

Communications and digital inclusion

Summary

This report explores patterns of communication between residents and the Council, with a focus on online communication. The analysis is based on data from the latest Tower Hamlets Annual Residents Survey which took place in June 2014.

Key findings:

Internet access: 86 per cent of adults surveyed said they had access to the internet. Levels of internet access are strongly related to age: the vast majority (96 per cent) of residents aged 18-34 had access to the internet compared with just 38 per cent of those aged 60 and over. Those aged 50-59 also have relatively low levels of internet access (74 per cent).

Those aged 50 and over comprise the majority - over two thirds (68 per cent) - of all those without access to the internet.

Those with a disability or health problem were far less likely to have access to the internet compared with those with no disability/health problem (60 vs. 90 per cent). The prevalence of disability increases with age, so this is consistent with the findings on age.

Households from social grades DE (typically lower income households) had lower levels of internet access compared with those in social grades AB and C1.

Patterns of internet use: Of those residents with internet access, most said they accessed the internet at least once a day (93 per cent). The most popular online activities were email (80 per cent); browsing for information about goods and services (79 per cent), social media (68 per cent); buying and selling online (61 per cent) and internet banking (59 per cent). The percentage of residents who said they currently use the internet to pay for Council services was 37 per cent.

Age and affluence were particularly associated with the way people use the internet. Younger and better off households typically engaged in a wider range of online activities than lower income or older households. Similarly, younger and more affluent households were more likely to use the internet for transactional purposes such as internet banking or paying for council services. The findings highlight the important distinction between having access to the internet, and the degree to which residents feel able or willing to use it for different purposes.

Online contact with the Council: Almost three quarters of residents surveyed said they had made contact with the Council over the last year. While telephone currently remains the predominant method of contact, 21 per cent used online methods (either email and/or website) to make contact.

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There were marked differences across population groups in the use of online contact methods:

- **Income** indicators suggest that better off residents are more likely to use online methods than low income households:
 - Those who said they were managing well financially were twice as likely to use online methods compared with those who were struggling financially (29 vs. 15 per cent);
 - Social grade AB households (typically higher income households) are three times as likely to use online methods to contact the Council compared with DE households (38 vs. 12 per cent);
 - Those working full time were more likely to use online methods than those who were not working (29 vs. 16 per cent).
- **Age** is also important in terms of likely choice of contact method, with younger resident more likely to use, and prefer, online methods. One quarter of residents aged 18-34 used online methods to contact the Council compared with just 15 per cent of those aged 50 and over.
- **Housing tenure:** almost one third of those in privately rented housing (who have a relatively young age profile) currently use online methods to make contact with the Council compared with only 12 per cent of those living in social housing.
- **Ethnicity:** While White and Bangladeshi residents were found to have similar levels of internet access, patterns of use were quite different: White residents were twice as likely to use online methods to contact the Council compared with Bangladeshi residents (28 vs.13 per cent).

Across all groups, with the exception of older residents, interest in using online methods in the future is higher than current levels of use.

East End Life (EEL) readership: around half (49 per cent) of those surveyed said they read East End Life regularly. Groups with higher levels of readership include:

- Older residents aged 50 and over (64 per cent regular readers);
- Those living in social housing (61 per cent);
- Bangladeshi residents (60 per cent);
- Those from social grade DE households (57 per cent).

EEL readership tends to be higher amongst those groups who are less likely to favour online methods of contact. Indeed, EEL readers were less likely than non-readers to use online methods to contact the Council: 16 per cent of EEL readers used online methods to contact the Council compared with 28 per cent of those who were not regular readers.

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Background

The Tower Hamlets Annual Residents Survey took place in June 2014 and was carried out on the Council's behalf by TNS-BMRB. The survey comprised face to face interviews with 1,147 residents and explored their views about the Council, local services and the area.

This topic report is the first in a series of short analytical reports that will provide more in depth analysis of the survey results. These reports are designed to complement the main survey report by providing more detailed analysis about particular topics.

This first briefing examines **communications and digital inclusion**. The report explores patterns of communication between residents and the Council, with a focus on online access and communication. The analysis covers:

- Internet access
- Internet use and activities
- Contact with the council over the last year
- Methods of contact: current and preferred
- East end life readership

This report complements previous analysis¹, which reviewed available statistics on digital inclusion in the borough, by providing more detail on patterns of internet use.

Technical note: As the survey data are based on a survey sample, they are estimates not precise measures, and as such, have a degree of sampling variability attached to them. The concept of 'statistical significance' is used here to highlight those differences that are likely to reflect real differences between groups, as opposed to those which may be simply reflecting the sampling variability attached to estimates.

¹ [Internet access and use: key statistics](#), Research Briefing 2014-04, Tower Hamlets Council June 2014

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Internet access

Overall, 86 per cent of adult respondents (aged 18 and over) said they had access to the internet (figure 1).

The majority had access to the internet at home (82 per cent), and well over one third (38 per cent) had access via work. Residents also accessed the internet at school or college (9 per cent), at a library or idea store (7 per cent) or elsewhere (18 per cent).

Figure 2 shows internet access by respondent characteristics for Tower Hamlets.

Levels of access are strongly related to age: the vast majority (95-97 per cent) of residents aged 18 to 34 had internet access compared with only 38 per cent of those aged 60 and over. Those aged 50-59 also have relatively low levels of access (74 per cent).

Those aged 50 and over comprise the majority - over two thirds (68 per cent) - of all those without access to the internet.

Also, those with a disability or health problem were far less likely to have access to the internet compared with those with no disability/health problem² (60 vs. 90 per cent). The prevalence of disability increases with age, so this is consistent with the findings on age.

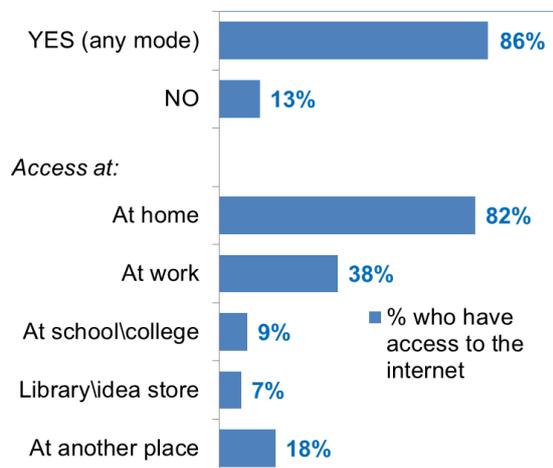
By tenure, access was lowest for those in social rented housing (82 per cent) and highest for those living in privately rented housing (93 per cent) - who are typically younger.

Internet access was lowest (76 per cent) for households from social grade DE³ (typically lower income households) and highest (94-96 per cent) for those in social grades AB and C1.

There were no significant differences in internet access by gender or ethnicity, though as is shown later, there are significant differences in patterns of use by ethnicity (ie Bangladeshi residents are less likely than White residents to use online methods to contact the Council).

Figure 1 Internet access in Tower Hamlets June 2014

Do you have access to the internet?

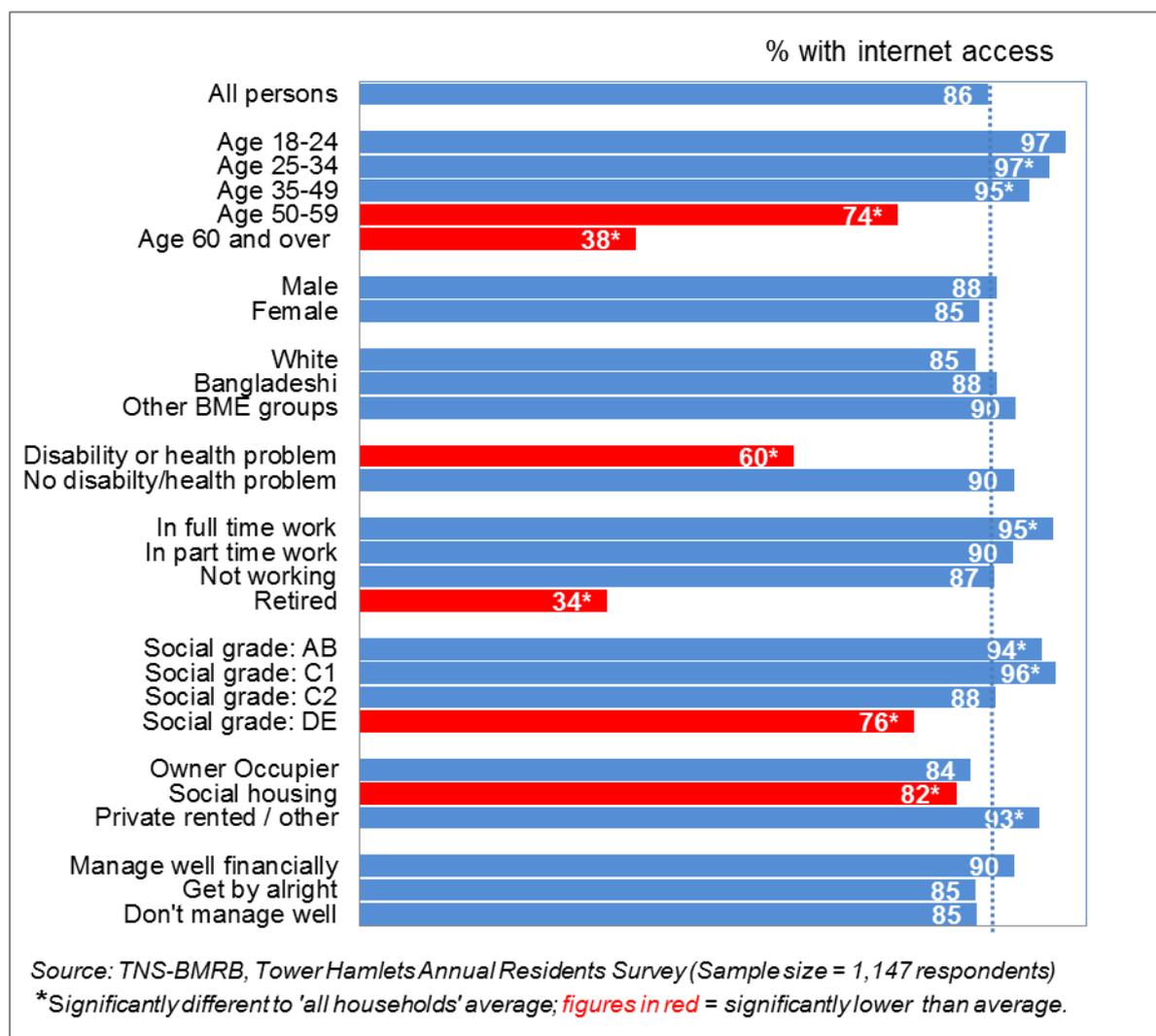


Source: TNS-BMRB, Tower Hamlets Annual Residents Survey 2014
Notes: Sample base: 1,147. Yes/no totals do not sum exactly to 100% as a small number of respondents said they didn't know.

² 'Disability/health problem' refers to respondents who said they had a long term illness, health problem or disability which limits the daily activities or work they can do.

³ Appendix A provides further detail on social grade classifications.

Figure 2: Internet access in Tower Hamlets by respondent/household characteristics, June 2014



Patterns of internet use

Of those with internet access, the majority had access via a laptop (81 per cent) and two thirds said they had access via a mobile/smart phone (figure 3). One third of residents said they used a PC and a similar proportion used a tablet.

The use of smart phones is most popular with younger residents: 72 per cent of those aged 18-34 used a mobile for internet access compared with 35 per cent of the over 50s who used the internet (figure 4). Younger residents were also more likely to use a laptop than older residents to access the internet (83 vs. 66 per cent).

Younger residents were more likely than older residents to use more than one method to access the internet than older residents. The average number of platforms used by residents to access the internet was 2.3 for 18-34 year olds compared with 1.7 for those aged 50 and over.

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Figure 3: Patterns of internet use, Tower Hamlets, 2014

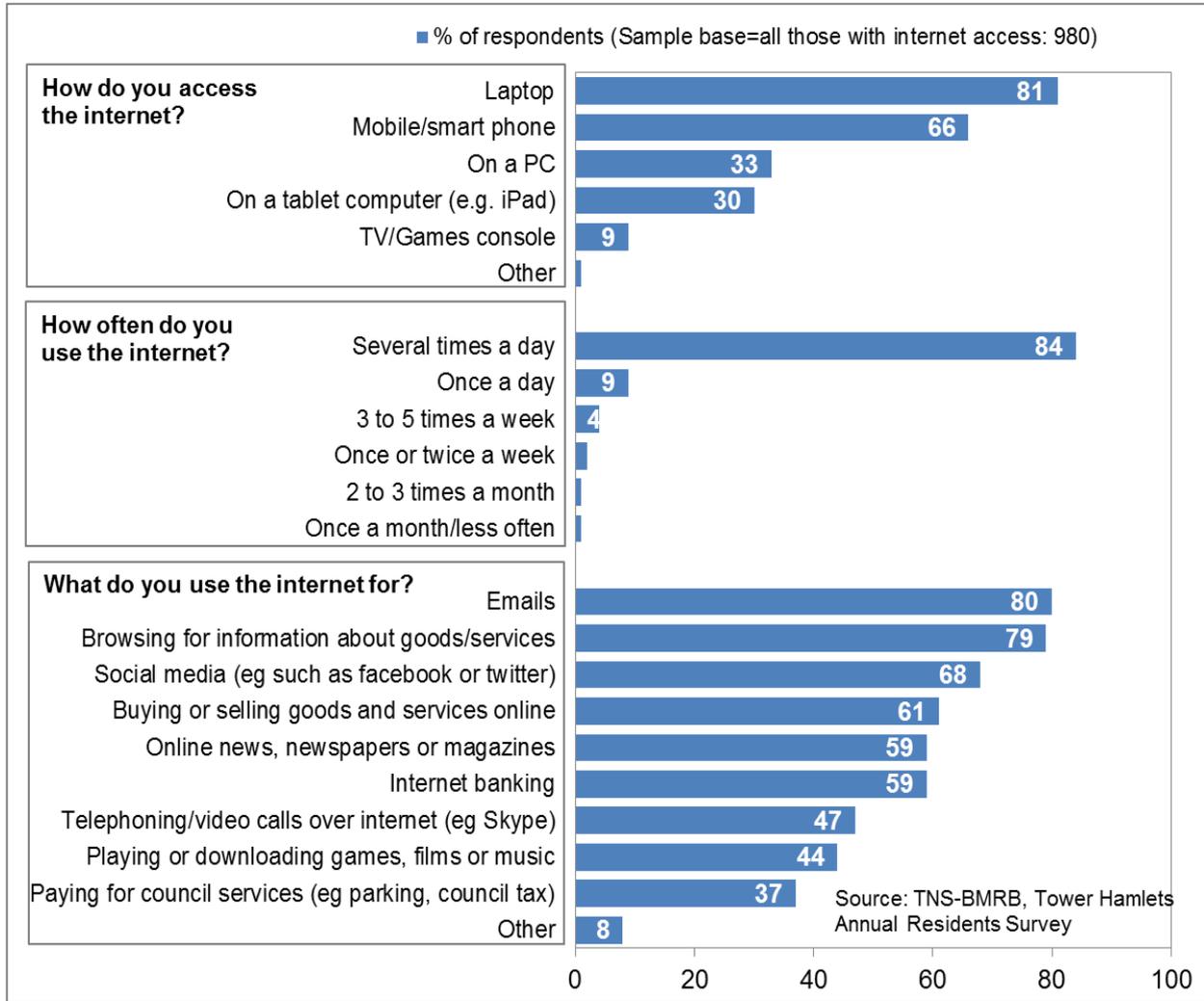
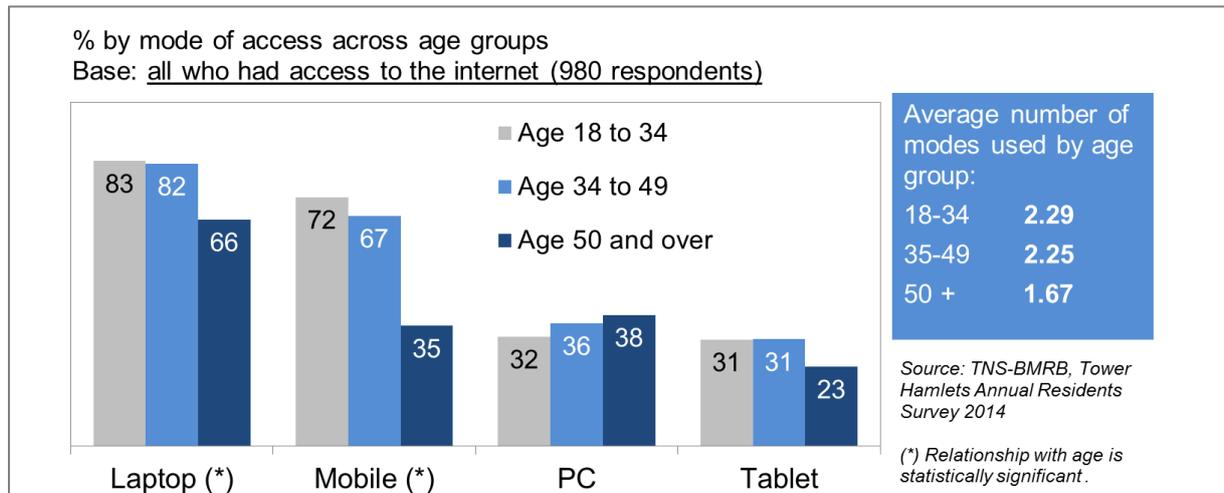


Figure 4: How people access the internet by age, Tower Hamlets, 2014



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Activities online – variation across population groups

Of those with internet access, most said they accessed the internet at least once a day (93 per cent) and the most popular online activities were: email (80 per cent); browsing for information about goods and services (79 per cent); social media (68 per cent); and buying and selling online (61 per cent). The percentage of residents who currently use the internet to pay for Council services was 37 per cent, well below the proportion who use internet banking (59 per cent). [Figure 3](#).

Table 1. Number of internet activities by population group, Tower Hamlets, 2014

Base: those with internet access (980 respondents)	Average no. of activities (max = 10)	% of residents who engaged in 6 or more different internet activities
Total	5.4	48%
Age 18-34	5.9	55%
Age 35-49	5.3	46%
Age 50 and over	3.6	21%
White	5.8	56%
Bangladeshi	5.0	38%
Other BME groups	5.3	48%
Disability/health problem	4.4	38%
No disability/health problem	5.5	49%
Full time	5.9	57%
Part time	5.3	45%
Not working	5.0	42%
Retired	3.0	14%
Social grade: AB	6.5	68%
Social grade: C1	6.3	61%
Social grade: C2	5.0	42%
Social grade: DE	4.4	31%
Private rented / other	6.1	61%
Owner Occupier	5.2	45%
Social housing	4.9	38%
Manage well financially	5.9	57%
Get by alright	5.3	44%
Don't manage well	4.7	39%

Source: TNS-BMRB, Tower Hamlets Annual Residents Survey
Notes: All relationships highlighted are statistically significant.

Of the ten different activities listed, residents engaged in an average of 5.4 different activities and almost half (48 per cent) said they used the internet for 6 or more different activities. [Table 1](#) shows how activity levels vary by group. The findings highlight the important distinction between having access to the internet, and the degree to which residents feel able or willing to use it for different purposes.

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More affluent households (as indicated by social grade, financial circumstances, and work status measures) typically engaged in a wider range of online activities than lower income households. For example, 68 per cent of social grade AB households said they used the internet for 6 or more activities compared with 31 per cent of social class DE households.

Similarly, younger households were more likely than older households to use the internet for a wider range of activities: 55 per cent of those aged 18-34 said they used the internet for 6 or more of the different activities listed compared with 21 per cent of those aged 50 or over.

Other groups whose level of use was below average included: Bangladeshi residents, disabled residents and those in social housing. In the case of all three groups: the percentage who said they used the internet for 6 or more activities was 38 per cent, ten points lower than the average.

Type of internet activity⁴

Age and social grade are associated with level of use of the internet across most activities to some degree.

Figure 5 explores activities online by social grade. The chart illustrates the significant difference between the extent to which AB/C1 households use the internet for particular activities, compared with C2/DE households. Use is much higher across all activities among AB/C1 households, particularly for transactional purposes such as internet banking, or paying for council services online. For example, the proportion of households with internet access who use internet banking ranges from 73 per cent of those from ABC1 households down to 47 per cent of C2DE households.

Figure 6 explores differentials in internet use by age. While use of the internet for email and browsing is fairly popular across all age groups (though with some variation), there are very marked differentials between age groups across all other activities. For example, age emerges as a particularly important predictor of social media use: 72 per cent of 18-49 year olds (with internet access) said they use social media compared with only 36 per cent of the over 50s.

While there are some differences by ethnicity in terms of the type of online activities undertaken (eg White residents were more likely than BME residents to use internet banking or social media), the differences were less pronounced than differences by age and social grade, and were not evident across all activities (**figure 7**). This could in part reflect the fact that the BME population has a younger age profile than the White population.

⁴ For this analysis, social grade, age and ethnicity categories had to be aggregated into broader groups, to provide larger samples for analytical purposes.

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Figure 5: Activities online by social grade, Tower Hamlets, 2014

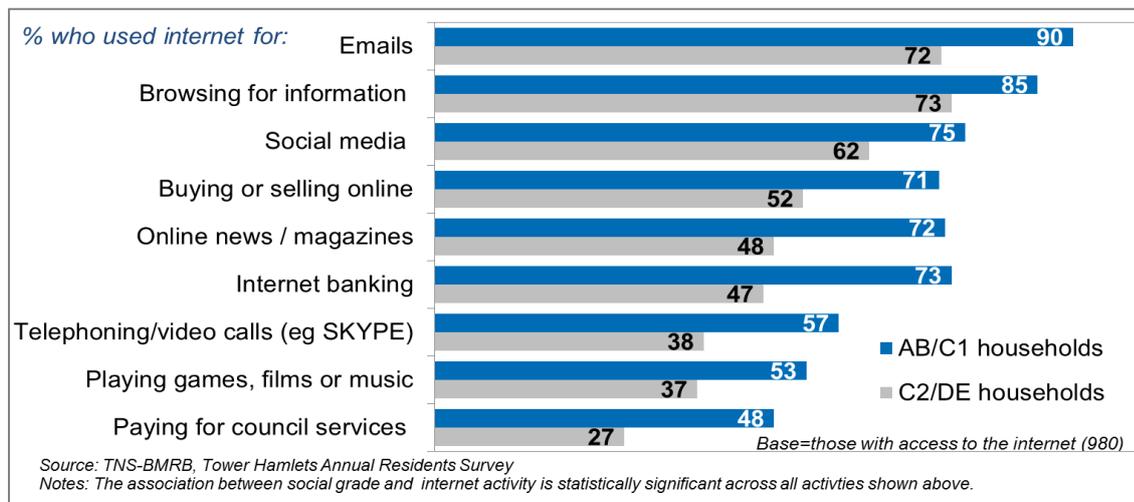


Figure 6: Activities online by age, Tower Hamlets, 2014

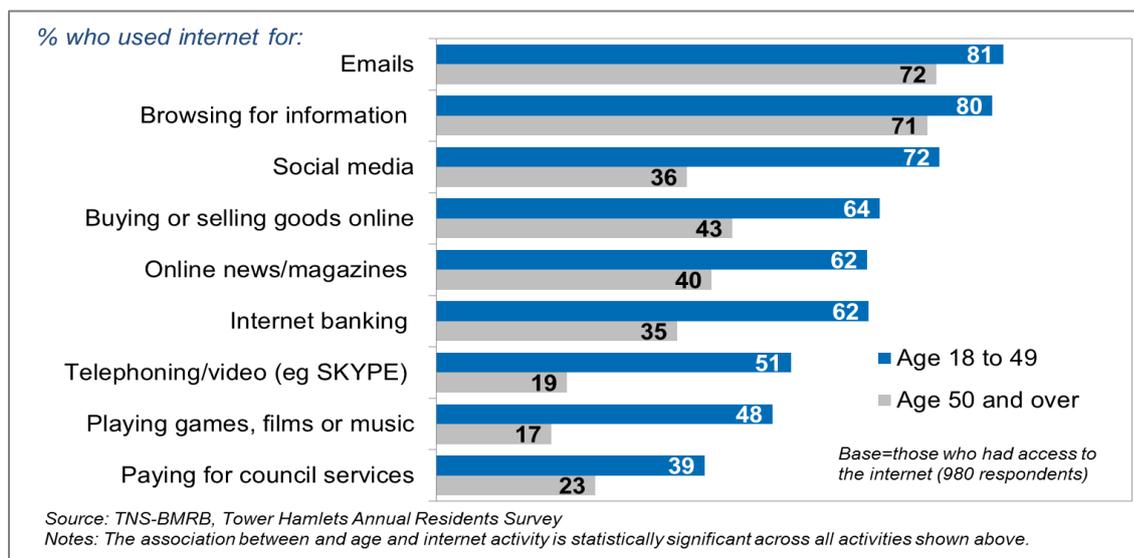
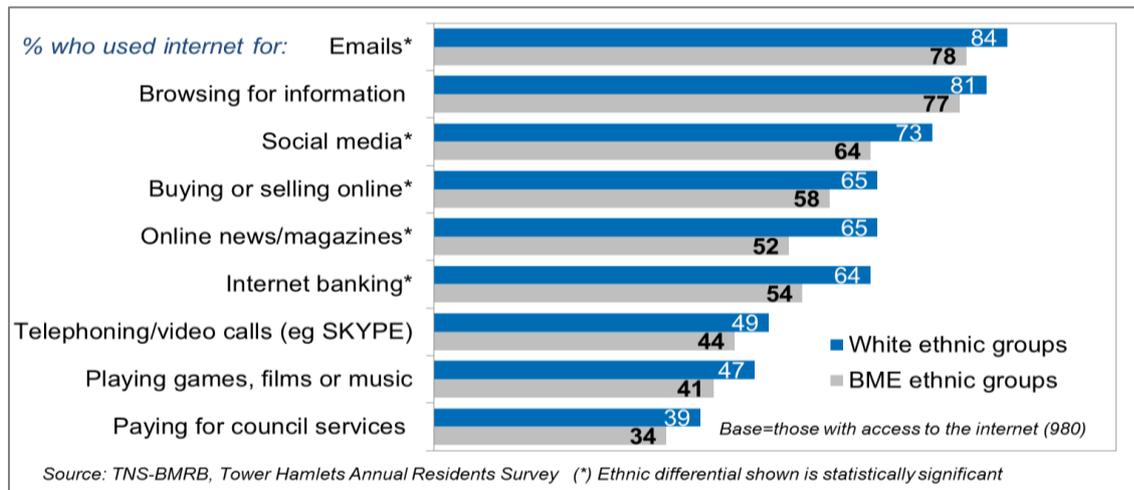


Figure 7: Activities online by ethnicity, Tower Hamlets, 2014



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For the most part, there was no significant difference in patterns of use by gender, with two exceptions: use of the internet for online news, newspapers and magazines; and, for downloading and playing of games, films or music. For both these activities the percentage of males who participated in these activities was a bit higher than for females (by 6-8 percentage points).

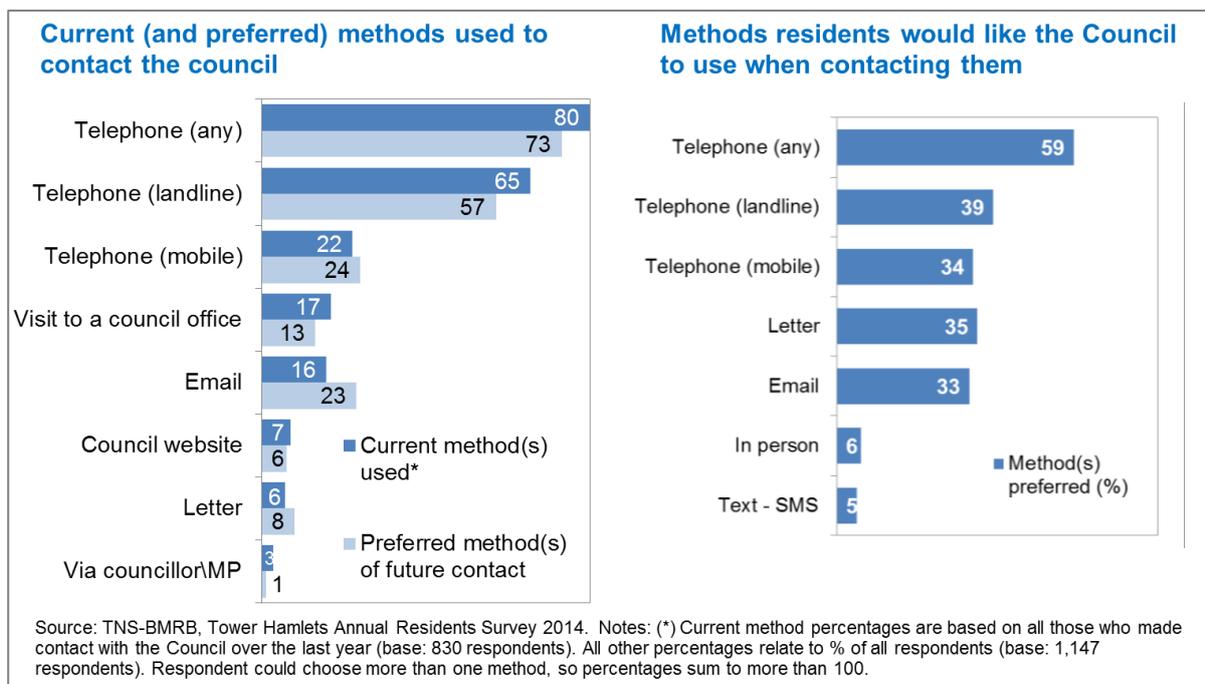
Note: analysis of patterns of use by disability was not possible as the sample of disabled people in the survey, who had internet access, was too small.

Contact with the Council over the last year

Almost three quarters (72 per cent) of residents surveyed said they had made contact with the Council over the last year. Telephone remains – by far - the most popular method of contact, used by 80 per cent of residents who had contacted the Council over the last year (figure 8). It is also the most popular preferred future method of contact (73 per cent). Almost one quarter said they would prefer to use email in the future, higher than the current proportion (23 vs. 16 per cent).

Residents were also asked what method they would like the Council to use if it was to contact them in response to an enquiry or request. Preferences were quite different to those methods used by residents. While telephone remained the most preferred method, there was more support for contact via mobile numbers (of residents) and also for contact by email. However, the most marked difference was the significant support for letter as a method for response: over one third would prefer the Council to contact them by letter in response to a query, while letter was one of the least preferred options for resident-initiated contact.

Figure 8: Current and preferred methods of contact, Tower Hamlets, 2014

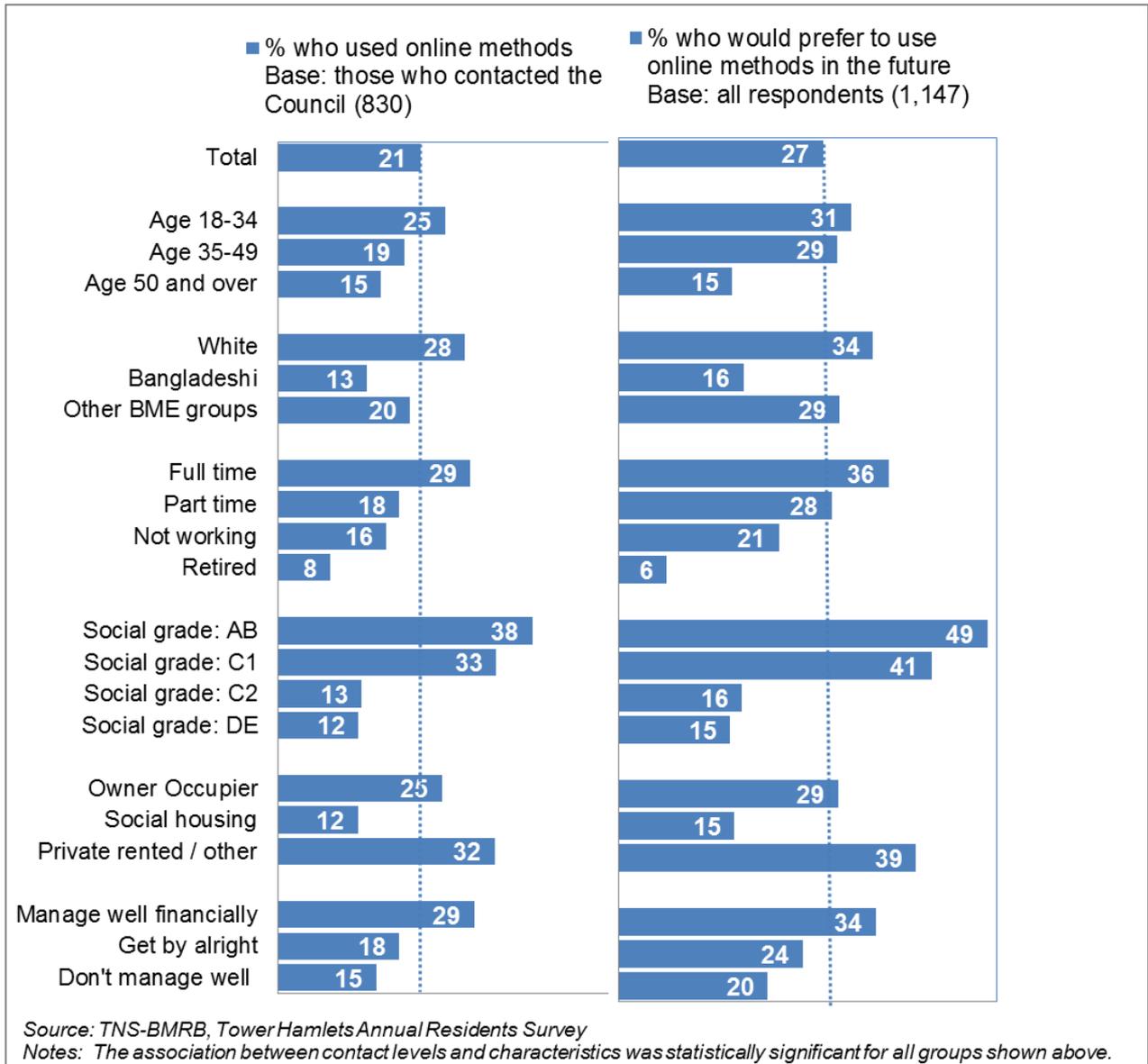


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Methods of contact by population group

Telephone was the most popular method of contact across all population groups - in fairly equal measure. However, there were marked differences across groups in the use of online methods. Overall, of all those who made contact with the Council over the last year, 21 per cent used online methods (either email and/or website) – figure 9 shows how this varies across particular population groups.

Figure 9 Online methods: use & preference by group, Tower Hamlets, 2014



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Age is strongly related to use of online methods, with younger residents more likely to use, and prefer, online methods. One quarter of residents aged 18-34 used online methods compared with just 15 per cent of those aged 50 and over.

Income indicators suggest that better off residents are more likely to use online methods than low income households:

- Social grade AB households are three times as likely to use online methods as DE households (38 vs. 12 per cent);
- Those who said they were managing well financially were twice as likely to use online methods compared with those struggling financially (29 vs. 15 per cent);
- Those working full time were more likely to use online methods than those who were not working (29 vs. 16 per cent).

Housing tenure: almost one third of those in privately rented housing currently use online methods compared with 12 per cent in social housing. Private renters have a younger age profile than those living in other tenures.

Ethnicity: White residents were twice as likely to use online methods compared with Bangladeshi residents (28 vs. 13 per cent). This is despite the fact that White and Bangladeshi residents have similar levels of internet access.

Similar differentials between population groups were also apparent in relation to preferences for online contact in the future. Across all groups, with the exception of older residents, interest in using online methods in the future is higher than current levels of use ([figure 9](#)).

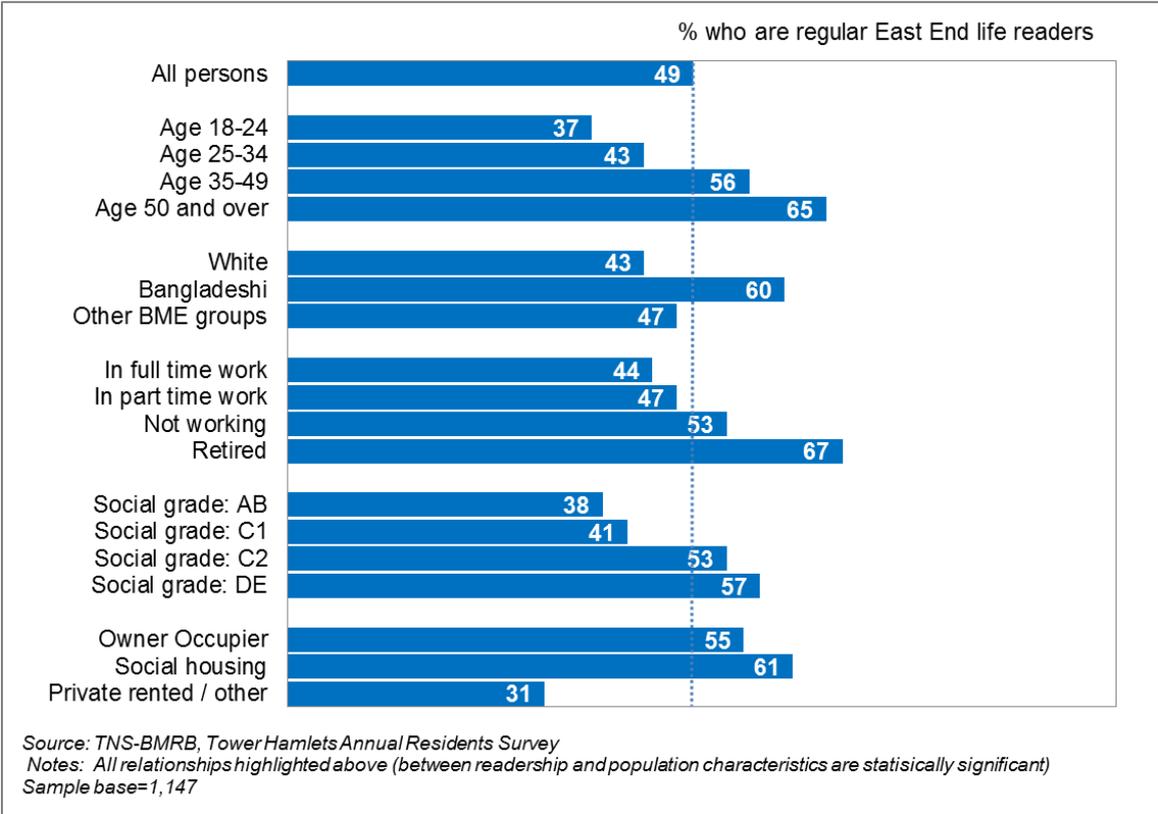
East End Life (EEL) readership

East End Life, the Council's newspaper, remains a key source of information for residents – around half of all residents say they read it regularly (49 per cent). Groups with high readership levels included:

- Older residents aged 50 and over (65 per cent regular readers);
- Those living in social housing (61 per cent);
- Bangladeshi residents (60 per cent);
- Those from social grade DE households (57 per cent).

Many of the groups most likely to read EEL were the same groups who are least likely to favour online methods of contact. Indeed, EEL readers were less likely than non-readers to use online methods to contact the Council: 16 per cent of EEL readers used online methods to contact the Council compared with 28 per cent of those who were not regular readers.

Figure 10 East End Life readership profile, Tower Hamlets, 2014



Further information

This report was produced by the Corporate Strategy and Equality Service. For further information about the Annual Residents Survey, please contact [Lorna Spence](#) in the Corporate Research Unit.

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Appendix A – Social grade groupings

Social class	Examples of residents included under each category (Source: TNS-BMRB)
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionals; very senior managers in business; top-level civil servants • Retired people who worked in a grade A job • People whose late spouse or civil partner worked in a grade A job • E.g. Accountant – chartered director or partner • E.g. Head Teacher
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle-management executives in large organisations, with appropriate qualifications • Principal officers in local government and the civil service • Top management or owners of small businesses and educational and service establishments • Retired people who worked in a grade B job • Retired people whose late spouse or civil partner worked in a grade B job • E.g. Teacher, with qualifications • E.g. Solicitor, fully qualified, employee
C1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Junior management, owners of small establishments and all other non-manual workers • Jobs in this group have varied responsibilities and educational requirements • Retired people who worked in a grade C1 job • Retired people whose late spouse or civil partner worked in a grade C1 job • E.g. State Registered Nurse • E.g. Bank Clerk
C2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled manual workers • Manual workers with responsibility for other people • Retired people who worked in a grade C2 job and who now receive an occupational pension • Retired people whose late spouse or civil partner worked in a grade C2 job and who now themselves receive a pension based on that job • E.g. Baker, skilled • E.g. Firefighter (not leading)
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, apprentices and trainees of skilled workers • Retired people who worked in a grade D job and who now receive an occupational pension • Retired people whose late spouse or civil partner worked in a grade D job and who now themselves receive a pension based on that job • E.g. Game Keeper • E.g. Warehouse packer/labeller
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term recipients of state benefits • Unemployed for more than six months (otherwise classify on previous occupation) • Off sick for six months or more (unless they are still being paid by their employer) • Casual workers and those without a regular income • Intermittent workers in receipt of income support