personal experience and history really*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

Public agencies will need to understand these differences better if they are to engage and develop trust among all sections of the public.

MORI

Variations by ethnicity

The research suggests that variations according to ethnicity are significant. Within the focus groups, loss of trust appears most pronounced among the young Black/Black British participants, particularly in respect to the police. Whereas all groups hold some negative attitudes towards the Criminal Justice System, those of Black participants appear more deeply rooted. Their concerns are also different, to an extent, than among other communities; specifically focusing on issues of discrimination and inequality as opposed to poor service or inability to catch perpetrators of crimes, which are the main concerns of White residents:

> *They don't look at you as a person, they look as you as a potential criminal*
>
> Black Female, 18-35, London

> *You're black – arrest them*
>
> Black Male, 18-35, London

> *When you are walking down the street and you get searched for no reason, they just want you to argue with them so they can arrest you. When that happens you start mistrusting them and feel that these people are against me*
>
> Black Male, 18-35, London

Such comments are consistent with a wide range of other research projects, including a study in Southwark[12] among young people (11-13 and 16-19 year olds) in response to the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry. The report comments that *"there is widespread cynicism and entrenched hostility towards the police among all young people we spoke to, but it is particularly strong among Black teenagers…who believe they are accused of crimes simply on the grounds of their colour"*.

They are also consistent with research into attitudes towards the Criminal Justice System in the West Midlands[13]. Across all Criminal Justice agencies the attitudes of the Black community is in stark contrast to White residents. For example, over half of Black residents (56%) *disagree* that the police treat people from ethnic minorities as fairly as it treats White people, compared to only 16% of White residents.

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[12] *Responding to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Researching Young People's Attitudes in Southwark*, MORI, 2000

[13] *Attitudes to the Criminal Justice System*, West Midlands Criminal Justice Strategy Committee/MORI, 2001

Treatment of ethnic minorities

Q   *Based on what you know, or have heard, to what extent do you agree or disagree that overall* The West Midlands Police *treats people from ethnic minorities as fairly as it treats White people?*

	% Disagree	% Agree	Net Agree ±%
All	18	41	+23
White	16	44	+28
Black	56	12	-44
Asian	25	37	+12
Been in contact with CJS	17	45	+28
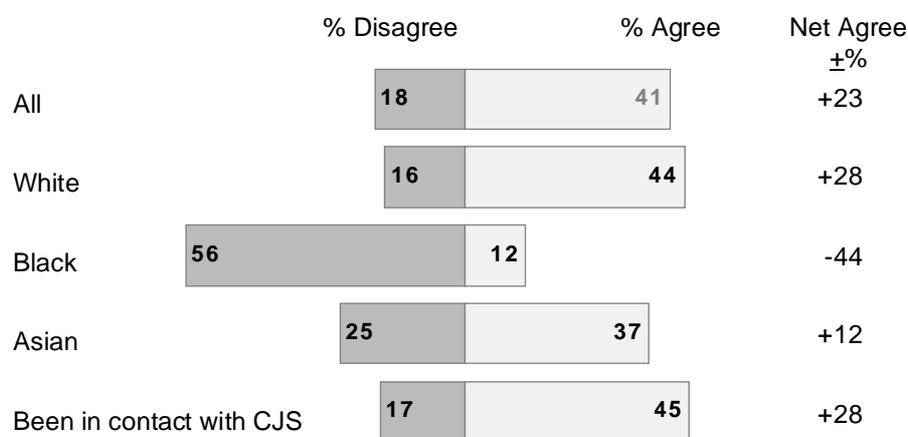
Base: All respondents (457)   Source: MORI

The attitudes of Asian residents appear different from Black residents. The results from the West Midlands study still demonstrate that Asian residents are concerned about equality of treatment/service from the police; one in four Asian residents (25%) do not think that people from ethnic minorities are treated as equally as White people. However, the focus group discussions suggest that this is not always as deeply rooted as with Black residents, and can be considered in a slightly different context. For example, while Asian participants widely criticise public services and feel that their community is not receiving the level of service seen in other areas, they attribute this more to incompetence, bureaucracy and uncommitted staff than overt forms of racial discrimination. In this sense the comments are very similar to those of White participants from poorer parts of Sheffield:

Especially when it comes to Asian areas. If you go down to Solihull, it is only a few miles away but the service is very different down there. The alleys are clean and there are people going round spraying the weeds

Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

You will always get a few but not all of them are [racist]. They have got too many pressures, too much paperwork, too much red tape and they think 'if we do this it will take us three hours to fill in the paperwork, so I'll let it go'

Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

I think it is more a fact that if you live in a certain area, then you deserve less of their time than people who earn more money and pay more taxes

White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

MORI

While the results represent depressing reading, the research suggests a number of positive opportunities for public services. For example, the research in Southwark concludes that young black people do want dialogue with the police to try to alleviate the current tensions, but feel the onus to develop this is firmly on the police. Furthermore, the West Midlands research demonstrates the potential for representation within public institutions to increase trust and confidence in the service.

More effective measures (2)

Q   Which one or two of the following measures, if any, do you think would be effective in making people feel safer?
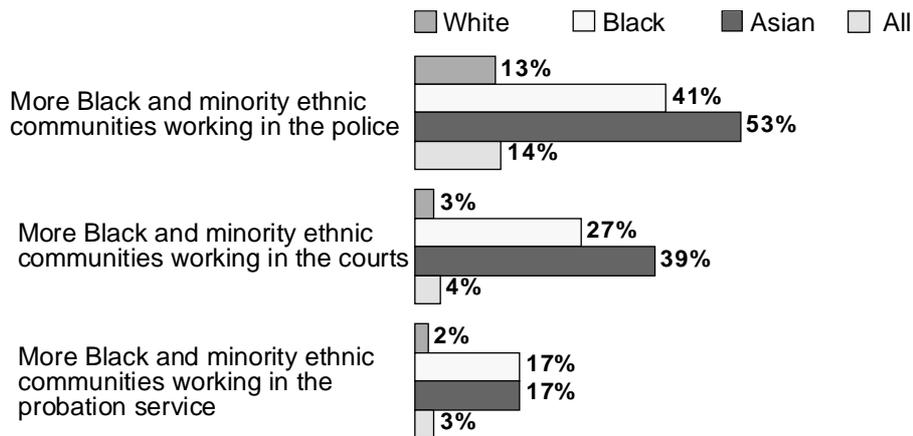
Base: All (457); White (398); Black (358); Asian (314)   Source: MORI

Trust and accountability

Trust and accountability are closely linked in the public's mind. The focus group discussions suggest that the way in which organisations respond to an issue plays a significant role in influencing whether or not they trust them or not. Participants acknowledge that mistakes happen; there does not appear to be an expectation that public institutions should never make errors:

> *Things happen, we are all human and nothing is perfect*
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

However, there are clear expectations of how organisations should respond once a mistake has been made. Participants agree there needs to be three main elements:

- an open admission of the incident;

- an apology if there is human error; and

- evidence that the organisation has learnt from the experience and has taken positive steps to ensure that it is unlikely to happen again:

> *They can say sorry and if it was racist then punish them, and if it was an accident then it was an accident. It is the hiding things and the hidden agendas that people don't like*
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

> *I think it's ok for them to make mistakes as long as they're prepared to say 'we've made a mistake'. Take responsibility*
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

> *Hopefully those organisations will take the opportunity to review their procedures and ensure it doesn't happen again*
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

However, participants feel that current practice is far from this model. There is a belief that mistakes go unreported because of a 'blame culture', that information is suppressed, and that organisations 'close ranks' to protect one another. Evidence of this in local situations appears to have a serious impact:

MORI

> *If someone puts their hands up and say's 'I've made a mistake', someone will say 'it's your fault, you're fired*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

> *Here it took a man to be driven out of his job and to leave the country. I find that really quite sad*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

> *We didn't know it was happening and it was an incredible shock when it came out, so I wouldn't trust them again*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

> *Everyone closes ranks, and they look after their own – that is the number one priority*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

> *If a doctor does a blunder obviously the manager and nurses knows but they keep quiet*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

The importance of accountability is highlighted in another regard – the subcontracting of council services. The focus groups suggest that negative sentiments towards collaborations between the public and private sectors arise, in part at least, because of a perceived lack of *accountability*. Most participants had poor experiences of public authority sub-contracting to private companies, for example, on something as routine as waste collection. They speak of the problem of having to phone two numbers rather than one, and the problem being passed between the Council and the subcontractor, with no one taking responsibility:

> *So many services are subcontracted, which gives you less accountability and more opportunity for corruption*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

> *Everyone seems to shrug their shoulders and blame someone else, and that is why nothing ever gets done*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

Public versus private institutions

Perceptions of private organisations

The public tend not to trust "big business". Two in three (65%) do not trust large companies, compared to only 22% who do; only politicians and journalists are trusted less. Within the focus group discussions, around half have knowledge of the Enron scandal in the United States. Among those who are aware, there is little doubt that the scandal was not an isolated example but something that is quite normal to these types of organisation; it is simply a case of whether they are found out or not:

> *Everybody does it*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

> *I do not think it is a one off. They got caught. I think it is quite endemic to multinational corporations*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

Quantitative research reveals that three in four people (73%) have heard about the actions of Enron or WordlCom. The impact of this knowledge is varied; half (48%) say that these individual cases have caused a loss of trust in large companies more generally, compared to a similar number to whom it has made no difference.

Enron, WorldCom and Trust

Q Have you heard anything about Enron or WorldCom recently?

Yes — 73%
No — 27%

Q What impact have their actions had on your trust in large companies?

Trust much less — 24%
Trust a little less — 24%
No difference — 50%
Trust a little/much more — 2%
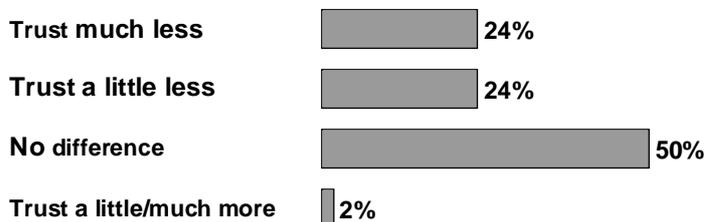
Base: 1,875 adults 15+ across Britain, July 2002

MORI

Public trust in large companies can shift – a MORI survey which intentionally asked about trust *following* questions about Corporate Social Responsibility issues (and so accentuating positive elements) found that twice as many people said they trusted large companies. Similarly, the high standing of three high street brands[14] suggests that while the public reaction is to mistrust 'big business', this has not prevented many companies from building an individual trust relationship. In this way there may be a distinction between trust in individual companies and trust in the collective business 'community', similar to the distinction between individuals and organisations noted in the public sector.

Trust in Individual Companies versus Companies in General

	% Distrust	% Trust
Big companies (1)	-65%	22%
Large companies	-21%	46%
Brand A	-6%	53%
Brand B	-10%	48%
Brand C	-7%	61%
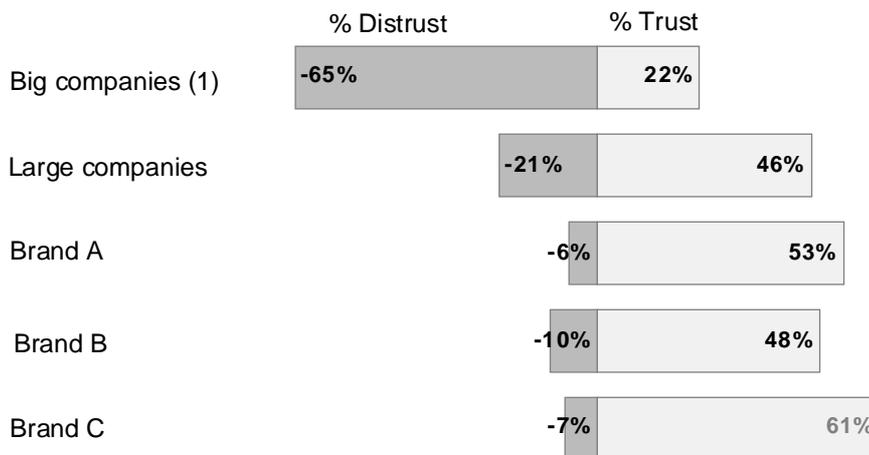
Base: 1,000 British Adults 18+, MORI; (1) Eurobarmeter 56   Source: MORI

Comparisons between the public and private sector

There is general agreement among participants that the public sector is inefficient:

> *Public services are intrinsically inefficient in the way that they operate, there is no commercial pressure on them at all*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

> *Look at the profits, it has gone into the private sector. BT that has gone into profit and it never used to make a profit and why didn't they make a profit under the Government?*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

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[14] The data on the three companies, which are common high street brands, is not public at the time of publishing this report and so they are referred to as company A, B and C, respectively.

However, the group discussions reveal that this is subject to two qualifications. Firstly, there is acceptance among many participants that such inefficiencies are *not only* a feature of the public sector. While there is a sense that the private sector is likely to be more efficient due to commercial pressures, there is a recognition that this is not always the case. Several participants link inefficiencies to the size of an organisation rather than whether it is public or private. In this way there is some *transferability* of attitudes about trust between the public and private sectors; even though high profile scandals in either sector, for example the Enron affair, are perceived to be directly associated with that sector, it does have an indirect impact on the other sector insofar as it contributes to people's feeling that they can't fully trust *any* institution:

> *I find that frequently with any large company, not just a public institution*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

> *Commercial companies don't always create a healthy, efficient company. Look at the railways*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

> *I think the incompetence you come across in individuals or the culture of indifference isn't confined to public institutions, the private sector is equally full of them*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

The second qualification is that even though the public sector is considered inefficient, many participants *still* have more trust in public services than in the private sector. The key driver here is the fact they feel the focus of the public sector is the public, whereas the private sector is considered to be governed first and foremost by the needs of its shareholders, a 'vested interest' that the public sector doesn't have:

> *When I think of the NHS I think it's fairly inefficient, but you know you're going to get looked after*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

> *Ultimately public services are there for the public, no matter how inefficient they are. It is almost an impossible job for them. Private is not about equality, it's about personal gain*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

MORI

Public-Private Partnerships

On the issue of new forms of relationships between the public and private sectors, in spite of privatisations under the previous Conservative administration and support from the Labour Government, there remains strong support for public sector ethos. Some services, such as hospitals, schools and social services, are seen as sacrosanct, and there is also support for re-nationalisation where privatisation is seen as a failure (e.g. the railways).
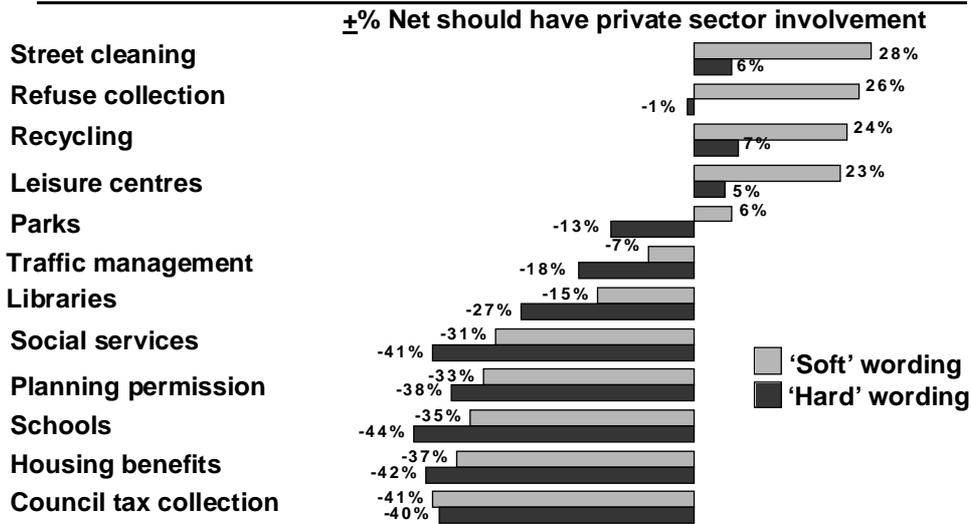
However, the research suggests that while there is a section of the public which is 'anti-private sector' and, similarly, a section of the public which is 'pro-private sector', the majority are 'pragmatists'. Most do not think that the private sector is always more efficient, nor that it should always be prevented from providing public services – instead it should be allowed to do so where it can be more effective.

To these pragmatists, the way in which the private sector is involved is crucial to their support or opposition. For example, MORI have researched attitudes to this issue using two question wordings:

- *Which of these services, if any, do you think the private sector should/should not be allowed to manage on behalf of the Government or local councils?*

- *Which of these services, if any, do you think should/should not be run under private sector management?*

The 'softer' first question – where the public sector retains overall control - gains the most support for private sector involvement, with positive support for a role in street cleaning, refuse collection, recycling, leisure centres and parks (although there remains opposition to those 'sacrosanct' services). Under the 'harder' wording – with full private sector management and no public accountability - there is far less support, and opposition is even more intense across most services.

Which public services?

+% Net should have private sector involvement

Service	Soft	Hard
Street cleaning	28%	6%
Refuse collection	26%	-1%
Recycling	24%	7%
Leisure centres	23%	5%
Parks	6%	-13%
Traffic management	-7%	-18%
Libraries	-15%	-27%
Social services	-31%	-41%
Planning permission	-33%	-38%
Schools	-35%	-44%
Housing benefits	-37%	-42%
Council tax collection	-41%	-40%

'Soft' wording
'Hard' wording

Base: 2,006 British adults 18+, 6-10 September 2001

MORI

Public-Public Partnerships

Relationships between public sector agencies appear to be considered in a different, more positive, context than public-private partnerships. Participants agree that co-operation and joined up working are good things, and assume that this happens already. One of the main concerns, in contrast to Public-Private Partnerships where accountability is the key concern, is the bureaucracy with public sector partnerships and whether they will make any difference.

At the same time, participants have relatively limited knowledge of the remits of different public sector agencies. For example, there is confusion about what local Councils do on crime (which is thought to be the police's responsibility), and also on health for the same reason. The way in which agencies work together and relate organisationally is not well understood:

> *[I'm aware of what local government does] only in vague terms*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

> *The [fire strike] issue really brought it home to us, didn't it, how little we knew about who was employed by who and who actually controlled the purse strings*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

MORI

Developing trust

Participants in the groups outline a series of factors that would make them more likely to trust public agencies. The importance of the service itself (the 'outcome') and the way in which it is delivered (for example, customer service) has already been noted. Furthermore, four other aspects appear particularly important: information, independence, personal contact and leadership.

A. Information

There is a strong desire for more information; the Strategy Unit reports[15] that nine in ten people agree with the statement "The government should be more open about how it makes its decisions".

Further, research on the NHS demonstrates the impact of effective publicity on public attitudes, as outlined in the graph below. For example, in the run up to its Anniversary there was a marked increase in the public's exposure to articles and publicity about the NHS. This in turn had a significant impact of the favourability rating of the NHS, which increased alongside the higher levels of information and exposure. Further, while satisfaction not surprisingly declined after the exposure had ended, it remained higher than previous levels in the months beforehand.
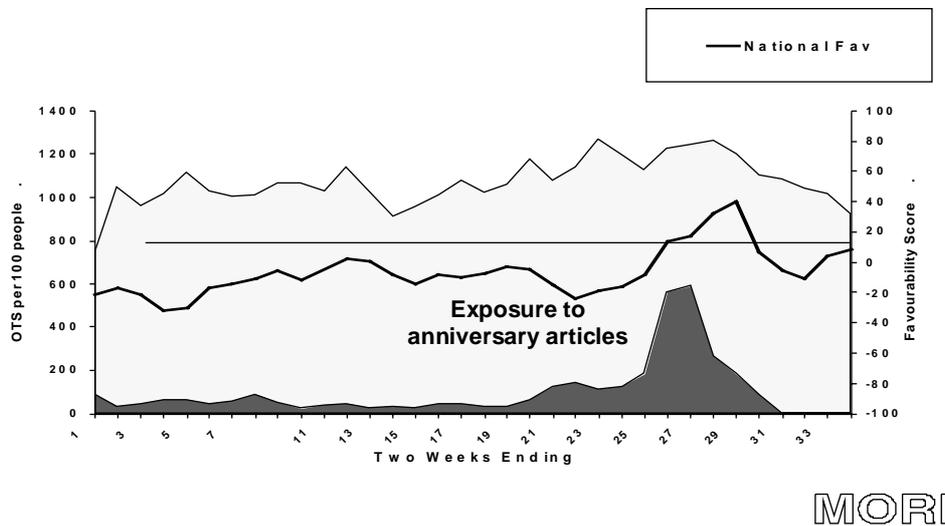
This is supported by numerous examples from the group discussions, which suggest that information can be highly effective in both informing residents and fostering greater levels of trust:

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[15] *Risk: Improving government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty*, Strategy Unit, 2002

> *Our doctor puts up how many appointments people haven't turned up for that month - that's quite an eye opener*
>
> **White Female, 45-60, Bristol**

> *I've actually had private healthcare and it's made me incredibly grateful of NHS care. If people knew how much it cost for an ambulance to come out, if we had any idea, I think that would influence the way people behave*
>
> **White Female, 45-60, Bristol**

> *They did well a couple of years ago, I can remember reading a paper from Bristol City Council which had a massive pie chart in the centre on what they spent the money on*
>
> **White Male, 45-60, Bristol**

> *Well, it's a fundamental thing isn't it. I wouldn't necessarily put all my faith in it but it's got to be there hasn't it*
>
> **White Female, 45-60, Bristol**

The challenge to public sector organisations, therefore, is to ensure the information they deliver is useful and credible. Information provision appears very difficult to get right; reactions from the focus groups suggest that small, micro-level considerations (for example, the tone it is written/spoken in, and how personable the information is so people can relate to the organisation) are often significant influences on how the information is received:

> *Now I understand that there's probably a point, that this [reminder letter for appointment] is a way of reminding you, but I just find the tone of the letters rather annoying*
>
> **White Female, 45-60, Bristol**

However, public organisations are not generally considered good communicators; at times the issue is not about the nuances of how information is conveyed but more about ensuring that the information itself gets through to the public. The graph below outlines how public authorities fare in relation to other organisations.

MORI

The Public's View of Best and Worst Communicators

	Worst	Best
British Telecom	1%	31%
Local Primary Schools	1%	10%
British Gas	3%	9%
Post Office	2%	9%
Local Hospital	7%	5%
BBC	1%	5%
Nearest Leisure Centre	5%	4%
Electricity Company	2%	4%
Local Council	24%	4%
Local Secondary Schools	1%	4%
Inland Revenue	9%	3%
Water Company	7%	2%
National Savings Bank	2%	2%
DSS	8%	1%
Local Social Services Dept	5%	1%
DVLA	3%	1%
Benefits Agency	6%	1%
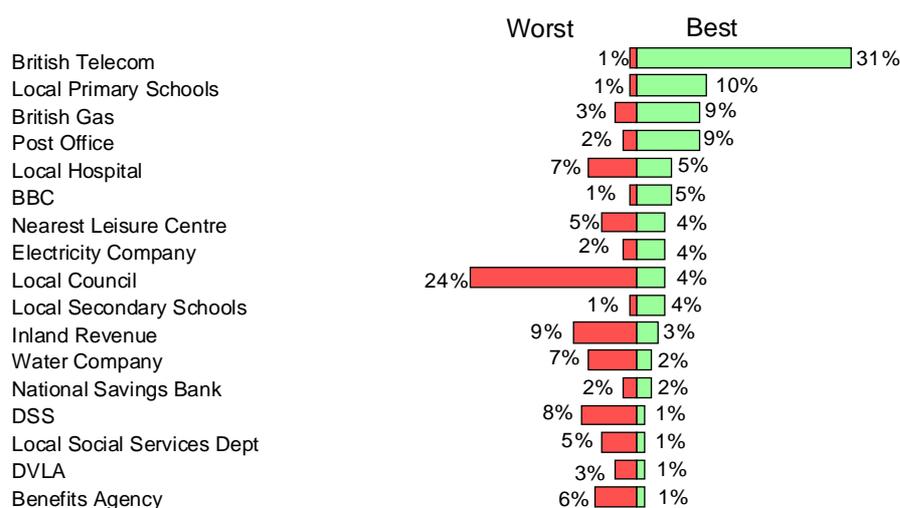
Base: c2000   Source: MORI

Recent MORI normative data reflects the extent to which awareness can in fact vary significantly across authorities; some are considered good communicators, bucking the above trend, while others fare less well.

Q   How well informed do you think the Council keeps you about the services and benefits it provides?

	Type	Year	Very/ Fairly well informed	Limited/ not much at all	Net informed
Base: All			%	%	±
Barking and Dagenham	LB	2002	61	36	+25
Harlow	DC	2002	51	44	+7
Norwich	U	2002	51	44	+7
Southwark	LB	2002	51	45	+6
Cotswold	DC	2002	50	46	+4
Stockton-on-Tees	U	2002	50	48	+2
Torfaen	W	2002	48	47	+1
Southampton	CC	2002	48	49	-1
Brent	LB	2002	48	49	-1
Sunderland	M	2002	47	49	-2
South Tyneside	M	2002	46	52	-6
Oxfordshire	CC	2002	45	52	-7
Derbyshire	CC	2002	44	51	-7
St Albans	DC	2002	44	53	-9
Buckinghamshire	CC	2002	42	56	-14
Enfield	LB	2002	37	58	-21

Source: MORI

MORI

The problem of communicating effectively seems to be particularly acute for some black and minority ethnic communities. For example, in the focus group discussions, Asian participants did not feel aware of council communication or information, even at the level of how to get in touch or who to complain to:

> *We have problems with procedures, we don't know who we can and can't complain to*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

> *They don't give us enough information and in some conversations I don't understand what they're talking about*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

Finally, it appears that public institutions will have to face an uncomfortable truth that some people, albeit a minority, simply do not want any information about the service or the organisation, other than when they want to use the service:
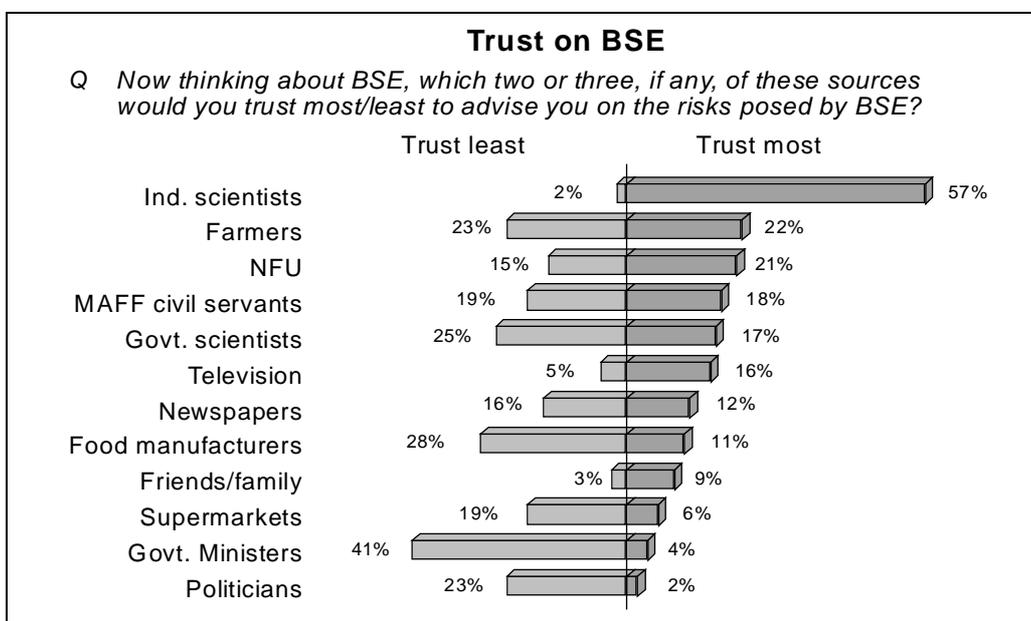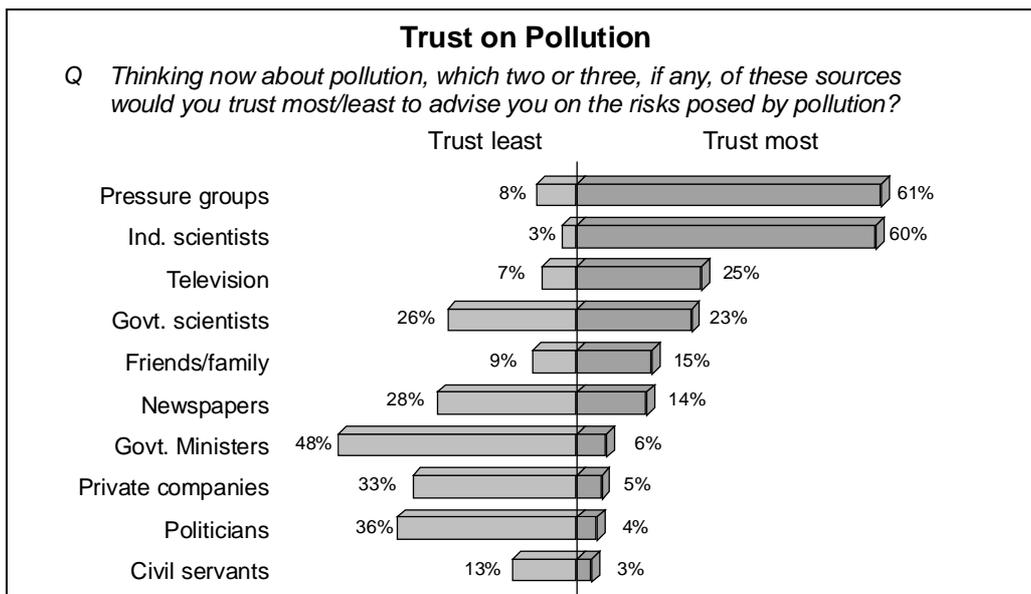
> *Maybe it is ignorant but I don't want to know about it. Things move so fast in the day that you don't take an interest in things you don't need to look at*
>
> White Female, 18-35, Sheffield

B. Independence

Another aspect that emerges from the groups as a pre-requisite for successful communication is *independence*. The Strategy Unit's note that *"the public value independence and will trust pressure groups and 'independent' scientists over private companies or the government"*. This is supported by MORI research on trust in groups on the issues of pollution and BSE[16]. In each case, the public values 'independence'; pressure groups and 'independent' scientists. Furthermore, they are able to take account of the sponsor of the research and make judgements on the trustworthiness of the research; voluntary or environmental pressure groups, for example, over private companies or the Government:

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[16] MORI/BRU – 1,015 British adults, 16+, 1999

Trust on Pollution

Q   Thinking now about pollution, which two or three, if any, of these sources would you trust most/least to advise you on the risks posed by pollution?

Trust least   Trust most

Source	Trust least	Trust most
Pressure groups	8%	61%
Ind. scientists	3%	60%
Television	7%	25%
Govt. scientists	26%	23%
Friends/family	9%	15%
Newspapers	28%	14%
Govt. Ministers	48%	6%
Private companies	33%	5%
Politicians	36%	4%
Civil servants	13%	3%

Trust on BSE

Q   Now thinking about BSE, which two or three, if any, of these sources would you trust most/least to advise you on the risks posed by BSE?

Trust least   Trust most

Source	Trust least	Trust most
Ind. scientists	2%	57%
Farmers	23%	22%
NFU	15%	21%
MAFF civil servants	19%	18%
Govt. scientists	25%	17%
Television	5%	16%
Newspapers	16%	12%
Food manufacturers	28%	11%
Friends/family	3%	9%
Supermarkets	19%	6%
Govt. Ministers	41%	4%
Politicians	23%	2%

In the group discussions, several participants think that information from their local authority, such as newsletters, is biased and only tells them about positive stories. While there is acknowledgement that people need to hear about 'good news' stories to counterbalance the natural media bias towards negative stories, it is not felt that this should come from the organisation itself, who have a vested interest to exaggerate the positive aspects. This is supported by other work for the Audit Commission[17], which notes that people thought it was *"in the interest of the service provider to present figures and spending in a positive light"* and hence they could not be entirely trusted:

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[17] The Audit Commission: Qualitative research amongst users of local services, Cragg Ross Dawson, 2001

> *Of course we all get one of those newspaper things don't we.*
> *A lot of the time it's saying how good they are*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

Independence can apparently come from a third party source or from the authority itself, provided it is validated in some way, for example in collaboration with the local newspaper or radio show:

> *I think they've got a very powerful tool down here in the*
> *local radio station. They can get people to ask direct*
> *questions*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

> *It should be in the Evening Post as a supplement –*
> *something that really gets out there*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

In this sense there is support for an independent body to oversee and inspect public institutions:

> *They should have an independent body to investigate their*
> *problems and mishaps*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

> *They need someone who is not biased to say 'actually you*
> *are not very good' or 'yes, carry on what you're doing'*
>
> White Female, 18-35, Sheffield

> *I would say some external watchdog like other governing*
> *institutes. Water, electric they all have governing bodies*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

However, this is conditional on the independent body having the power to hold them to account; without this participants feel the exercise would not have legitimacy and would be a waste of resources:

> *They had an Audit Commission report not so long ago on*
> *the City Council in which they were torn strips off. But the*
> *Council just said "that's rubbish"*
>
> White Male, 45-60, Bristol

Also important is the provision of different levels of detail. For example, some participants feel that basic rating scale, such as league table of Comprehensive Performance Assessment style approach, would be sufficient. However, others feel that, alone, this would be too basic and they would want the result qualified according to specific services:

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> *I would be glad to know, because for instance, you have two hospitals. So if one was a five star and the other a two star, I know where I'd go for an operation*
>
> White Female, 18-35, Sheffield

> *I would want it [comprehensive performance assessment] quantified. You've got to know on what sort of criteria it's based on*
>
> White Female, 45-60, Bristol

> *Well it is such a complex thing, and there are so many different factors you have to take into account. One hospital might be better for one thing than another*
>
> White Male, 18-35, Sheffield

C. Personal contact

Closely associated with the fact that participants are more likely to trust individuals rather than institutions, so too is their trust strongly influenced by personal *contact* with service providers and, crucially, the *nature* of that contact. Indeed, the Henley Centre[18] note *"the focus is on relationships and familiarity, rather than distant authority. Organisations must be seen to make promises that are not only relevant and inspiring, but are genuinely delivered at every point of contact"*.

At one level participants are more likely to trust that a service has been delivered if they can see someone delivering it:
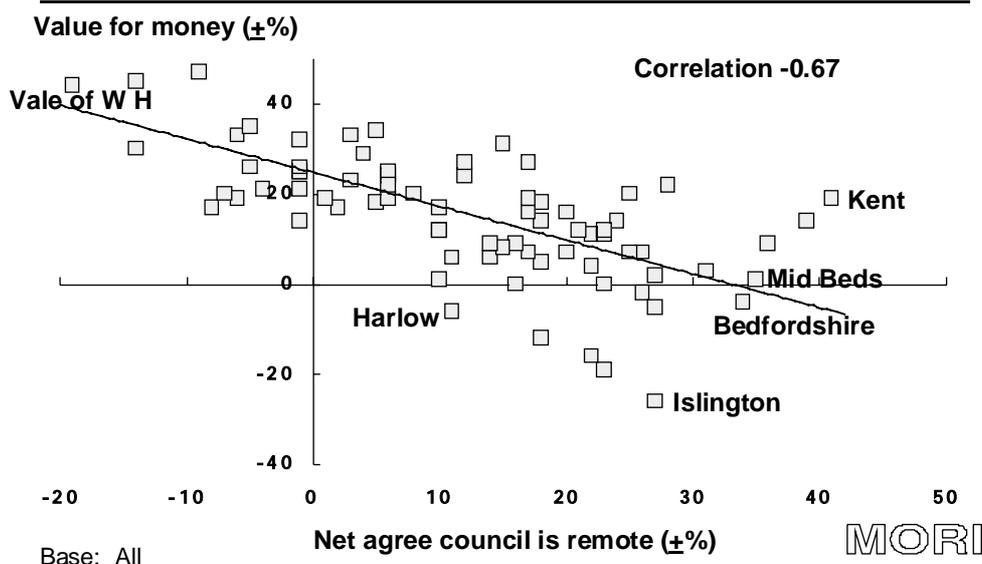
> *They say they will send someone down [to clear the streets] but you never see the person who they send*
>
> Asian Male, 18-35, Birmingham

In this sense, trust is strengthened by the *visibility* of service delivery. Another key criteria is ensuring that the service is not considered by residents to be remote. As the chart shows (based on MORI data from surveys with local authorities) perceptions of remoteness negatively impact on public satisfaction with value for money from their local authority.

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[18] *Risk, Trust and Loyalty.* The Henley Centre

Value for money versus remoteness

Value for money (±%)

Correlation -0.67

Vale of W H

Kent

Mid Beds

Harlow

Bedfordshire

Islington

Net agree council is remote (±%)

Base: All

MORI

Where direct personal contact is involved the *nature* of the contact is significant. For example, participants feel that the current process of communication is very 'one way' where they are told the 'right' answer, whereas they are keen that they are listened to and their concerns addressed. Both the time taken and the language used by providers seem particularly important in creating a *personable* relationship with the client. Call centres are not considered sufficient as participants do not feel they are talking to someone who can help them:

My doctor is fantastic, he has 15 minutes with you. If I go and see another doctor 'oh yes, he has got a cold, give him this'. They don't sit down and they don't listen to you

White Female, 18-35, Sheffield

You are seen as a number, not an individual with needs

White Female, 18-35, Sheffield

In a hospital you can't get a straight answer, they talk through you and don't understand what you are saying

Black Female, 18-35, London

Someone who's working on a switchboard doesn't have the information, they're not employed to know that

White Male, 45-60, Bristol

The need to develop personable relationships with service users has implications for the leaders of public services, who have the potential to give the organisation more visibility, accountability and personality:

I'd like to see more identity and personality, and see who is responsible in that division of the Council
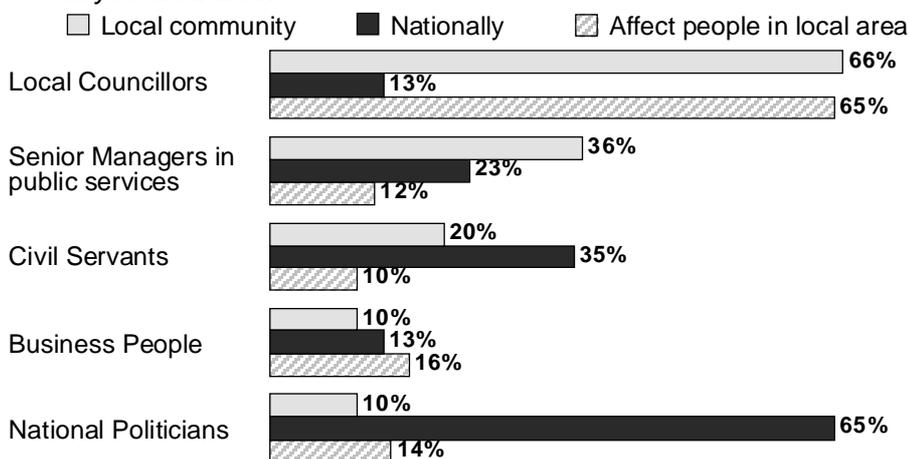
White Male, 45-60, Bristol

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D. Leadership

Given the problem organisations as a whole and the corporate centre face in terms of the perception that they are remote, impersonal and not as trustworthy as front-line staff, the need for leadership of public services has become increasingly important. Research from the Cabinet Office's Peoples' Panel[19] suggests that the public look predominantly to local councillors for leadership and influence on local issues, while senior managers in public services do not have the same profile in this regard.

Public leadership

Q   *Which of these people, if any, do you think are in charge of public services in your local community?*

Q   *Which of these people, if any, do you think are in charge of public services in the United Kingdom?*

Q   *Which of these people has most influence on the issues that affect people in your local area?*

☐ Local community   ■ Nationally   ▨ Affect people in local area

Local Councillors
66% / 13% / 65%

Senior Managers in public services
36% / 23% / 12%

Civil Servants
20% / 35% / 10%

Business People
10% / 13% / 16%

National Politicians
10% / 65% / 14%

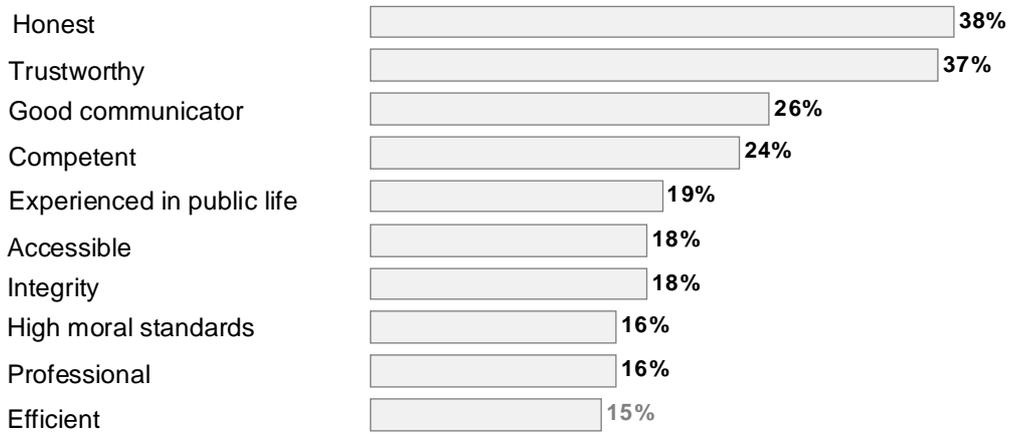Base: People's Panel Wave 5 - All (1,086)   Source: MORI

The qualities the public looks for in different leaders and professions varies according to the nature of the role. *Honesty* and *trustworthiness* are the most significant personal qualities for public leaders. In contrast, the public looks to Civil Servants to be efficient, competent and honest, while experience in running a business and professionalism are considered more important for business people. Therefore, while honesty and trustworthiness are important qualities for most leaders, they are *more* significant for public leaders.

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[19] People's Panel, 5th wave results, 2000

Personal Qualities in Public Leaders

Q Which three of these qualities, if any, do you feel are most important in a public leader?

Quality	Percentage
Honest	38%
Trustworthy	37%
Good communicator	26%
Competent	24%
Experienced in public life	19%
Accessible	18%
Integrity	18%
High moral standards	16%
Professional	16%
Efficient	15%

Base: People's Panel Wave 5 - All (1,086)   Source: MORI

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