



Governor's Office
British Virgin Islands

Public Feedback

Implementation of the Commission of Inquiry Recommendations

9 May 2025

Governor Daniel Pruce

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
British Virgin Islands



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Key Insights

- The public have a good awareness of the COI report and its recommendations, 40% were 'extremely' or 'very' familiar. A further 45% were 'somewhat familiar'.
- 44% reported that the COI had made a 'very positive' or 'somewhat positive' difference to them personally.
- A considerable proportion of respondents said the COI made no difference, this was particularly evident in relation to the security of the Virgin Islands (38%) and to politicians and Government (34%).
- Almost half of all respondents reported that the COI has made a positive difference to the Virgin Islands as a whole (47%) compared with only 15% who reported a somewhat negative or very negative impact.
- Respondents were 11% more likely to report that the COI had made a positive difference to the Public Service if they had interacted with the Social Development Department in the last year. They were 2% less likely to if they had interacted with the Immigration Department.
- 52% of those who applied for Social Assistance in the last three years thought their application would be considered fairly (compared to 30% of people who applied over three years ago).
- Only 25% of those who had applied for social assistance heard about it directly from the Government. This compares to 65% of respondents who got their information from word of mouth. Similarly, most people find information out about Crown Land by word of mouth (78%).
- Over 50% of those who had applied for Crown Land disagreed or strongly disagreed that their application would be considered fairly, though the vast majority of respondents applied over three years ago.
- 26 responded that they thought their application for Crown Land had been lost or mishandled during the process (23%). 11 people indicated that there had been bias or political interference in the application process.
- 44% of people who applied for Residence Status within the last 3 years reported that the eligibility criteria were clear, this compares with 33% of those who applied over 3 years ago. Though those who applied within the last 3 years were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that it was easy to find information about how to apply (49% compared to 40%).
- Those who applied for Belonger Status in the last three years were more likely to agree or strongly agree that the process for applying for Belonger Status was clear (55% compared to 47%). They were also more likely to report that it was easy to find out information about how to apply (51% compared to 40%).



- Those who applied for Belonger Status within the last three years were more likely to agree or strongly agree that their application would be considered fairly (51% compared to 46%) and far less likely to disagree or strongly disagree (12% compared to 25%).
- 57% of respondents who had applied for Belonger Status within the last three years reported that their application was processed within a year (compared to 38% of those who applied over three years ago).
- Public Officers were more likely to say that the COI made a positive difference to them personally (50% compared to 44%). Public Officers were significantly less likely to respond that the COI had a negative impact on Government and politicians (8% of Public Officers compared to 17% of all respondents).
- Respondents who identified as Black, Black Caribbean or Black African were more likely to report that the COI had made a positive difference to the Virgin Islands (51%, compared to 42% of respondents who identified as White or Caucasian). Respondents who identified as White or Caucasian were significantly more likely to report that the COI had made “no difference”, an average of 44% across all categories (compared to 27% of respondents who identified as Black, Black Caribbean or Black African).
- The findings are against a backdrop of reportedly high satisfaction in the Public Service. The Customer Service Centre's End of Year Recap 2024 reports that an average of 93.8% of customers who responded were satisfied with the service they received.



Executive Summary



- 1.1. It is incredibly important to consider the views of the people who live in the Virgin Islands when assessing the impact of the Commission of Inquiry (COI). The Minister for the Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty MP, tasked me with gathering the views of the public to inform his assessment.
- 1.2. A general survey was widely publicised, and those with experience of applications for Social Assistance, Crown Land and Residence & Belonger Status were asked to complete questions directly related to these themes.
- 1.3. The three policy areas were chosen because these are areas where reforms are targeted, where the reform is resident-focused, and where there has been some sort of change. The purpose of the survey was to assess whether there are direct or indirect impacts from the COI which have resulted in a positive, negative or neutral experience for the people of the Virgin Islands. In the absence of baseline data, respondents were asked when they interacted with services, and a comparison was conducted between experiences of those who applied for services before and after the publication of the COI report in 2022.
- 1.4. The response to the survey was encouraging, 621 responses were received. The thoughtful and considered comments of those who participated represented a wide cross-section of society. I am incredibly grateful to everyone who took the time to respond, and to those involved in the development of the survey.
- 1.5. Improvements can be observed in many areas. For example, 44% of people who applied for Residence Status within the last three years reported that the eligibility criteria were clear, this compares with 33% of those who applied over three years ago. That said, still over half of the people who responded did not find the criteria clear. Similarly, 52% of those who applied for Social Assistance in the last three years thought their application would be considered fairly, compared to 30% of people who applied over three years ago. While this shift should be commended, there is still more work which can be done.
- 1.6. Many people reported that they observed 'no difference' as a result of the COI, and this is understandable. The forty-eight recommendations were largely targeted to specific areas. In some areas, where there were significant policy changes,



respondents' experiences improved. For example, shortly after the publication of the COI report, grants previously administered by elected officials were transferred to the Social Development Department. Respondents who had interacted with the Social Development Department in the last year were 11% more likely to report that the COI had a positive impact on the Public Service compared to respondents as a whole.

- 1.7. It continues to be the case that the public are often getting their information about services through word of mouth rather than directly from the Government. This is particularly evident in relation to Crown Land, where 78% of respondents found out about Crown Land through word of mouth compared to 6% who got their information from the Government website. This is open to abuse, as those with connections to Government would be more likely to benefit. It is vital that the next stage of the reform process is focused on making information easily accessible.
- 1.8. Written comments provided detailed insights into the experiences of residents, some reported continued poor governance practices, others reported confidence in future change, and others criticised the COI itself. Many respondents felt it was too early to observe meaningful changes. What is clear, is that there must be an ongoing focus on both implementation and enforcement.
- 1.9. While it may be too early to draw reliable conclusions, and more can be done to improve the experiences of residents, the findings provide enough to give confidence that governance is moving in the right direction in several areas. Given that many of the reforms are in their infancy, it is likely that the impact is because of shifting attitudes rather than delivery. The next phase, focused on education and implementation, must be prioritised to ensure the people of the Virgin Islands experience the benefits of the COI reforms.

Governor Daniel Puce



Background

- 2.1. The Commission of Inquiry (COI) report was published on 29th April 2022, and considered whether “serious dishonesty in relation to public officials may have taken place in the BVI”.
- 2.2. The Framework Agreement, setting out how the Government of the Virgin Islands would deliver the COI recommendations, was confirmed by an exchange of letters between the Premier and the then UK Minister for the Overseas Territories in June 2022. The objectives of the reforms were to deliver justice where wrongdoing is found, to improve how the Government handles the public’s business, and to build effective institutions.
- 2.3. Between 4th and 6th November 2024, the Minister for the Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty MP, visited the Virgin Islands to start the assessment process. The Minister called for a final review by the Governor, self-assessment by the Government of the Virgin Islands, assessments by Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office officials, and public feedback coordinated by the Governor’s Office. The Minister tasked the Governor with finding out from the public what impact the COI reforms had.

Methodology

- 3.1. The primary method of gathering feedback was a survey intended to capture the awareness, perceptions and attitudes of the public in relation to the COI reforms. A summary of the Public Service’s Customer Service 2024 ‘End of Year Recap’ provides context.
- 3.2. The public feedback survey ran between 12th February and 2nd March 2025. Questions were developed collaboratively, between various Government departments and the Governor’s Office, and tested thoroughly. The survey could be completed online and was specifically adapted so it could be easily filled out on mobile phones. The survey also allowed respondents to answer the questions on behalf of someone else, who may have been unable to do so themselves.
- 3.3. The survey asked a series of general questions, as well as targeted questions relating to specific areas impacted by the COI reforms. Assistance Grants, Crown Land and Residence & Belonger Status were selected as the three areas where



the public were most directly affected, and although the legislation in these areas is new or yet to be brought into force, there were specific changes because of the COI. For example, assistance grants were transferred to the Social Development Department, and the Government committed to following the existing rules for Residence Status. The survey was also intended to measure if there had been a shift in culture in these areas, and whether this resulted in a positive, a negative or no change to the experience of the public. Other areas of the COI not covered in this report, such as contracts, Statutory Boards and integrity in public life, are covered in the Governor's Final Review.

- 3.4. A range of different communication methods were used to publicise the survey. A press release was issued on the Government website to announce the launch. Social media posts were shared from Governor's Office and Government of the Virgin Islands channels. A graphic was created which could be shared on WhatsApp with a link to the survey. Respondents were most likely to hear about the survey via WhatsApp (44%). 25% of respondents heard about the survey by word of mouth, 21% heard about it in the news, and 18% from the Government website. Some respondents would have heard about the survey through multiple channels.
- 3.5. This analysis compares the views of those who applied for services before and after the COI report was published to determine the differences in experiences and perceptions. While this approach is imperfect, as individuals are expected to cast their minds back several years, this was determined to be the best way to assess impact in the absence of baseline data. In some instances, small sample sizes mean that the findings should be treated with caution. That said, the response from participants provides useful insights into the experiences of those living in the Virgin Islands, and how those experiences have changed over time.
- 3.6. Additionally, data from the Public Service's Customer Service Centre 2024 'End of Year Recap' is provided for context. This existing intelligence, not collected for the purpose of the COI assessment, is intended to provide a wider perspective on the public's view of how the Public Service is operating.



Findings

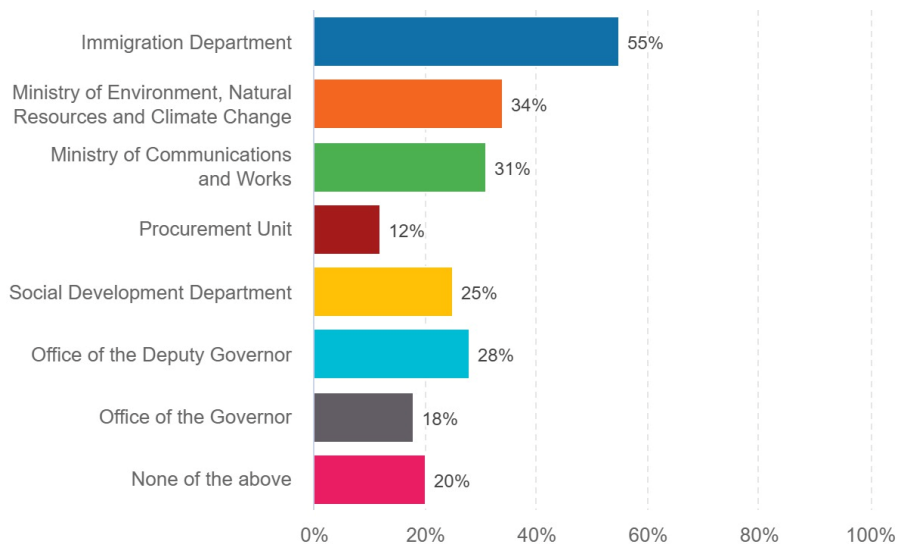
Public Survey

- 4.1. The survey received 621 responses. This high response rate is testament to how important the reforms are to the people of the Virgin Islands.
- 4.2. Most respondents had lived in Virgin Islands for over 30 years (62%), many of whom for all their life. Over 80% had lived in Virgin Islands for over 20 years. Most respondents who provided the information held Belonger Status (374, 70%). Of the remaining respondents who gave their immigration entry category, 67 held Residence Status (12%). The remaining 65 respondents (12%) held a work permit, 22 respondents (4%) were work permit exempt, and 9 (2%) were residing (e.g. with a spouse).

General Questions

- 4.3. **Most people had some level of familiarity with the findings of the COI and its recommendations (85% of respondents).** Nearly 40% were extremely or very familiar with the findings and recommendations, and a further 45% were somewhat familiar. All respondents were asked which Ministries or Departments they interacted with in the last year.

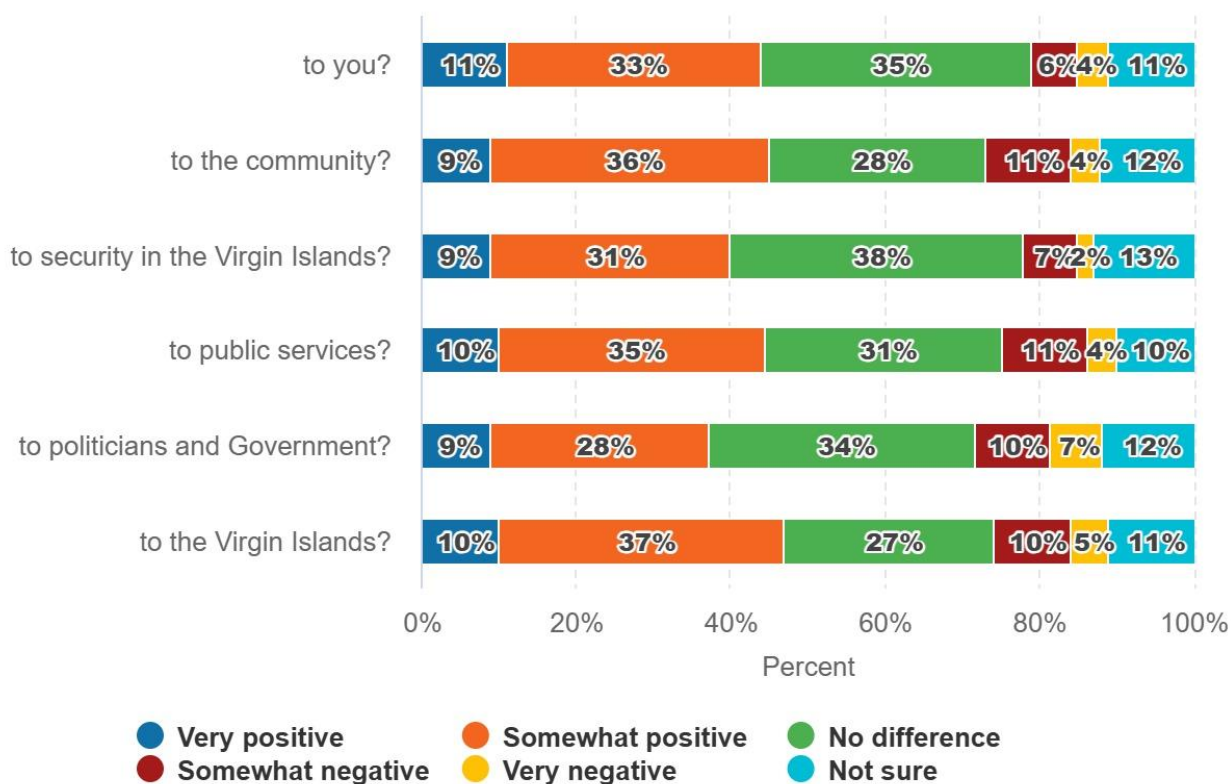
Which of the following Government Ministries or Departments have you interacted with in the last year? Please select all that apply.





- 4.4. Most people had regular interactions with the Government. Only 20% of respondents had interacted with none of the listed Ministries or Departments in the last year. The above chart does not distinguish between members of the public and Public Officers, whose interactions would be different in nature.
- 4.5. All respondents were asked what difference the Commission of Inquiry made to them, to the community and to different aspects of the Virgin Islands. The question had multiple purposes: to ascertain differences in impact between different elements of Government and society, and to find out whether experiences differed for people who had interacted with different departments.

What difference did the Commission of Inquiry Make...



- 4.6. 11% of respondents reported that the COI had made a very positive difference to them. **Almost half of all respondents reported that the COI had made a positive difference to the Virgin Islands as a whole** (47% reported a very positive or somewhat positive difference), compared to only 15% who reported a somewhat negative or very negative difference. Giving reasons for their responses, some described the COI as “badly needed” and many agreed with the



sentiment that “it brought a lot of issues to the forefront”. Those who thought the COI had a negative impact felt that way for different reasons, some describe that “other work got neglected to prioritize the COI” and others describe it resulting in “more division, blaming 'others' [and], less community spirit”.

- 4.7. One respondent said that the COI provided an “opportunity to change” and another was “cautiously optimistic”. Most respondents who thought the COI made a very positive difference to the Virgin Islands still felt as though there had been “minimal change”. Six respondents mention challenges with enforcement, one describes there being “no enforcement and minimal implementation”, and another notes recent changes to laws and thought “politicians will only find a work around”. Others felt the COI “put corrupt individuals on notice” and caused people to “think twice”. This would indicate that the positive impact is because of shifting attitudes rather than delivery.
- 4.8. **A considerable proportion of respondents said the COI made no difference, this was particularly evident in relation to the security of the Virgin Islands (38%) and to politicians and Government (34%).** Several respondents felt that there are “no consequences for breaking law”. Given the targeted nature of the reforms, it is expected that 35% of respondents said that the COI had made no difference to them. Others welcomed transparency and the focus on challenges in the Virgin Islands, however others described the reforms as “lip service”.
- 4.9. Some respondents who were critical of the impact of the COI gave reasons for their responses. Several respondents stated the importance of preserving land for the people of the Virgin Islands. One respondent said, “I am especially concerned about the immigration, labour and land laws which were not clearly laid before Virgin Islanders (first) to make the necessary decisions for our future generations and us now.” Others mentioned the length of time they had been waiting for Residence or Belonger Status and expressed concern about a lack of rights for residents.
- 4.10. 374 respondents who provided the information about their immigration entry category held Belonger Status. Those with Belonger Status were more likely to think the COI had a positive impact on public services and politicians (50% compared to 45%, and 40% compared to 37% respectively). 50% of those with Belonger Status responded that the COI had made a ‘somewhat positive’ or ‘very positive’ difference to the Virgin Islands (compared to 47% of all respondents).



4.11. **Those with Belonger Status were more likely to report that the COI made a positive difference** across all categories (an average of 43% for all respondents and 46% for those with Belonger Status). This could be because many of the reforms were targeted at services accessible only to those with Status e.g. Crown Land and Social Assistance. Alternatively, it could be that this group has a closer connection to Government and hence are more likely to notice changes.

4.12. Consideration was given to the views of respondents based on the departments which they had interacted with in the last year, specifically departments where the reforms were targeted (namely, the Social Development Department, the Immigration Department and the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources & Climate Change).

4.13. Respondents who had accessed these departments in the last year were more likely to have viewed positive impacts to themselves because of the COI, this is particularly evident in relation to the Social Development Department. The below table shows the percentage of people who had interacted with each department and answered that the COI had made a 'very positive' or 'somewhat positive' difference to themselves, to the community, and to the Public Service.

Respondent reported interaction with the following departments...	The COI made a 'very positive' or 'somewhat positive' difference...		
	To you	To the community	To the Public Service
Social Development Department	55%	51%	56%
Immigration Department	46%	46%	43%
MENRCC	50%	50%	45%
All Respondents	44%	45%	45%

4.14. **Respondents were 11% more likely to report that the COI had made a positive difference to them if they had interacted with the Social Development Department in the last year.** One respondent commented, "once procedures are followed it seems very organized and useful", though several respondents think the Department is "understaffed".



- 4.15. Respondents were 2% more likely to report that the COI had made a positive difference to them if they had interacted with the Immigration Department. One respondent who had been awarded for Residence Status writes "if the COI hadn't happened, I am sure we would still be waiting".
- 4.16. Although respondents were 6% more likely to report that the COI had made a positive difference to them if they had interacted with the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change, the comments relating to Crown Land are critical. One described a "significantly negative impact for ancestral persons in the Virgin Islands" and argued that Land should be reserved for this group. Another respondent said the COI was "not taken seriously", noting that the Crown Land "management Board is not yet active" and "application forms are not prepared".
- 4.17. Respondents were 11% more likely to report that the COI had made a positive difference to the Public Service if they had interacted with the Social Development Department in the last year. One respondent who had interacted with Social Development thought that "public servants operate on an increased professional level", though others comment that "nothing has changed".
- 4.18. **Respondents were 2% less likely to report that the COI had made a positive difference to the Public Service if they had interacted with the Immigration Department in the last year.** This could indicate that although administrative challenges continue in some areas, some people feel as though they are better served overall. One respondent who had been waiting for several years for their application for Status to be considered thought the "Public Service in general is still very slow and inefficient". Another respondent said, "employees in Immigration and Customs are either poorly trained, untrained, or ignorant of their training".
- 4.19. The positive findings in relation to the Social Development Department could be reflective of the major policy shift in this area, where grants formerly administered by elected officials were transferred to the Department. In Immigration, while there has been commitment to follow the existing law, the new legislation is yet to be brought into force and hence policies and procedures are yet to be finalised and published.

Social Assistance

- 4.20. The COI recommended a move towards an open, transparent and single (or, at least, coherent) system of benefits, based on clearly expressed and published criteria without unnecessary discretionary powers. A new programme of social



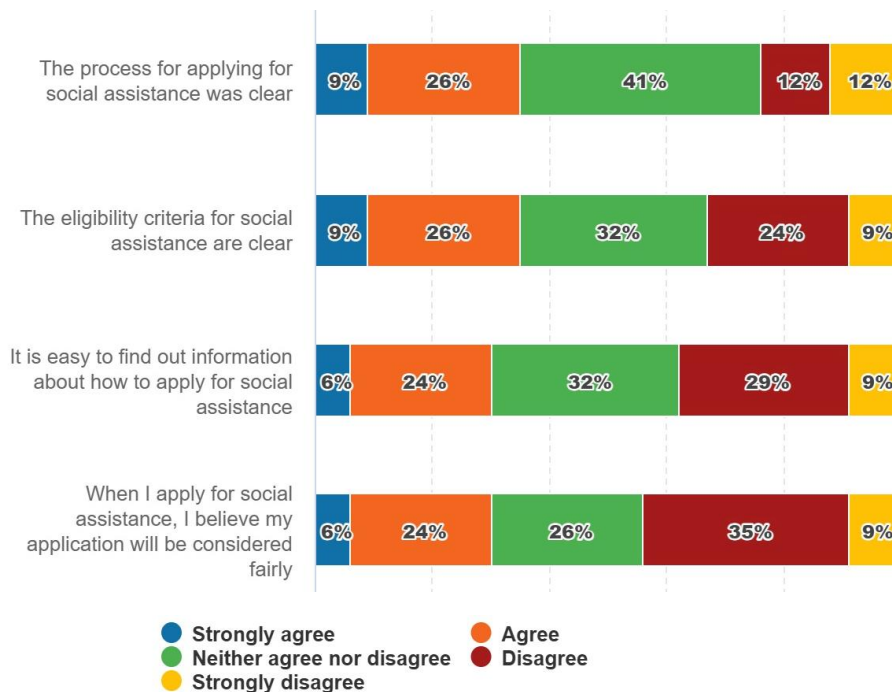
assistance was developed, and the Public Assistance (Amendment) Act 2024 was passed in the House of Assembly (though this is yet to be brought into force).

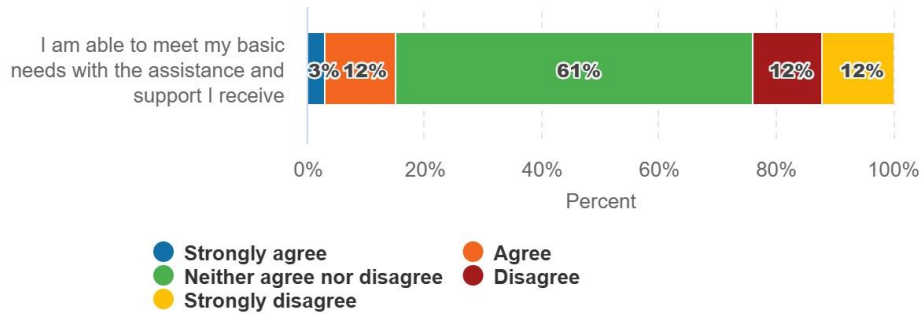
4.21. Given the needs of those likely applying for social assistance, adjustments were made to the survey to allow social workers to complete it with service users. 63 people (10%) who responded had applied for social assistance in the past. 42 people (7%) had considered applying but had not.

4.22. **Of those who had considered making an application but had not, the most likely reason was that they thought they were eligible but didn't think they would get help (14 people, 37%),** followed by those who found the application process too difficult (6 people, 16%). Only 5 respondents reported that they were currently receiving social assistance.

4.23. All respondents who had applied for assistance grants were asked about their experience. The responses from those who applied before the COI report was published are compared with those who applied within the last three years.

Applied for Social Assistance over three years ago. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following...



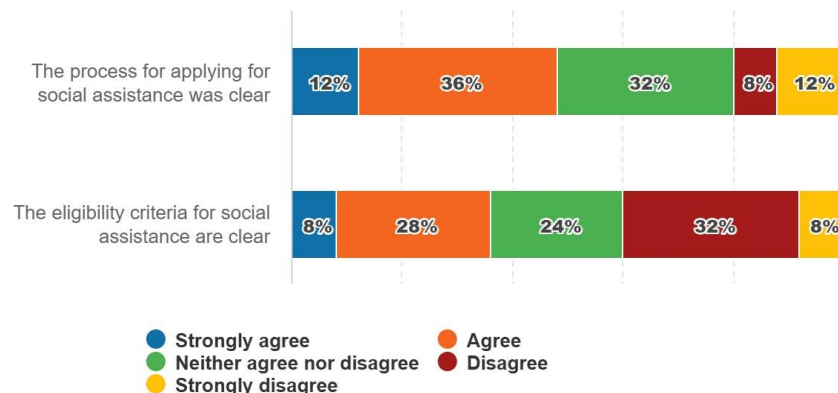


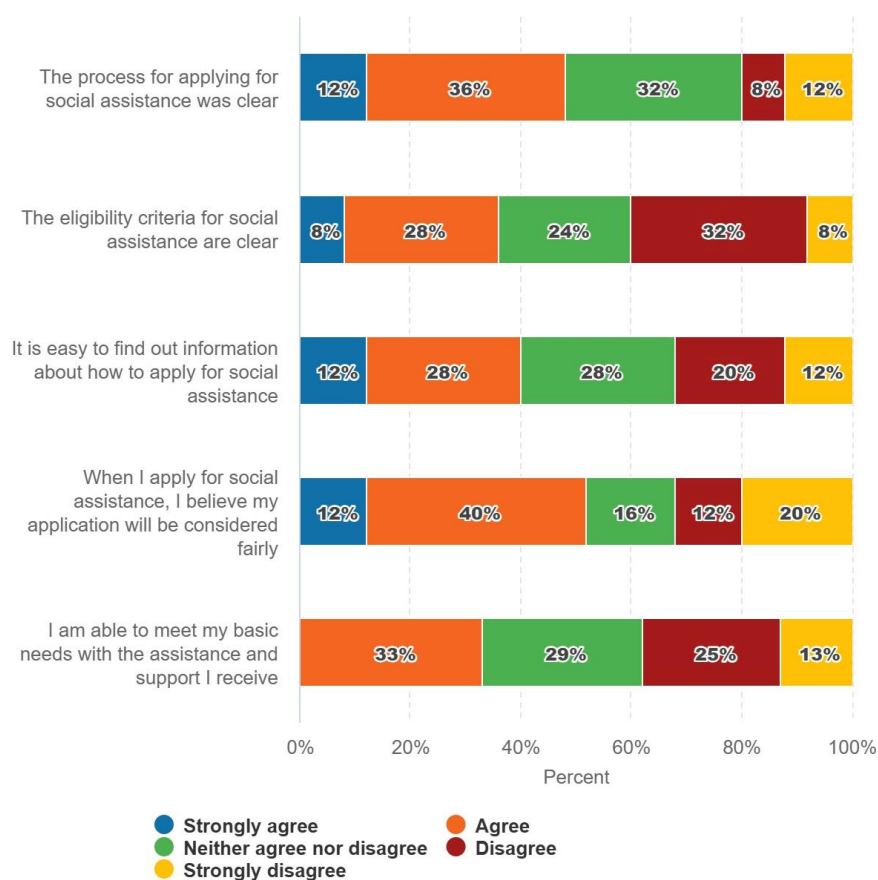
4.24. 36 people reported that they had applied for social assistance over three years ago. Most of this group reported that they no longer received support, and this most likely accounts for a significant proportion of respondents answering that they 'neither agree nor disagree' that they can meet their basic needs with the support they receive (61%). A significant proportion of those who responded that they had applied for social assistance over three years ago disagreed or strongly disagreed that their application would be considered fairly (44%).

4.25. One respondent who had applied for Social Assistance over three years ago said, "besides the way Social Assistance is provided, the recommendations have not 'taken root'. It's still business as usual." Of the 16 people who had applied for social assistance over three years ago and gave comments, 10 agree with the sentiment "it is difficult to identify any real significant positive change" and "most of the changes still seem to be policies and words only".

4.26. 26 people reported that they applied for social assistance in the last three years. The below graph shows their responses.

Applied for Social Assistance in the last three years. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following...





4.27. **48% of those applying for social assistance in the last three years agreed or strongly agreed that the process was clear (compared to 35% of those who applied over three years ago).** One respondent commented that the social assistance programme is as “a bit intrusive but it’s needed so that it is not abused”. One commenter noted the change in legislation, but said they “do not expect anything to improve” because “nothing is enforced in the Virgin Islands.”

4.28. **52% of those who applied in the last three years said they thought their application would be considered fairly (compared to 30% of people who applied over three years ago).** The above indicates improvements since the COI across all areas, in terms of clarity of criteria and processes, and perceived fairness. One respondent commented, “I think the social benefits changed away from politicians is benefiting for a fairer community”, though also thinks the department is understaffed. Several respondents agree with the shift in grants to the Social Development department, one commented “it’s very reasonable especially now that the fees are increased.”



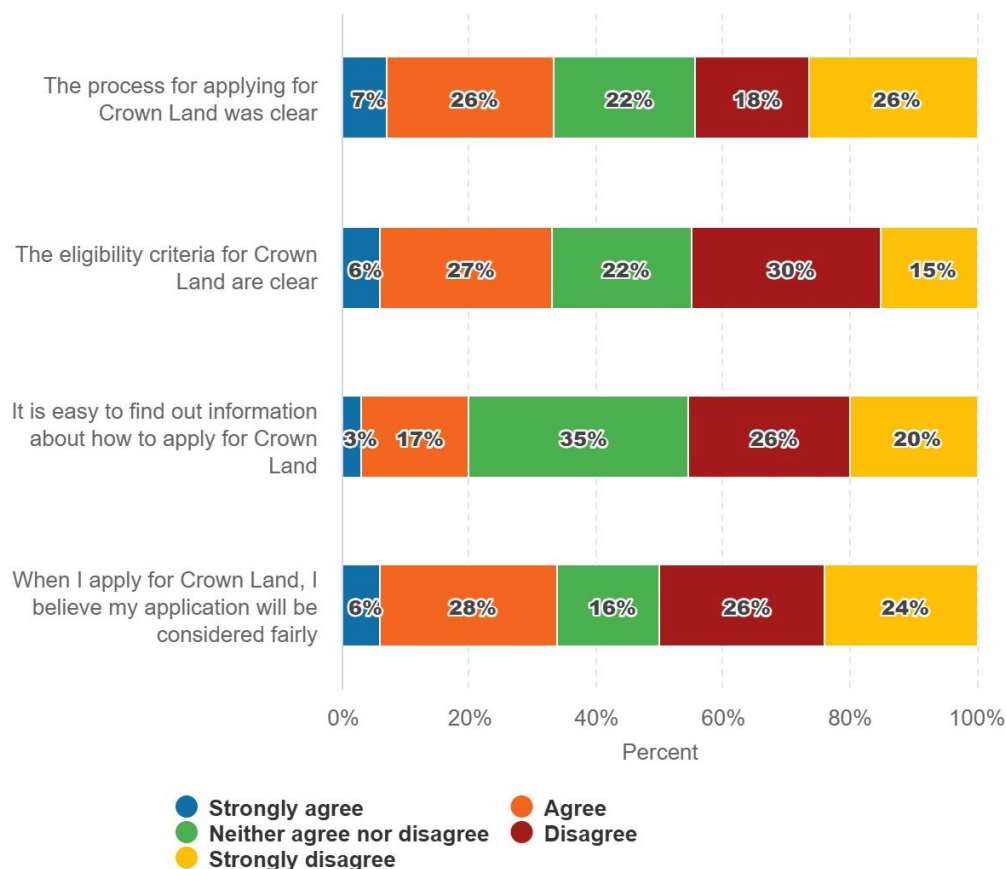
- 4.29. 50% Of those who gave a response to the question said their application for social assistance took less than three months (20 people) and 35% (15 people) reported it took over 3 months but less than 1 year. Some reported that they waited longer than expected. 12 people reported that their application had been lost or mishandled. 2 people wrote that they thought the processing time was fair and 3 people reported bias in who gets assistance.
- 4.30. Most people heard about social assistance through word of mouth (40 people or 65%), 17 people heard about social assistance in the news or on social media (27%), 9 people through calling or visiting the Social Development Department (15%) and 6 people from the Government's website (10%). As **only 25% heard about social assistance directly from the Government**, there is a risk that some groups could be left out, and those with connections to the Government would be more likely to benefit.
- 4.31. One respondent summarises "while progress has been made in implementing the COI recommendations, additional efforts are needed to fully institutionalize these changes." The respondent cites "the transfer of assistance funding from elected representatives to the Social Development Department" as a "significant example of good governance".

Crown Land

- 4.32. The COI found that decisions relating to the disposal of Crown Land were taken by Ministers without any published criteria. The COI recommended a review to ensure that disposals are the subject of an open and transparent process. A new Crown Lands policy was published in March 2024. The Crown Lands Management Act 2024 was brought into force on 30th January 2025.
- 4.33. 119 respondents had applied for Crown Land (19%). A further 105 had considered applying but had not (17%). **The most common reason for not applying for Crown Land was because the respondent thought they were eligible but didn't think they'd be successful (40%)**, followed by 32% of this group who didn't understand how to apply. 37 people said they had been awarded Crown Land in the past. Of the 119 respondents who had applied for Crown Land, 109 had applied over five years ago (87%).



Applied for Crown Land over three years ago. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following...

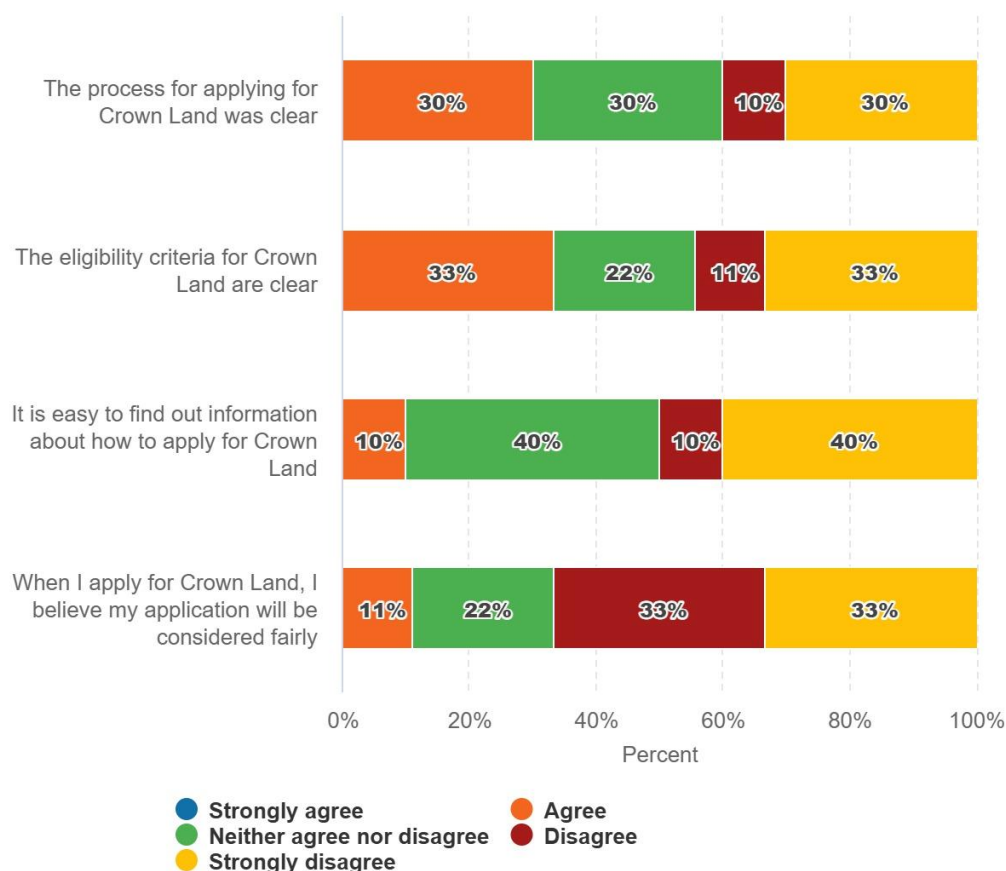


4.34. Only 20% of respondents who had applied for Crown Land over three years ago agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to find out information about how to apply. 50% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their application would be considered fairly. One respondent who had applied for Crown Land said, “the COI confirmed many things that that we as Virgin Islanders used to say ‘School Children say’ but there has been absolutely no change in behaviour”, another felt it “was not taken serious by the elected politicians and their circle.”

4.35. 10 people reported that they had applied in the last three years. Given the small sample size, these findings should be treated with great caution. That said, the population who apply for Crown Land is relatively small and the views of these individuals provide insights into their experiences. Efforts will be needed to monitor the effectiveness of the new policy.



Applied for Crown Land in the last three years. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following...



4.36. Of those who responded that they had applied for Crown Land within the past three years, 6 out of 9 people disagreed or strongly disagreed that their application would be considered fairly. One person who had applied within the period did not answer the question. This compares with 50% of people who applied over three years ago. While it is not possible to conclude that the perception of fairness is worse given the small sample size, the fact that over 50% of 119 people who had applied for Crown Land disagreed or strongly disagreed that their application would be considered fairly provides evidence for the need for clear and transparent policies. 33% of those who applied for Crown Land in the past three years strongly agreed or agreed that the eligibility criteria are clear, this is the same as those who applied over three years.

4.37. A few respondents comment that “Crown Lands should be reserved for indigenous Virgin Islanders”. Ultimately, this is a policy decision for the Government. Several



others comment that Crown Land should be accessible to those “living at poverty levels”. Others believe there is bias in the system, one respondent questions “why some people have gotten through more than once and now have multiple pieces [of Crown Land] and some have not received any”. The respondent suggests some applications were being “thrown away”.

- 4.38. Respondents were asked about delays faced as part of the Crown Land application process. **26 responded that they thought their application for Crown Land had been lost or mishandled (23%)**. 42 respondents chose to give ‘other reasons’. Of these, **11 of those indicated there had been bias or political interference in the application process (26%)**. One respondent said that their “application for Crown Land was submitted years ago, to this day I have not received a response”, and another stated they “have applied multiple times and have not even received an acceptance or denial”.
- 4.39. Respondents were asked how they found out about Crown Land. **Most people had found out about Crown Land by word of mouth (91 respondents or 78%)**, others called or visited the Ministry (25 or 22%). Only 7 respondents (6%) said they found out about Crown Land on the Government’s website. There is a risk that a lack of transparent and consistent information could result in an unfair system.

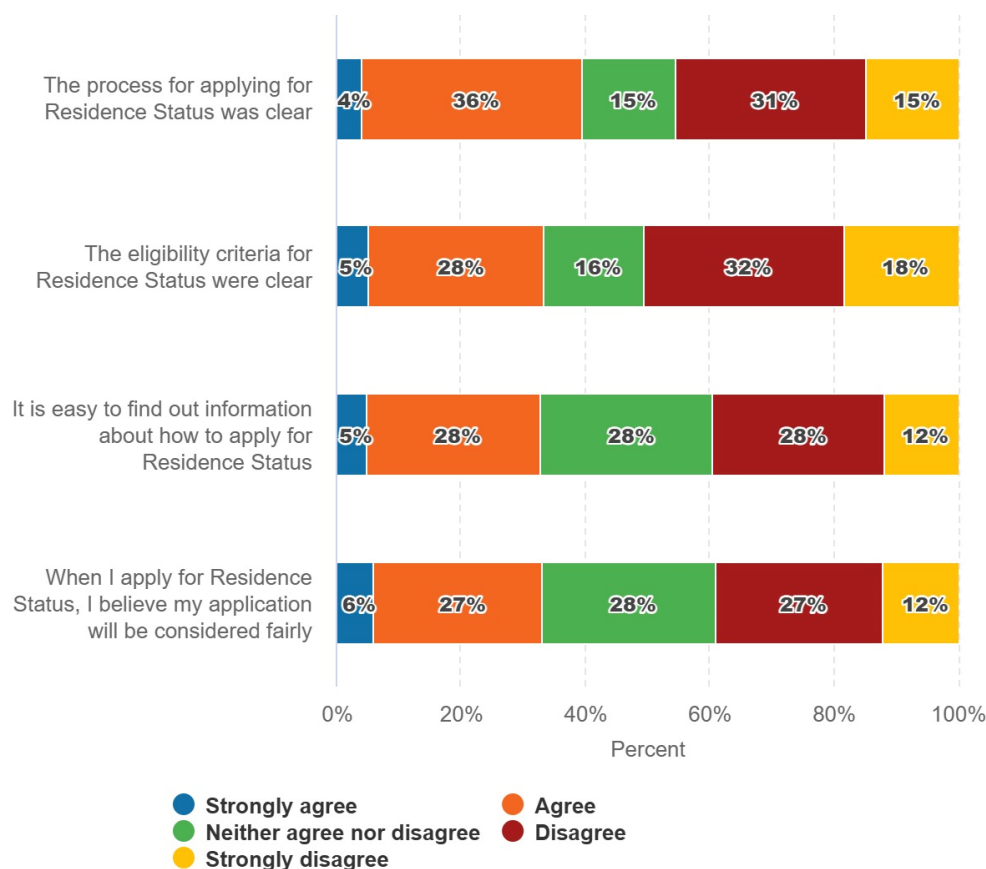
Residence Status

- 4.40. The COI found that Cabinet appeared willing to act in a legally arbitrary manner in deciding Residence and Belonger Status applications. Additionally, the COI found that the Fast Track scheme (intended to address the 2019 backlog in applications) resulted in a process which involved an even greater exercise of discretion, with greater risks of errors, inconsistent decision making and dishonesty. In law, eligible individuals apply for and are granted Residence Status which they must hold for a period before they are eligible to apply for Belonger Status.
- 4.41. Most respondents held Belonger Status (374, 64%). 67 people held Residence Status (11%), and 87 people were on a Work Permit or Work Permit Exempt (22%). Several people chose not to respond to the question about their immigration entry category (33) or indicated that they ‘Prefer not to say’ (51). 190 respondents had applied for Residence Status (31%). Two thirds of the respondents who had applied for Residence Status had been successful (116, 67%). 53 people were waiting for an application to be considered (31%) and only 3 people who reported that their application had been rejected (2%).



4.42. 111 respondents reported that they'd applied for Residence Status over 3 years ago. Some of whom also went on to apply for Belonger Status.

Applied for Residence Status over three years ago. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

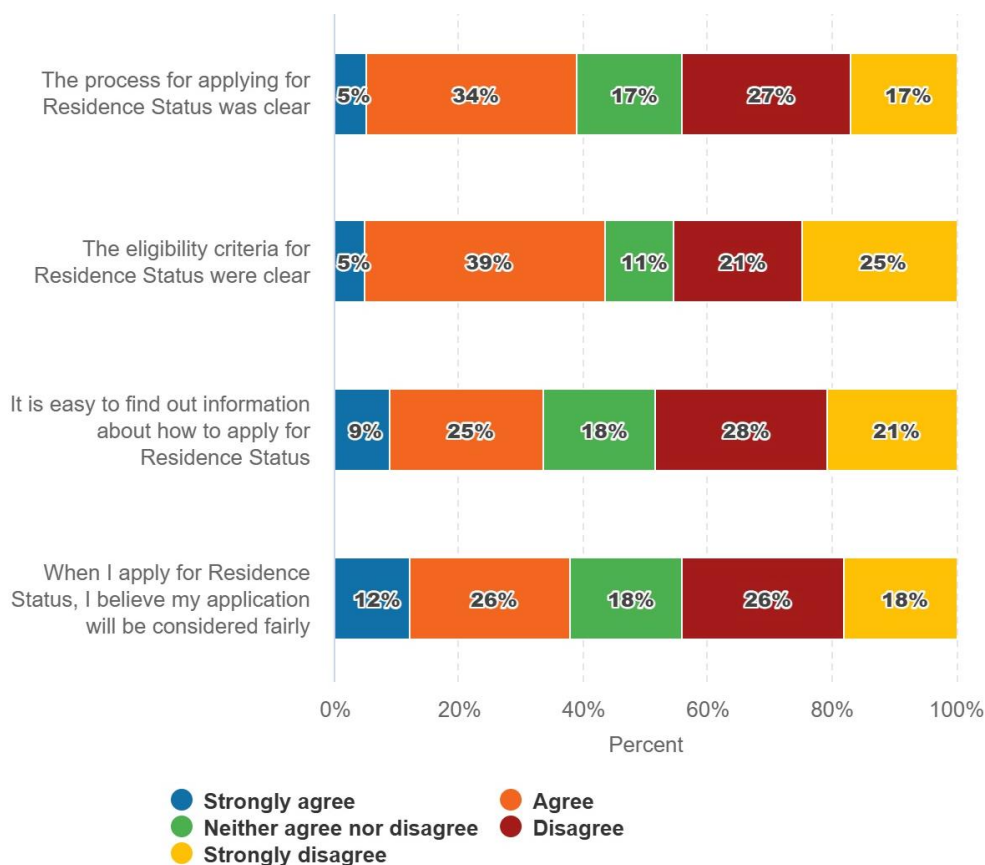


4.43. 50% of those who had applied for Residence Status over three years ago disagreed that the eligibility criteria were clear (32% disagreed and 18% strongly disagreed). While 40% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the process for applying was clear, 46% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Many respondents describe long waits for Status, and several comment their applications were “only processed because of the one-time fast track”. Other apparently eligible respondents who had applied for Status over three years ago were still waiting, some having “not had any communication since [they] applied”. Several respondents say they have witnessed others being granted Status while they wait, one noted that some of those had spent “much less time here”. Another respondent speculates others were awarded status quickly “simply because they knew someone”.



4.44. 59 respondents reported that they had applied in last three years. 20 respondents who had applied for residence status left the question about how long ago they applied blank and were hence excluded from this analysis.

Applied for Residence Status in the last three years. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:



4.45. **44% of people who applied for Residence Status within the last three years reported that the eligibility criteria were clear, this compares with 33% of those who applied over three years ago. Those who applied within the last three years were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree that it was easy to find information about how to apply (49% compared to 40%).**

4.46. Several respondents note “recommendations have not been implemented” or it is “too early to detect positive change”. Some respondents feel the “focus on transparency and good governance” has been positive, but others think there is “deliberate foot-dragging on implementing the COI recommendations on



Residency and Belongership.” One respondent credits the COI for their application being processed, “if the COI hadn't happened, I am sure we would still be waiting.”

- 4.47. Several respondents are critical of the process for applications, “the process is a nightmare and the people who implement it obstructive”. Conversely, another respondent describes the staff involved in the interview process as “polite and professional” but is critical of the group interviews and the expectation that those who apply must “answer the questions in a group of strangers”.
- 4.48. These findings are likely because the new law is not yet in force, and hence the new policies and procedures have not been finalised and published. The findings are likely to also be because attention has not been given to implementation within the Department. Some of the respondents who applied over three years ago applied under the Fast Track Scheme, which although open to abuse was a widely publicised initiative. One individual who applied in this way said, “it was clear what I had to do and my application was processed quickly and objectively.”
- 4.49. **Although a greater percentage of those applying within the last few years strongly agreed their application would be considered fairly (12% compared to 6%), a greater percentage were likely to strongly disagree (18% compared to 12%).** This could be evidence of a perception of greater disparity or worsening unfairness within the application system.
- 4.50. Respondents were asked about delays faced during the application process. Only 3 respondents stated their delay was caused by themselves (1 submitted an incomplete application and 2 were not eligible when they applied). 43 respondents chose to give other reasons. Several respondents stated that documents were lost or there was maladministration. Some highlighted changing rules or changing administrations resulting in delays, as well as a fire and Hurricane Irma. Others highlighted political interference, both in positive and negative lights.
- 4.51. Many people had been waiting for several years. One respondent stated that “passing or clarifying laws is one thing but seeing that they are actually carried out is another”, a significant number of respondents report that they are still waiting. One respondent stated, “prior to the COI, [the] Immigration department were unhelpful, simply stating I had not been here for 20 years, and refusing to give me the application form”. Several respondents question whether “residency approvals are stagnant” despite the Framework commitment to apply the law. The below is a sample of comments from those who are currently waiting for Resident Status:



- “I still patient wait on my residence status...in Bvi for 15 years. I think we all go in great direction and I can see improvement in the office.”
- “Having lived and worked here for 10 years I would love to be work permit exempt and/or have residency status but the path is onerous, slow and still very political.”
- “After having been unlawfully blocked from applying for residency status ... I was finally allowed to apply following the COI. I have now been here 16 years, but my residency application hasn't been processed in the 2 years it has been submitted.”
- “I feel like the UK have not done enough to enforce the COI and for us that are trying to get a Belongership the road to it has become more difficult and timely. I have called many times to find out when we might get some news on our Residence application.”
- “It is unacceptable that I ... was informed I will receive a call within six months. I am yet to receive any communication from anyone.”
- “I have witnessed many being granted residency believer status simply because they knew someone. I stuck to rules & 15 years of my life here was completely ignored, no discussion.”
- “The processing of residency applications is taking far too long. My receipt is dated July 2022 and I haven't heard a thing since.”
- “I am very disappointed that after living here and working for 41 years, I have not been granted residency.”
- “I submitted my residency application nearly 3 years ago and it's not progressing. Last time I followed up I was told off for being impatient.”
- “My son has been waiting for his residency status to be processed for 5 years”
- “Very long residency process and zero transparency. Cannot obtain information on where application is and have waited over 2.5 years.”
- “Every time I inquire about my residency application ... they say they will call me back and never call.”

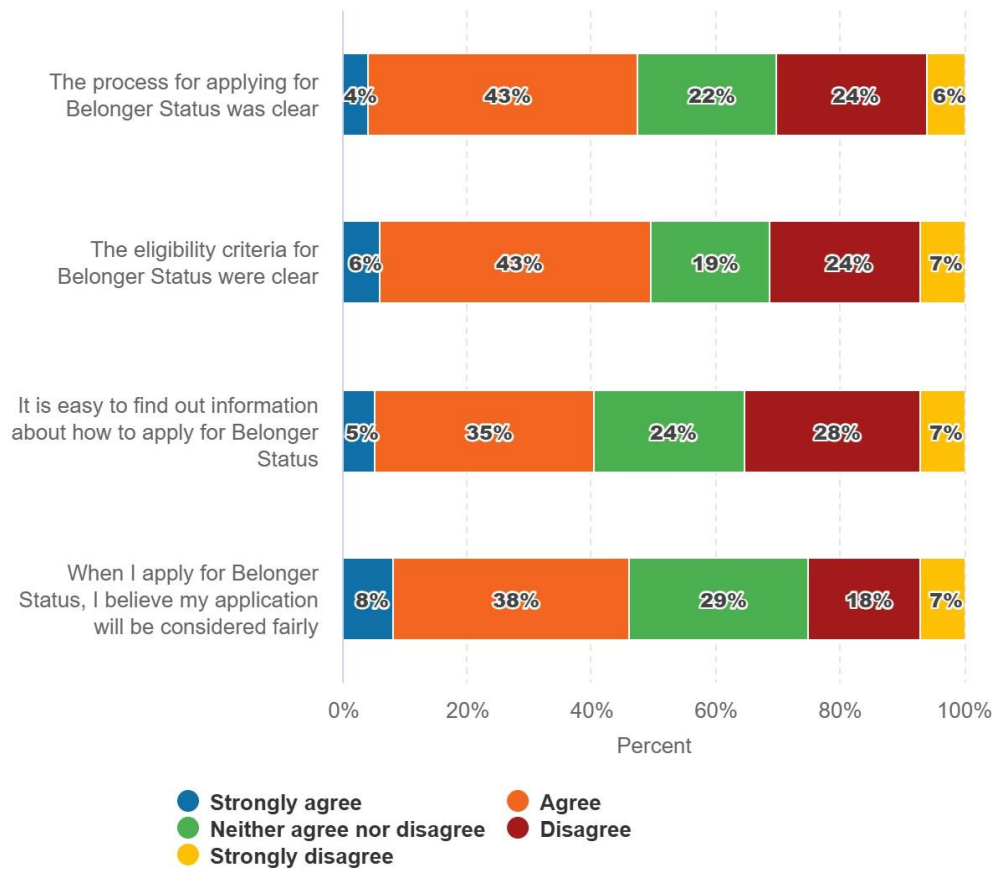
4.52. It is encouraging that a higher proportion of people found out information about Residence Status directly from the Government, compared to those who sought to apply for Crown Land or Social Assistance. **74 people got their information about Residence Status by calling or visiting the Immigration Department (44%) and 34 visited the Government's website (20%).** Almost half of the respondents were informed about Residence Status by word of mouth (82 people, 48%).



Belonger Status

4.53. Once an individual obtains Residence Status, they can apply for Belonger Status after a period of time. 113 respondents reported they had applied for Belonger Status. 13 people were waiting for an application to be considered (7%) and only 1 person reported that they had an application rejected.

Applied for Belonger Status over three years ago. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:



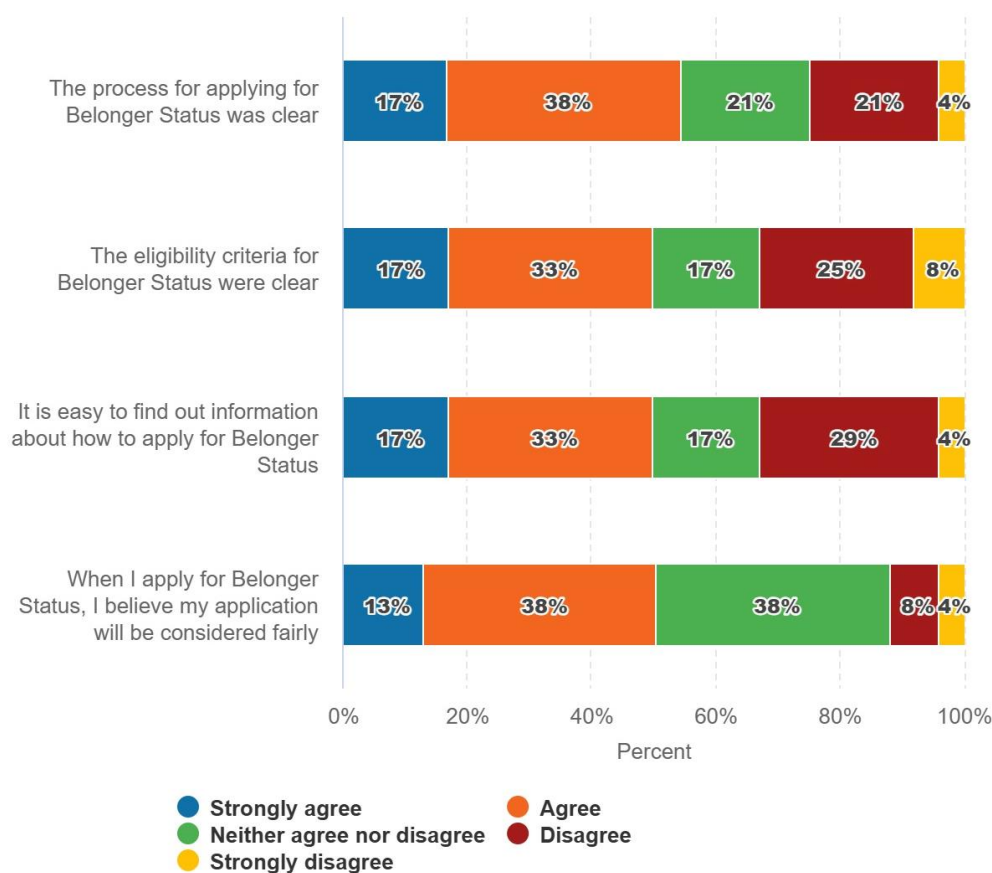
4.54. 99 people reported that they had applied for Belonger Status over three years ago. 94 of these had been awarded Belonger Status (95%), 4 people reported that they were waiting for their application to be considered, and one person had their application rejected. Nearly half of those who applied for Belonger Status over three years ago agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (6%) that the eligibility criteria were clear, compared to 31% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 35% of



respondents who applied over three years ago disagreed or strongly disagreed that it was easy to find information about how to apply.

4.55. Several respondents said they applied under the Fast Track Scheme. Some described the process as quick and objective, three respondents said there was “favoritism”. One respondent who applied over three years ago said “there isn't transparency, no booklets, no online help. Civil servants aren't clear about the rules.” Another respondent described there being “no formal process” and “subjective rules”.

Applied for Belonger Status in the last three years. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:



4.56. 23 people reported that they had applied for Belonger Status in the last three years. 15 people had their application approved (65%) and 8 people were waiting for their application to be considered (35%). Though the experiences of these individuals provide insights into the experiences of those interacting with the

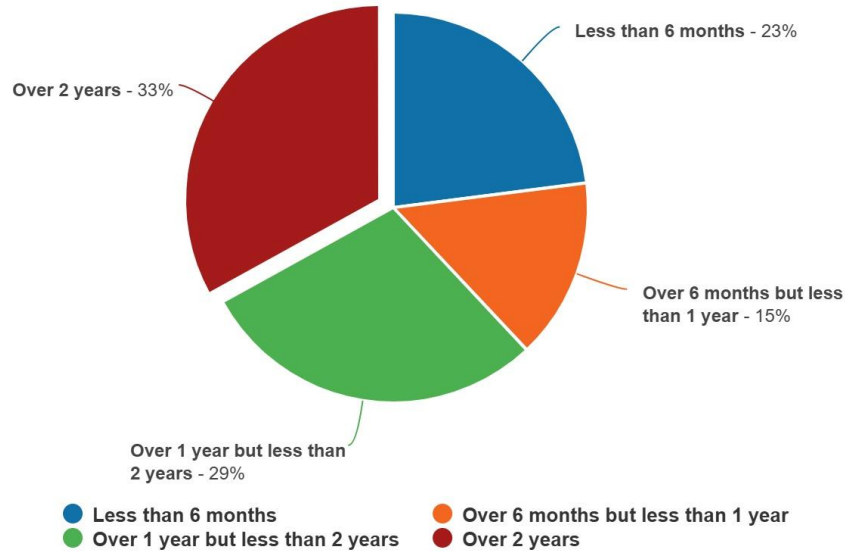


Immigration Department, the results should be treated with caution given the relatively small sample size.

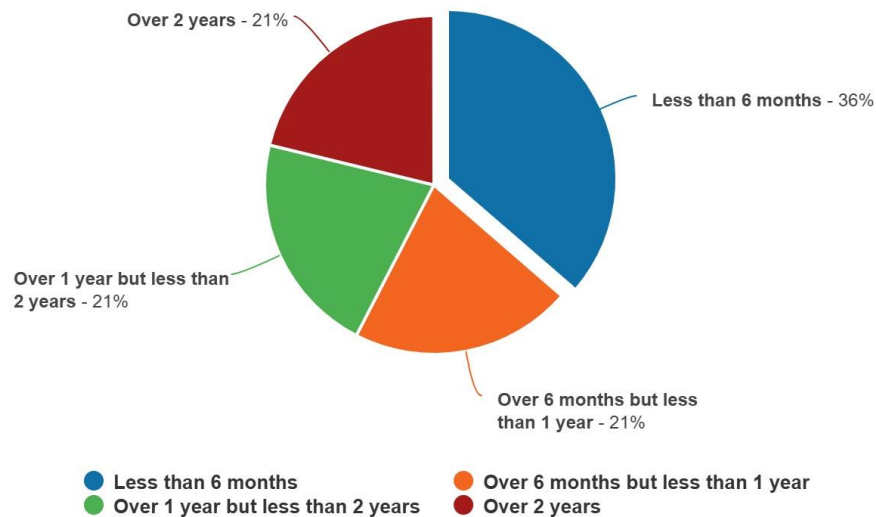
- 4.57. **Those who applied for Belonger Status in the last three years were more likely to agree or strongly agree that the process for applying for Belonger Status was clear (55% compared to 47%), and that it was easy to find information out about how to apply (51% compared to 40%). Those who applied within the last three years were more likely to agree or strongly agree that they believed their application would be considered fairly (51% compared to 46%) and far less likely to disagree or strongly disagree (12% compared to 25%).**
- 4.58. Very few people who had applied for Belonger Status in the past three years provided comments about their experiences, though one person who is currently waiting for their application to be considered describes “indefinite waiting times”. Others who had interacted with the Department said that “there are some helpful people in the office now” which has “made it much easier to figure out answers to questions.” Another respondent commends “the significant volume of legislation and governmental progress ... at remarkable speed, with great transparency and clarity”.
- 4.59. More generally, one respondent argues that “Immigration status should not be easily attainable”, and a few respondents endorse the proposal for immigration quotas. Several others express concern that they “do not think that citizens get fair representation.” One respondent stated that “non-Belongers still live in fear” and questions why there are “different tiers of rights for people.”
- 4.60. Some improvements can be observed in the timeliness of applications being considered over recent years. **57% of respondents who had applied for Belonger Status within the last three years reported that their application was processed within a year (compared to 38% of those who applied over three years ago).** One respondent stated that “the Commission of Inquiry has made a notable difference in terms of service and turnaround time”.
- 4.61. The below charts compare the reported application processing time for those applying for Belonger Status over three years ago, with those who applied for Status within the last three years.



Applied for Belonger Status over three years ago. If you have had an application for Belonger Status processed, how long did it take?



Applied for Belonger Status in the last three years. If you have had an application for Belonger Status processed, how long did it take?



4.62. 4 people had applied for Belonger Status over three years ago and were waiting for their application to be considered. 3 reported that they did not know the reason



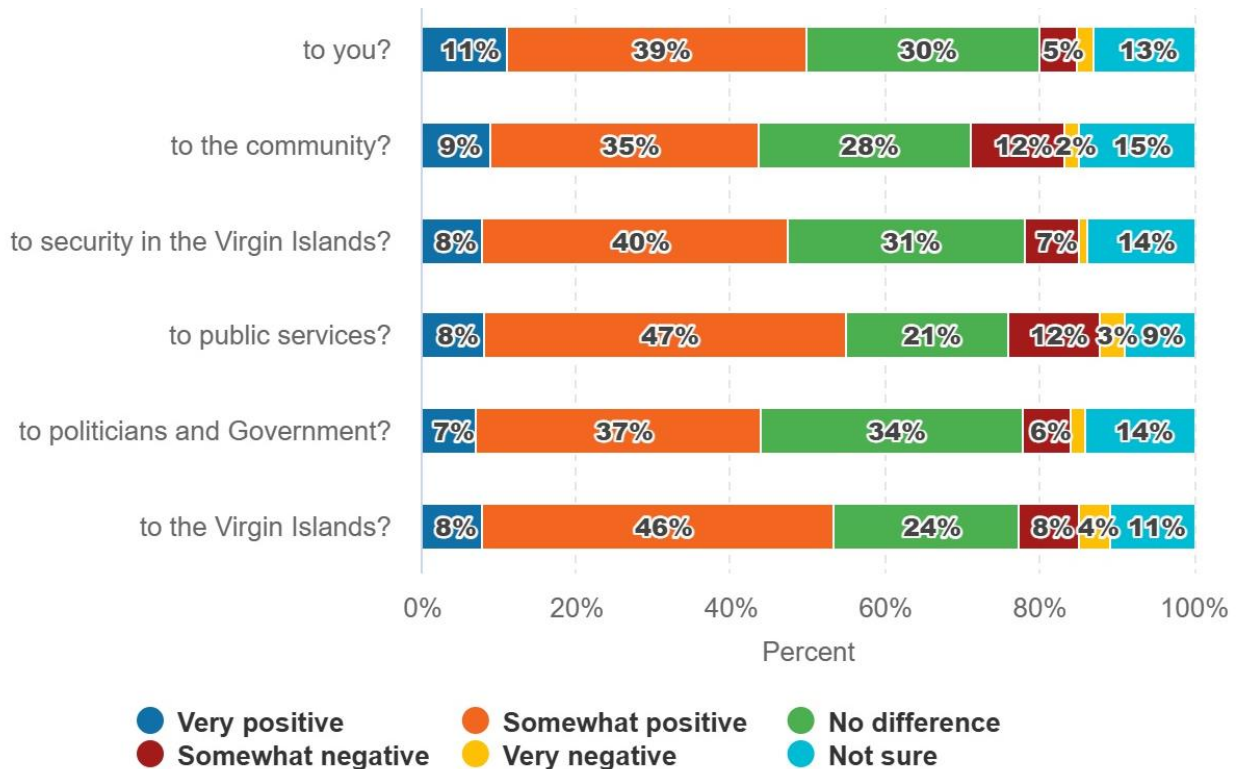
for the delay, and one person blamed the change in Premier. One of the respondents who reported that they did not know the reason for the delay appears to be ineligible, having applied for Belonger Status despite having an application for Residence Status rejected.

Public Officers

4.63. Public Officers play a key role in both delivering the recommendations and implementing the policies and procedures which stem from the new legislation. Public Officers are also intended beneficiaries of the reforms, which should provide clear guidelines and expectations for how they operate. Considering this, the views of Public Officers were specifically sought as part of the survey.

4.64. 134 responses were from Public Officers (22%). According to the most recent Census, the 2010 Population and Housing Census Report, 18% of the population worked for state-owned institutions or Government, so this can be considered a representative sample.

Public Officers. *What difference has the Commission of Inquiry made...*





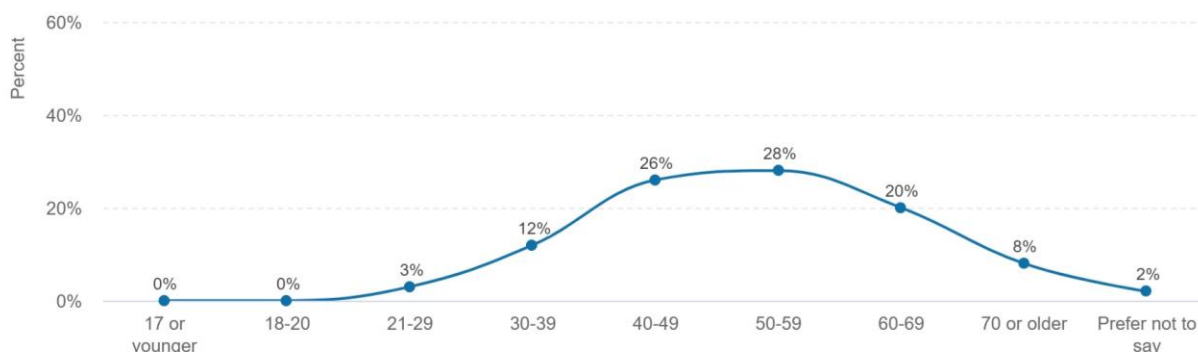
4.65. **Public officers were more likely to say the COI made a positive difference to them personally (50% compared to 44%), and similarly likely to report a positive difference to public services generally (55% compared with 54%). Public Officers were significantly less likely to respond that the COI had a negative impact on politicians and Government (8% of Public Officers compared to 17% of all respondents).** Across all areas Public Officers were more likely to report a positive difference because of the COI, except for to the community (where public officers were marginally less likely to report a positive difference).

4.66. 50 Public Officers chose to give comments. Many responded that they perceived that corruption and influence from politicians still existed, and that there was a lack of accountability. No specific evidence was provided to support this. Several others reported that it was too soon to see the benefits, and some felt the reforms would eventually lead to better governance and accountability. Several respondents felt that the COI offered a chance for introspection. A few respondents were more critical, and felt that the COI was “one-sided”.

Respondents

4.67. The survey was anonymous, however respondents were given the option to opt-in to providing demographic information for the purpose of better understanding the experiences of different groups. 474 people chose to give this information (76% of all respondents).

4.68. 60% of respondents were female, 38% were male and 2% answered ‘prefer not to say’. Most respondents were aged between 40 and 69 (74%). Further work is required to engage with younger people, given that their views are underrepresented in this analysis.





- 4.69. The structure of the question on ethnicity was based on a recent survey provided by the Immigration Department. Several respondents did not find the question suitable and gave details in the 'Other' box provided. As 26% of respondents opted against providing this information, it is not possible to draw reliable conclusions about the representativeness of respondents based on their ethnicity.
- 4.70. Most respondents identified as Black, Black Caribbean or Black African (62%). 22% of respondents identified as White or Caucasian, which could indicate that this group is overrepresented among respondents. Based on 2010 Census, 76.9% of the population identified as African or Black and 5.4% of the population identified as White or Caucasian.
- 4.71. Of those who provided the information, **respondents who identified as Black, Black Caribbean or Black African were more likely to report that the COI had made a positive difference to the Virgin Islands (51%, compared to 42% of respondents who identified as White or Caucasian). Respondents who identified as White or Caucasian were significantly more likely to report that the COI had made "no difference", an average of 44% across all categories (compared to 27% of respondents who identified as Black, Black Caribbean or Black African).**
- 4.72. Only 2% of respondents stated they had a disability, suggesting that this group is significantly underrepresented in this analysis (14% of respondents identified as having "some form of disability" in the 2010 Census).
- 4.73. 45% of those who provided the information were born in the Virgin Islands (213 people), 7% were born in the US Virgin Islands (35 people), and 17% were born elsewhere in the Caribbean (79 people). 14% of respondents were born in Europe (65 people) and 10% were born in North America (45 people).
- 4.74. Most respondents who disclosed where they lived, lived on Tortola (76%). This is in line with the 84% of the population identified in the 2010 Census. It is also likely that some respondents who live on Tortola responded 'Other (BVI)' if they did not fit into the East End, Road Town/Central or West End categories provided. 38% of respondents lived in Road Town/Central Tortola, 21% of respondents lived in the East End and 17% lived in the West End.
- 4.75. 8% of respondents lived on Virgin Gorda (meaning they were underrepresented based on the 14% who reported they lived there in the 2010 Census). Similarly, only a handful of people who live on Jost Van Dyke and Anegada responded



(accounting for less than 1% of respondents). The views of those on the Sister Islands were specifically sought as part of Town Hall meetings led by the Government of the Virgin Islands in February 2025.

Customer Service Data

- 6.1. In January 2025, the Public Service Customer Service Centre published its 2024 End of Year Recap. This data provides a backdrop to this public survey.
- 6.2. Throughout 2024, the Customer Service Centre tracked customer satisfaction across the Public Service. An average of 218 customers responded each quarter, and performance was consistently above 90% of customers satisfied. For 2024, an average of 93.8% of customers who responded were satisfied with the service they received. The data is collected using the RateUs platform, where members of the public can share their views on their experiences with departments or individual Public Officers.
- 6.3. 'Express Pods' are used within Government buildings for service users to share their experience on a 'five-point smiley face' scale. 12,778 people interacted with these 'Express Pods' in 2024. Overall, 59% were very happy and 12.5% were happy with the service they received. 95% of people who chose to give feedback on the Customer Service Centre were very happy with the service, which is an important part of the Public Service Transformation Plan endorsed by the COI recommendations.
- 6.4. Although not all the experiences are directly linked to COI reforms, data from this source can be seen as a proxy for how different parts of the Public Service operate. 78% of individuals who interacted with the Deputy Governor's Office were happy or very happy with the service they received, compared with 18% who were unhappy or very unhappy with the service.

Conclusion

- 7.1. The public's awareness of the COI recommendations and its findings is encouraging. Almost half of all respondents reported that the COI has made a positive difference to the Virgin Islands as a whole (47%) compared to only 15% who reported a somewhat negative or very negative impact.



- 7.2. The proportion of respondents who said the COI made no difference is notable, this was particularly evident in relation to the security of the Virgin Islands (38%) and to politicians and Government (34%). This insight provides evidence for the continued need to prioritise implementation, in the context of the law enforcement review and newly established integrity model for elected officials.
- 7.3. In key policy areas, improvements can be observed in the experiences of those who have interacted with departments since the publication of the COI report. Respondents who applied for Social Assistance in the last three years were 22% more likely to believe their application would be considered fairly, compared with those who applied before. Those who applied for Residence Status in the last three years were 11% more likely to report that the eligibility criteria were clear. Despite this, more work needs to be done to embed the reforms, as in most instances more people than not gave neutral or negative responses to questions about the clarity of processes, criteria and fairness.
- 7.4. Very few people reported that they were accessing information about services directly from the Government, with most people hearing about how to apply through word of mouth (for example 78% in relation to Crown Land and 65% in relation to Social Assistance). There is a risk that information may be inconsistent, and those with links to Government could disproportionately benefit. Priority will need to be given to not only finalising policies and procedures but ensuring that they are easily accessible and widely understood.
- 7.5. Many of the new laws, and policies and procedures stemming from those laws, are in their infancy or not in force. It is likely that the impact evidenced through this public feedback exercise is as a result in a change in attitudes as opposed to delivery. The findings present an encouraging baseline, and a case for continued efforts to embed the reforms as part of the everyday government business.