

Have your say on Croydon's budget proposals 2024-25

Feedback from public survey

5 January 2024

Executive Summary

This report summarises the responses received to the budget 2024-25 proposals survey. The survey was launched following the approval of the 2024-25 budget update, Medium Term Financial Strategy and savings proposals at Cabinet on 25 October 2023.

939 responses were received to the survey which ran between 6 November and 11 December 2023.

The survey suggested that respondents gave greatest priority to support for elderly and vulnerable residents, services for children young people, families and education, and rubbish and recycling collections. The lowest ranked service areas, according to respondents, were libraries and culture and leisure and sports facilities.

In answering how the budget proposals will affect them, the key themes of concern were (number of responses is shown in brackets):

1. Increase in council tax (248)
2. Cost of living (50)
3. Service cuts and reductions (38)

When asked where the council should be looking for external funding, safer communities, improving town and district centres and cleaner streets received the strongest support.

When asked if respondents had any further comments on the proposals, the largest group of responses were about council tax.

In addition to the survey, a small engagement session was run with young people aged between 11 and 22 as part of 'Croydon Superstars', the council's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Youth Participation Forum. From the two activities, greatest priority was given to keeping the streets safe and clean, housing services and services for children, young people, families and education. The lowest ranked services were parks and open spaces and libraries and culture. Full details of the feedback from this session are included in the appendix.

Engagement methodology

Following the cabinet meeting on 25 October 2023 the council launched a six-week budget engagement to seek feedback on the proposals.

A survey was available on the council's resident engagement platform, [Get Involved](#), and widely promoted across council channels and accessible from the front page of the council's website.

The survey design was similar to previous budget engagement surveys used in recent years.

Questions utilised different response structures, with some seeking to understand agreement/disagreement and others having free text responses for people to provide any comments or feedback. The survey was designed to be relatively short in order to maximise the response and completion rate.

Councillors, partners and community groups were encouraged to spread the word and share the survey with their communities. We advised that paper copies/easy read and alternate language versions were available if required. This was also communicated to key partners and councillors to support any residents unable to access digital channels.

The survey was promoted through all council channels throughout the engagement. This included:

- Press release
- Your Croydon weekly e-bulletin
- Business e-bulletin
- Mayor's weekly message and Chief Executive's staff message
- Social media posts (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram)
- Staff webinar ahead of the survey launch
- Intranet article
- Our Croydon e-newsletter
- Communications in libraries and children's centres - library staff briefed to support residents and print out copies of the budget engagement if required
- Email to 390 community and voluntary contacts via the council's VCS team
- Faith leaders
- All councillor emails
- Shared with Croydon Youth Assembly and SEND Youth Participation Forum
- Facebook post shared with local groups
- Contact centre available to take residents views over the phone if required.

Following a mid-point review of the demographics of respondents a further email was sent to community groups including Croydon's BME Forum and Asian Resource Centre of Croydon (ARCC) encouraging them to promote the survey and encourage residents to take part.

As part of the exercise and to give residents more opportunity to hear about the plans and have their say, the Executive Mayor of Croydon ran a webinar on 11 December. Residents were invited to join and ask questions either in advance or live at the session. The webinar was promoted via a press release, Your Croydon weekly and social media.

Analysis of responses

934 responses were received to the survey which ran between 6 November 2023 and 19 December 2023.

In addition to the specific engagement questions, respondents were asked to provide responses to equality and diversity questions to provide a breakdown of the responses compared to the borough profile.

The response rate for people aged 16 – 19 and 20 - 24 was lower than other age groups. This is, however, similar to other engagement surveys both in Croydon and other areas. Other age groups were well represented.

In response to the low response rate from young people, Croydon's SEND Youth Participation Forum carried out two tasks with a small group to engage them on the budget survey. The results from this activity can be found in the appendix.

Respondents came from a wide range of ethnic groups, although no weighting has been applied to the results. The largest response group identified as White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British (67.3%). This is higher than the borough profile from the 2021 Census, where 48.4% of the population identified as White.

Global Majority groups were underrepresented in the response rate compared to the Census 2021 profile for Croydon.

12.3% of respondents identified as having a disability. This is slightly below the boroughwide level identified in the 2021 Census of 14%.

In relation to faith, the largest groups of respondents were those that identify as Christian (42.8%) which is very similar to the Census 2021 level. The response rate for those identifying as Muslim was lower than the borough profile.

In relation to sex, the proportion of respondents identifying as female was very similar to the borough profile. Male respondents were slightly underrepresented compared to the borough profile.

In relation to partnership status, 46.9% of respondents were married. This is an over representation compared to the 2021 Census profile, where 32.8% were married.

There was a slightly lower response rate from those in a registered civil partnership compared to the borough profile.

Full details of the response rates by demographics are provided in the appendix.

The remainder of this report provides a summary of the results and analysis of the feedback. Analysis is provided against each question of the survey.

Analysis

Question 1: The council spends £300m a year providing hundreds of local services to 390,800 people. Please rank these services in order of importance to you, with 1 being the most important and 9 being the least important:

There were 914 responses to this question.

The table and chart below show how the services were prioritised according to the average ranking given by respondents.

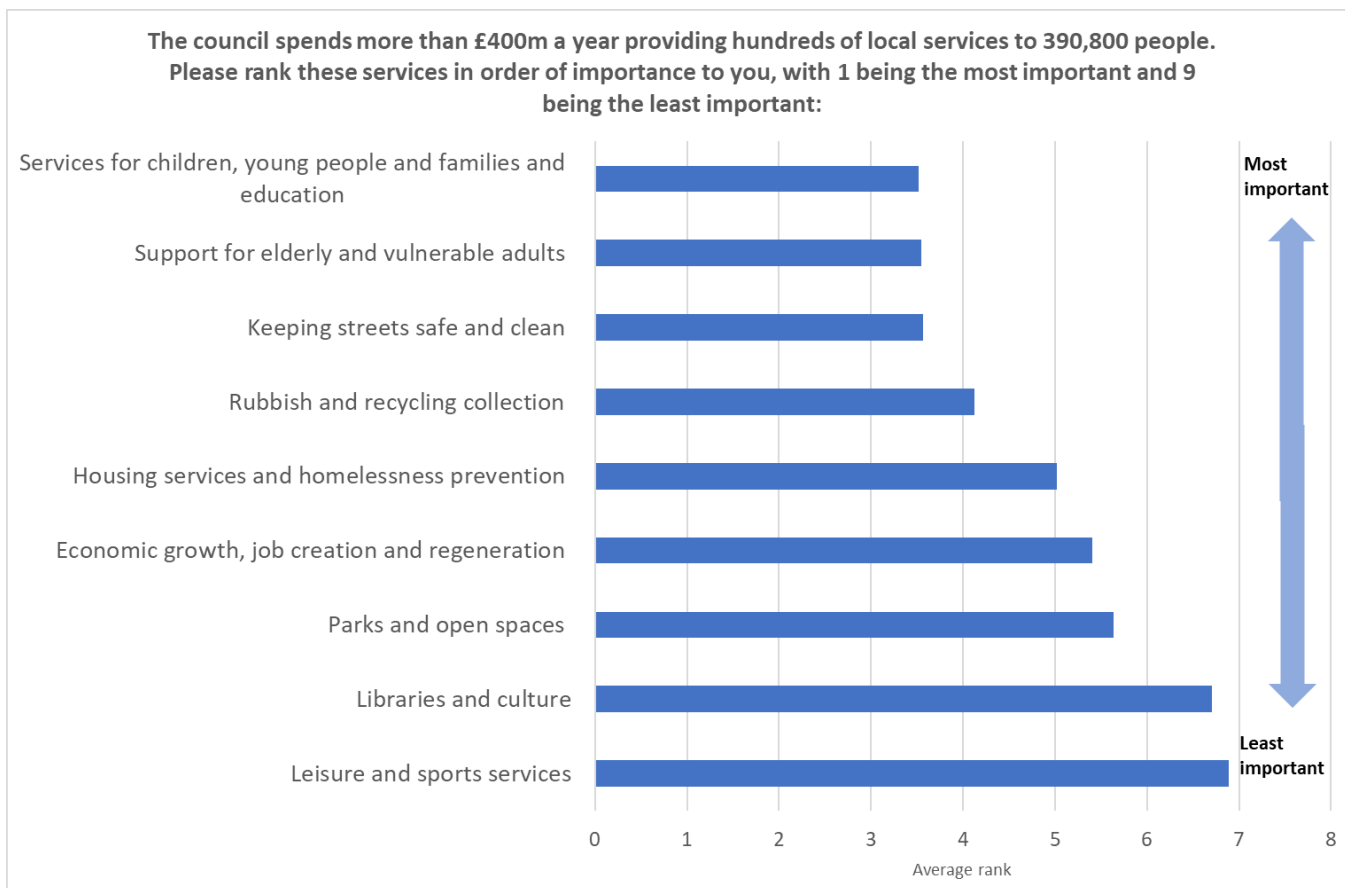
The two largest services, by budget, were ranked first and second in the order of priority: support for elderly and vulnerable adults (adult social care) and services for children, young people, families and education (children, young people and education). These were followed by keeping streets safe and clean which received a very similar average rank.

Libraries and culture and leisure and sport facilities received the lowest average rank.

The Mode ranking is also provided - showing the most common ranking provided. This can be useful where averages sometimes mask variation in scoring.

For example, although economic growth had an average rank of 5.41, placing it above parks and open spaces in the priority order, the most common rank was actually nine. The most common rank for parks and open spaces, however, was seven.

Order of priority	Service	Average rank	Mode (most common rank)
1 (most important)	Children, young people, families and education	3.52	1
2	Support for elderly and vulnerable adults	3.55	1
3	Keeping streets safe and clean	3.57	1
4	Rubbish and recycling collection	4.12	3
5	Housing services and homelessness prevention	5.02	5
6	Economic growth, job creation and regeneration	5.41	9
7	Parks and open spaces	5.64	7
8	Libraries and culture	6.71	9
9 (least important)	Leisure and sports services	6.89	8



Question 2: The council is doing all it can to help to balance its budget - you can read more about our proposals here. Do you think our budget proposals will impact you and if so how?

As part of the budget engagement, we wanted to understand if residents felt that the budget proposals would impact them and how. In reviewing these responses they have been themed, for example, some respondents suggested that an increase in Council Tax would have a financial impact on them.

649 people responded to this question:

The table below provides a breakdown of the key proposals that were identified by respondents as having an impact. The table shows the top five/six themes mentioned.

Theme (number of responses)	Description
Council Tax (248)	The respondents mentioned last year's increase in council tax and concern about further increases.
Cost of living (50)	Respondents were worried about changes impacting their own finances at a time of an increased cost of living and other financial pressures facing households.
Service cuts and reductions (38)	The respondents were worried that any cuts to, or reduction in services might affect them. These covered multiple budget proposals and/or included general statements about service reductions.
Safety (32)	The respondents mentioned that street safety was a concern.
Cleanliness and maintenance (27)	The respondents indicated that the budget proposals may impact the cleanliness and maintenance of the streets.
Town centre and regeneration (13)	The town centre and regeneration were mentioned including the decline of the town centre, lack of shops and increase in antisocial behaviour.

Other comments included the council's financial collapse in 2020, housing services and building new homes.

In addition to the numerical analysis, a sampling of the responses is provided for context.

Examples of responses:

"...I have also rented in the borough since 2014 and have felt the considerable burden of increasing rent alongside increase of council tax and other essential household bills."

"It will cost me more money when the cost of living is already having a serious negative impact."

“If money is taken from street cleaning and environment as a Street Champion this will mean more work clearing litter.”

Question 3: Do you have any further comments on our proposals?

Within the engagement survey we wanted to give respondents every opportunity to give their feedback, and not be limited to only closed choice questions.

Respondents were therefore invited to provide any further comments through a free text format. 487 respondents provided comments. To analyse these comments they have been themed. As this was a free text response, there was significant variety in the comments.

The table below provides a breakdown of the top five key themes raised by respondents.

Theme (number of responses)	Description
Council Tax (64)	The respondents mentioned last year’s increase in council tax and concern about further increases.
Clean streets / safety (50)	The respondents indicated that safety in Croydon should be considered when discussing budget proposals. Responses also included concerns about street/town centre/neighbourhood cleanliness
Services for children and young people (27)	Responses mentioned the importance of investing more in services for children and young people.
Council / staff (21)	The respondents indicated themes around pay, staff numbers and use of consultants/agency staff.
Debt (17)	Respondents indicated that the cost of the debt sustained by the council as an important issue to resolve, with some feeling that the borrowing costs were unsustainable and should not be passed onto residents. Comments also included the Council seeking more support from central government.

Other comments included needing more affordable housing, parking and support for the vulnerable.

In addition to the numerical analysis, a sampling of the responses is provided for context.

Examples of responses:

“Croydon residents took a huge hit last year with 10% increase on Council Tax, expectations this year would be a reduction on cap to national average.”

“Please do something about rubbish collection, current service is very poor, quite often bins are left anywhere on footway or street after collection, sometimes rubbish are left over on roads as well.”

“Children and young people needs are often put bottom of the list, specially children with SEND. Can this be a little higher priority next year?”

Question 4: If the council has opportunities to bid for external funding to invest in any of the following areas, to what extent would you support or not support each of the following?

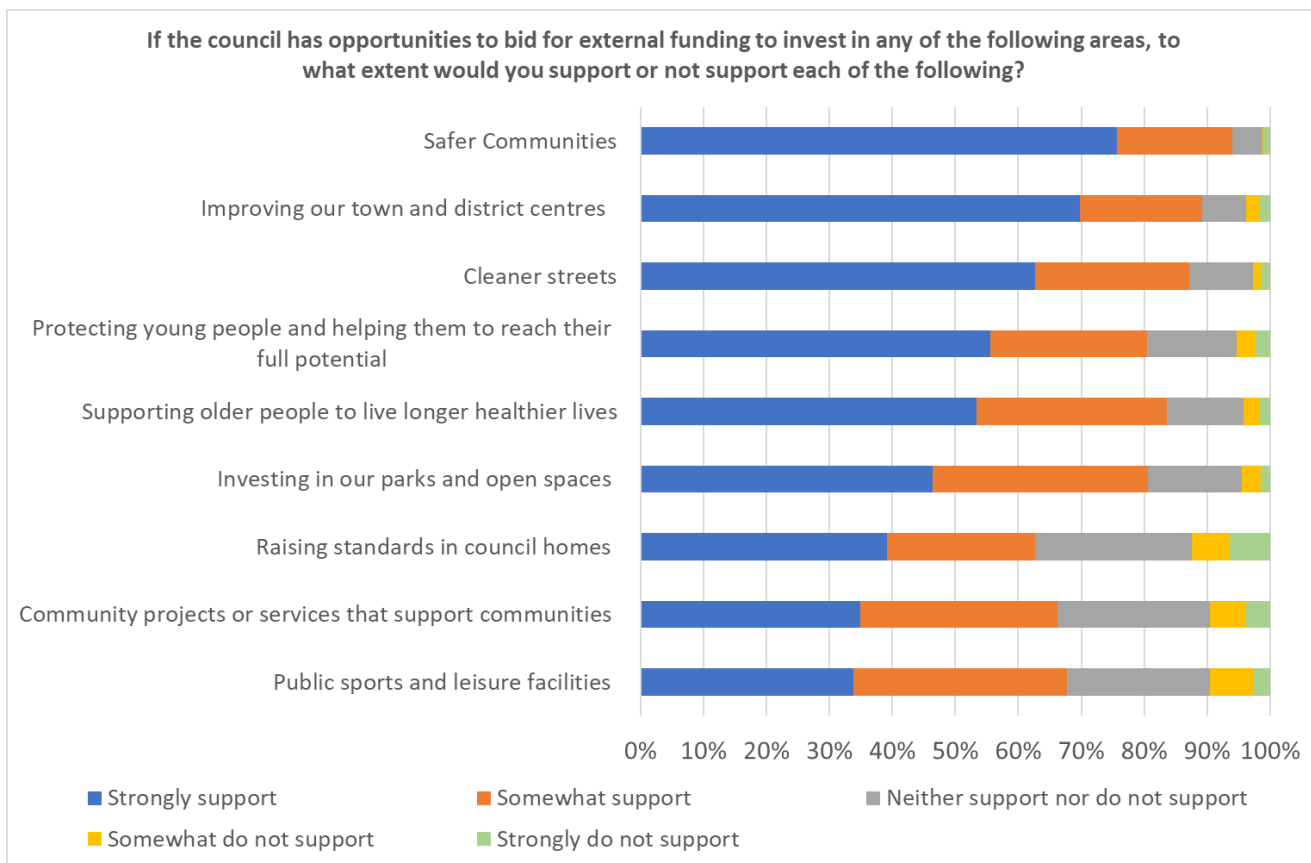
The Mayor's Business Plan has emphasised the importance of working in partnership, and supporting these partnerships to secure external funding and investment into Croydon. The budget engagement survey therefore sought to understand where respondents would prioritise external funding against different service areas. Against each area, respondents were asked to state how much they would support, or not support, investment.

923 responses were provided to this question.

A 5-point scale was used for the responses, with respondents indicating how strongly they agreed or disagreed.

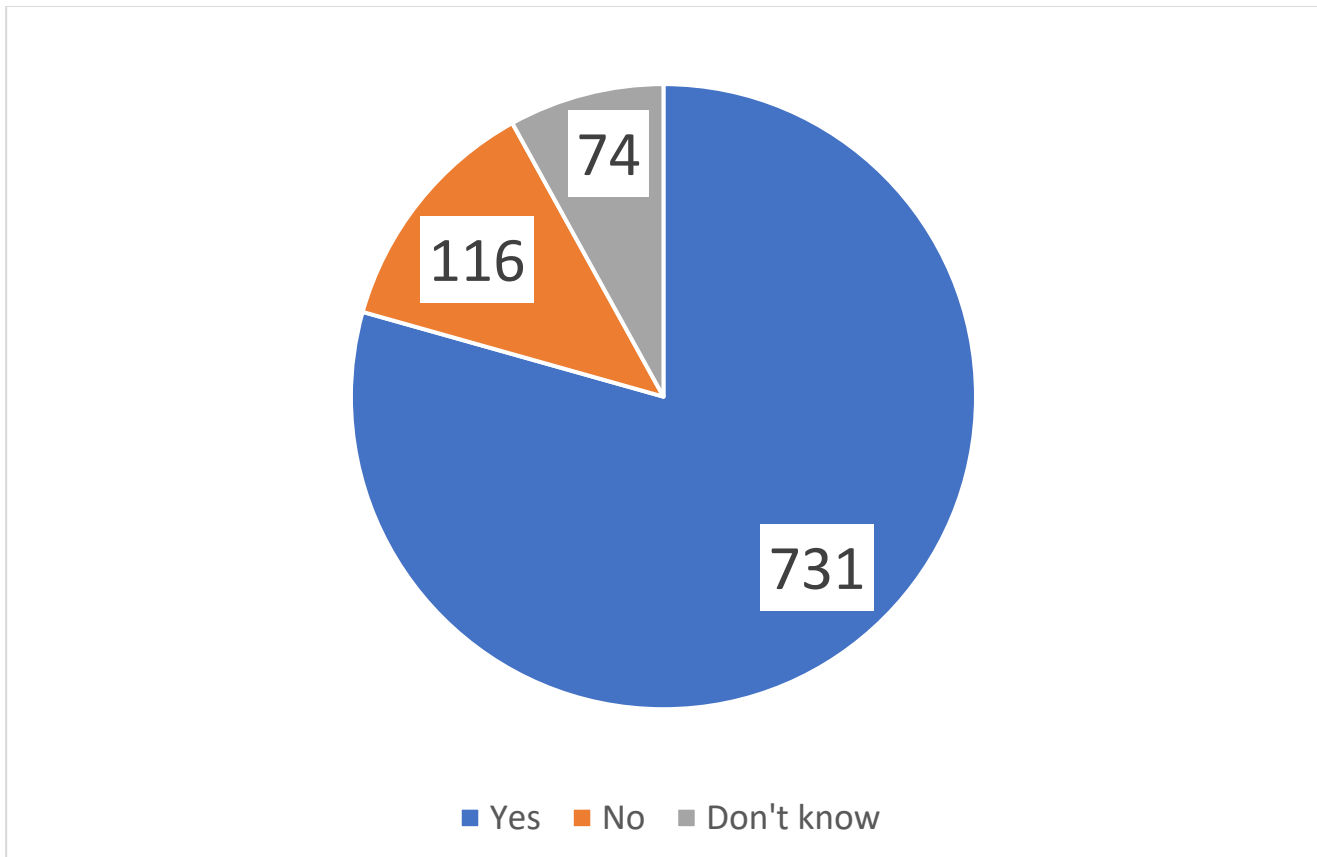
The table below summarises the responses. All areas received support for external funding being invested.

Investment areas	Strongly support and somewhat support	Strongly do not support and somewhat do not support
Safer Communities	94.05	1.21
Improving our town and district centres	89.17	3.87
Cleaner streets	87.10	2.73
Supporting older people to live longer healthier lives	83.59	4.27
Investing in our parks and open spaces	80.66	4.51
Protecting young people and helping them to reach their full potential	80.44	5.36
Public sports and leisure facilities	67.77	9.57
Community projects or services that support communities	66.19	9.58
Raising standards in council homes	62.62	12.46



Question 5: Last year the Executive Mayor of Croydon pledged that the council would not increase council tax above the cap set by the government in future years. Do you agree with this approach?

921 responses were received to this question with 731 out of 921 (79.3%) of respondents agreeing with the Executive Mayor of Croydon's approach of not increasing council tax above the cap set by the Government in future years.



Question 6: Is there anything that we currently spend money on that you think we should not, or anything that you think we could do differently?

As part of the engagement survey, it was important that respondents were not limited to only comment on the budget proposals that had been identified in the Cabinet report. This question sought general feedback on any areas that the council should consider future expenditure on. The response format was a free text answer.

There were 594 comments responses and a wide range of reactions to the spending decisions of the council.

Similar to other free text answers, these responses were reviewed and themed according to the response. The top five themes are listed below.

Theme (number of responses)	Description
Council / staff / councillors / governance (112)	The respondents indicated themes around pay for staff, members and councillors, staff numbers and the use of consultants/agency staff and governance.
Council tax (108)	The respondents mentioned last year's increase in council tax and concern about further increases.
Clean streets / safety (98)	The respondents indicated that safety in Croydon should be considered when considering budget proposals. Respondents highlighted concerns about safety and cleanliness in streets / town centre / neighbourhoods.
Town centre and regeneration(44)	The respondents indicated the importance of investment in town centre and regeneration were mentioned including the decline of the town centre, lack of shops and increase in antisocial behaviour.
Housing and new homes (50)	Respondents indicated that there should be more investment in housing services and building new homes.

Other responses included Borough of Culture, parking and parks.

Examples of responses:

“Stop spending money on temporary staff and retain the staff with knowledge...”

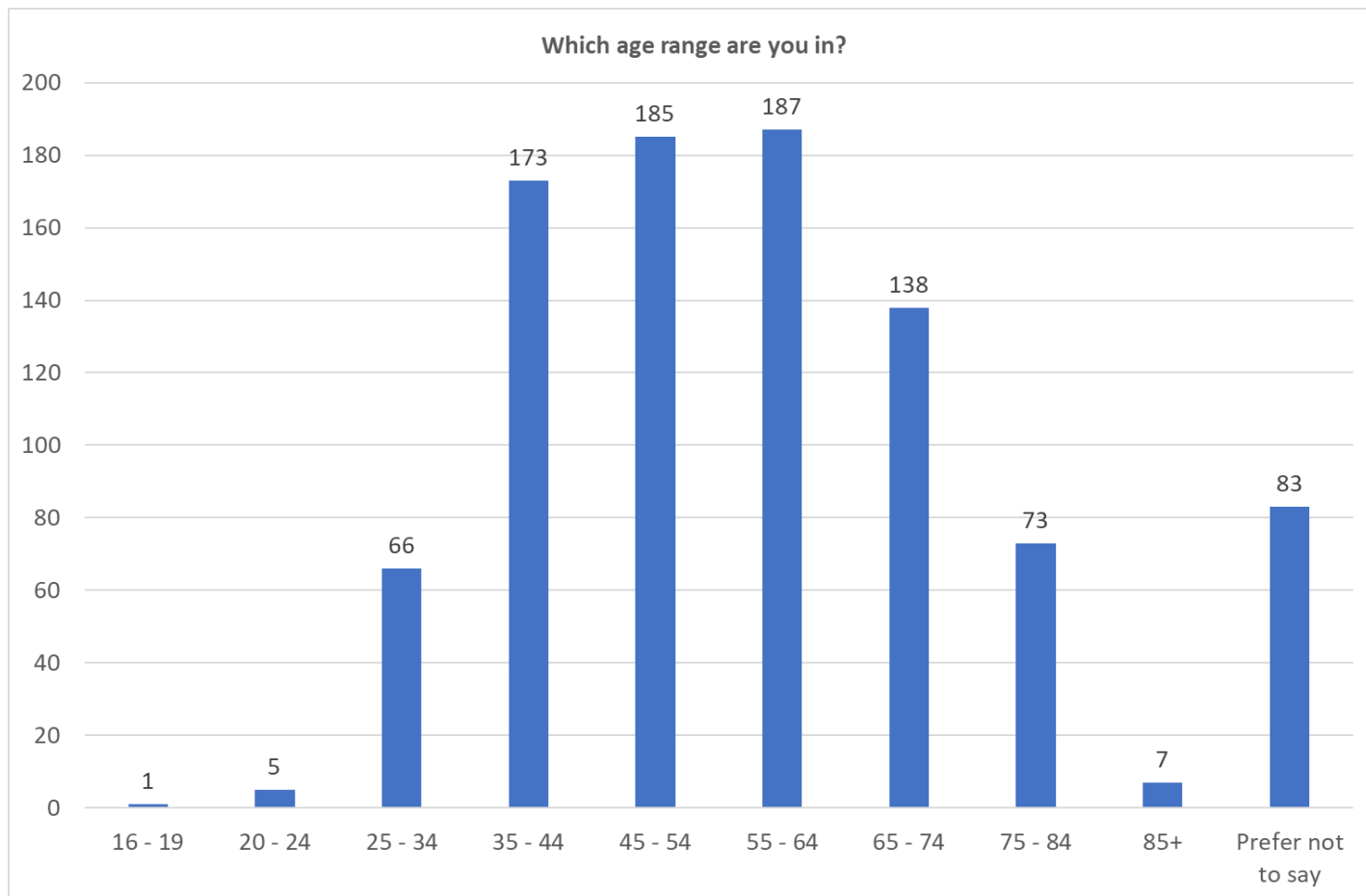
“We should spend more money making the borough safer and more attractive to visitors, investors and working residents who will pay council tax. I think that Council tax could be increased by a small percentage. I think people would be willing to pay this if the money was spent on things they could see such as well maintained parks and open spaces, a greater police presence, improved sports and leisure facilities and cleaner and safer streets.”

“Make the streets and town centres look nice and investors/business will follow.”

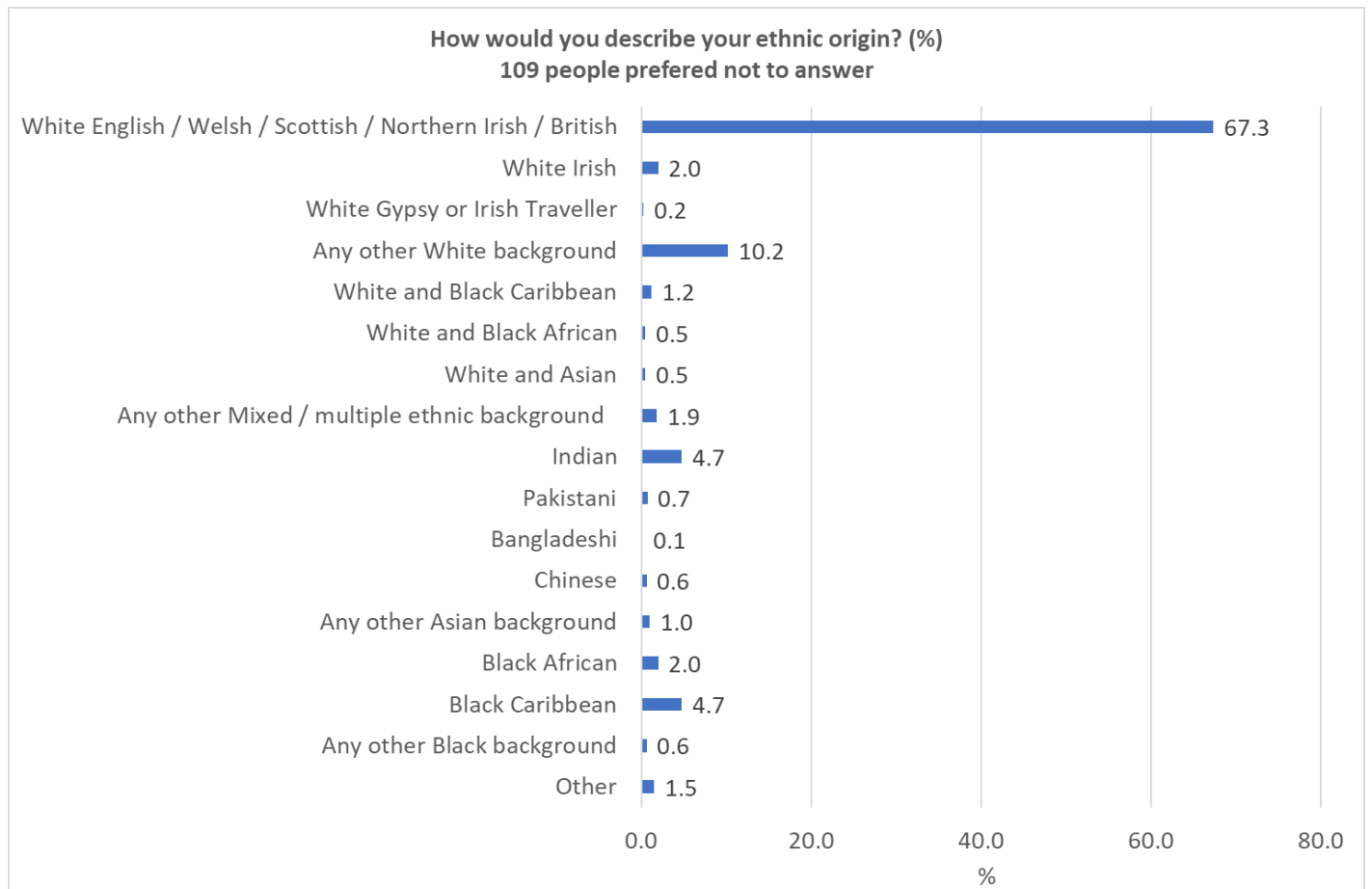
“Rather than steeply raising Council Tax during a cost of living crises, the emphasis should be on restoring adequate central government funding and support. “

Appendix - Demographic analysis

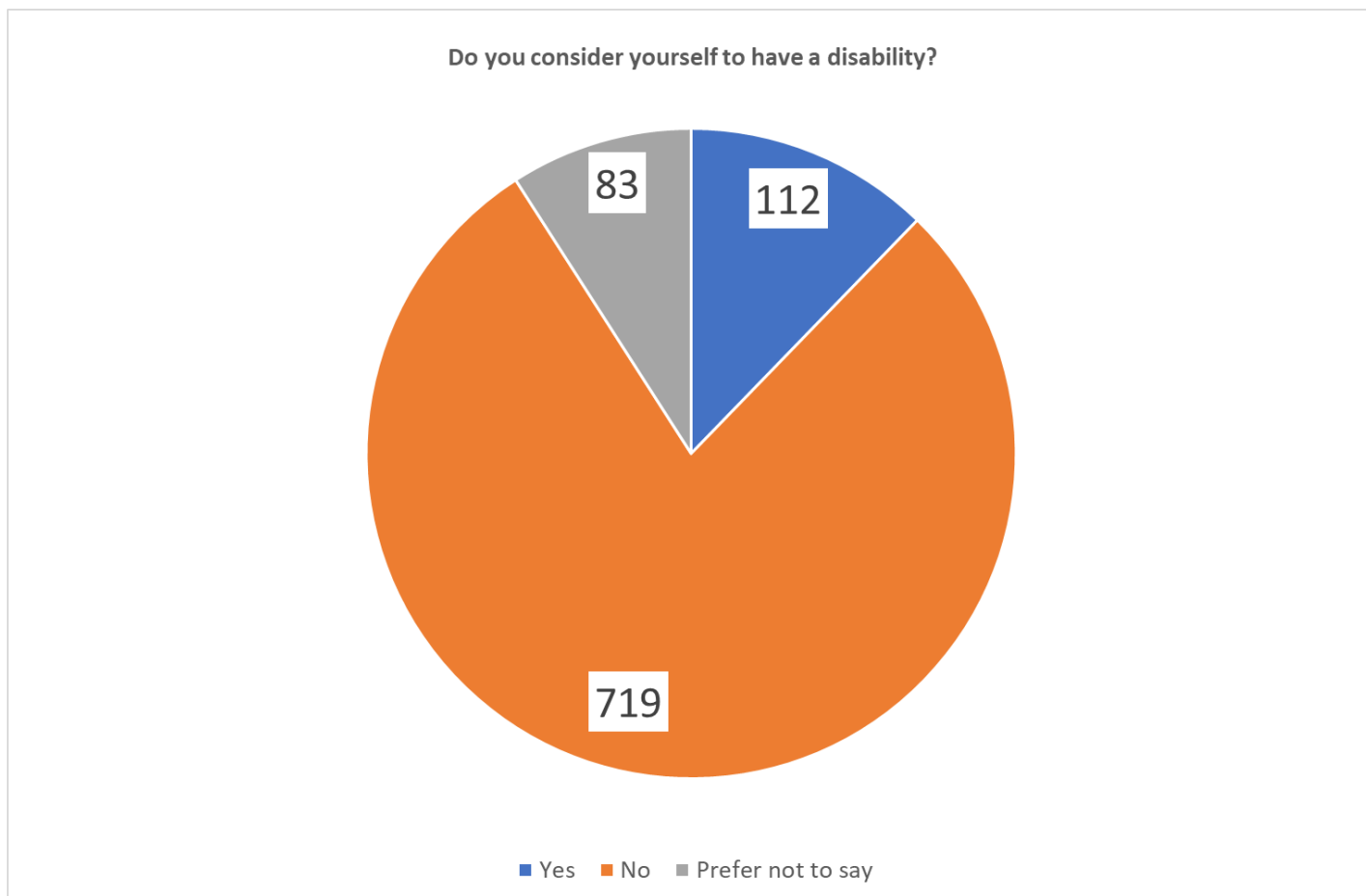
Which age range are you in?



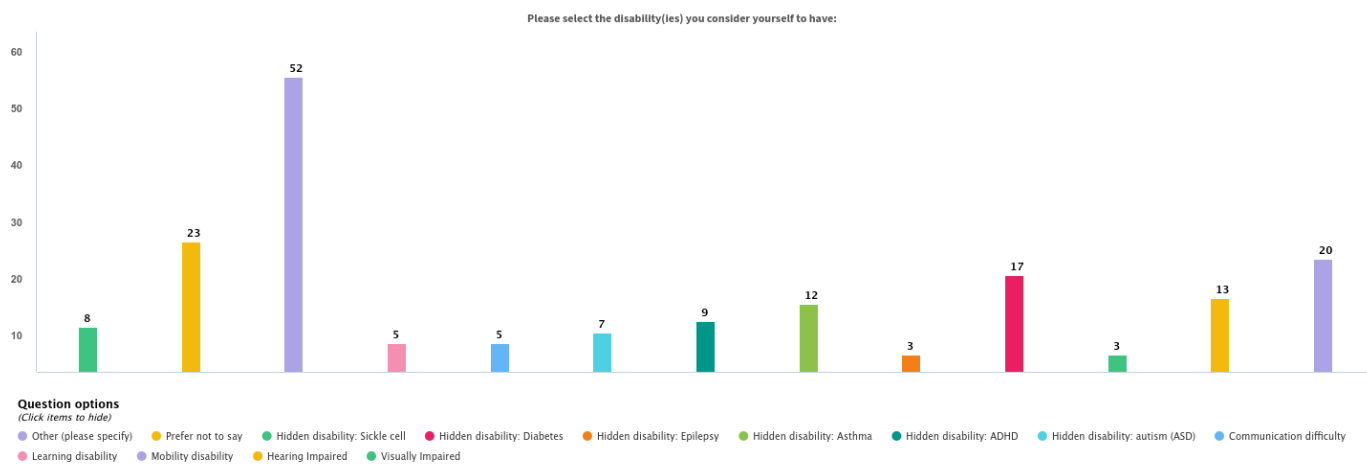
How would you describe your ethnic group?



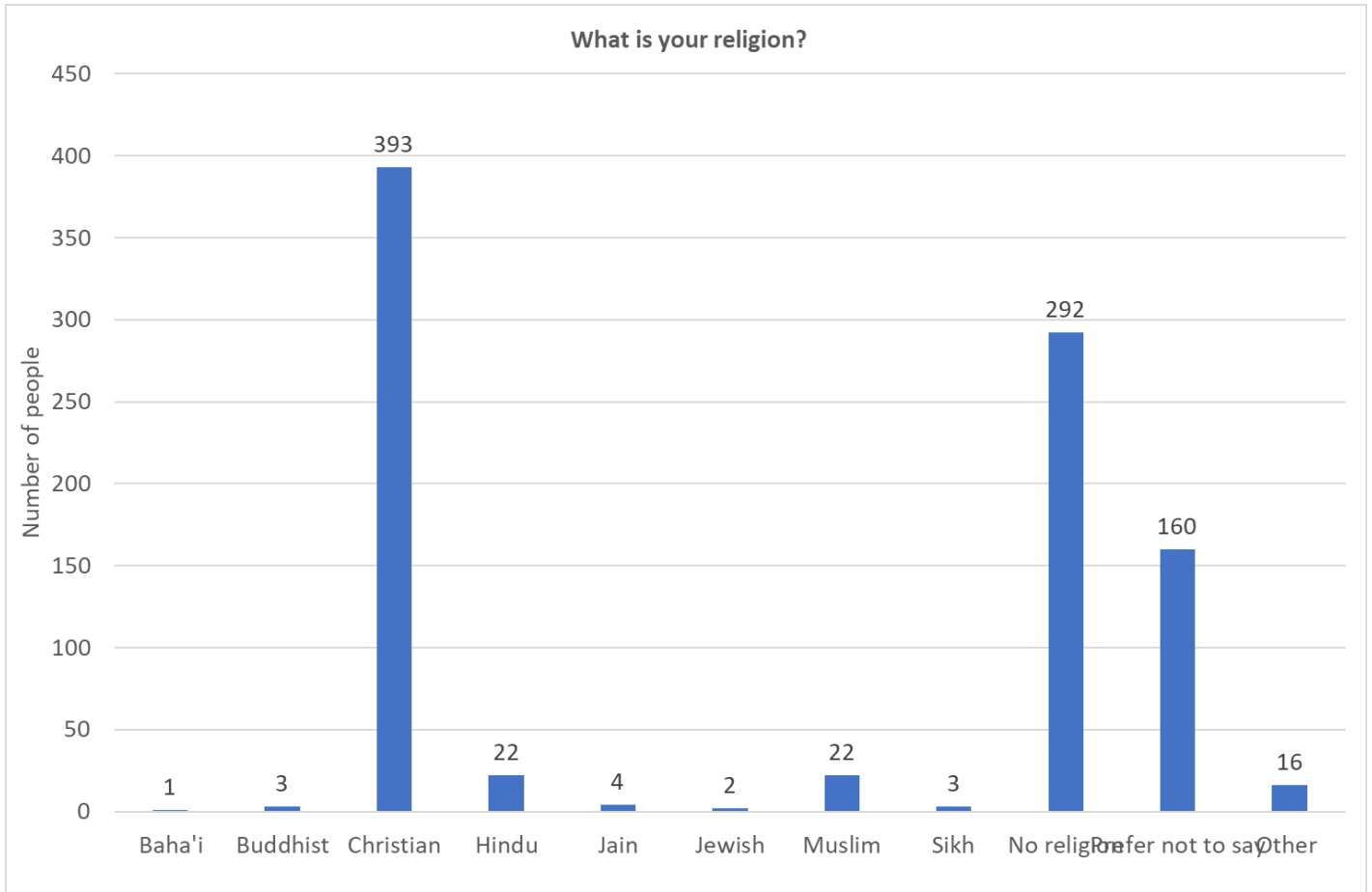
Do you consider yourself to have a disability?



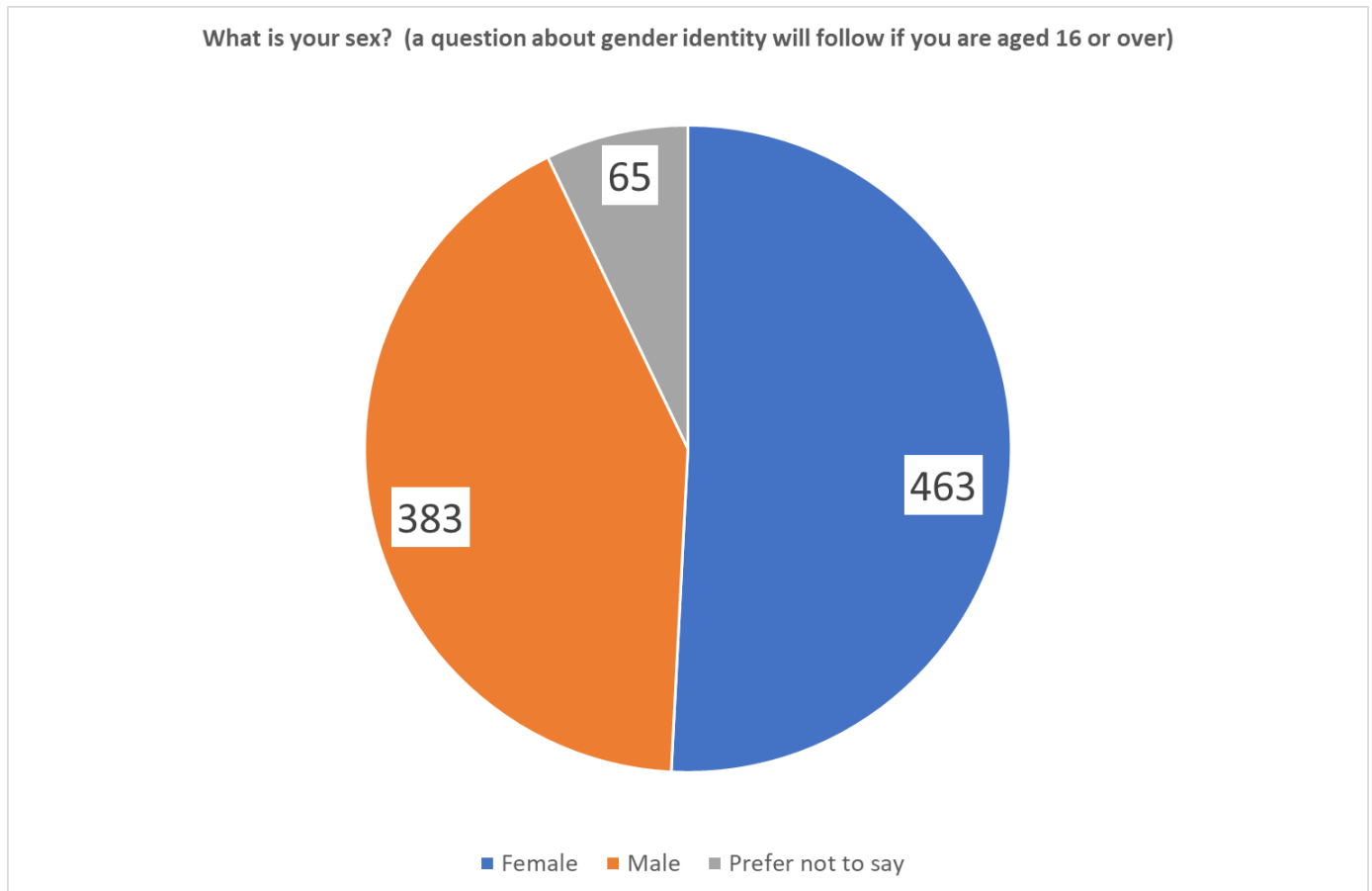
Please select the disability(ies) you consider yourself to have:



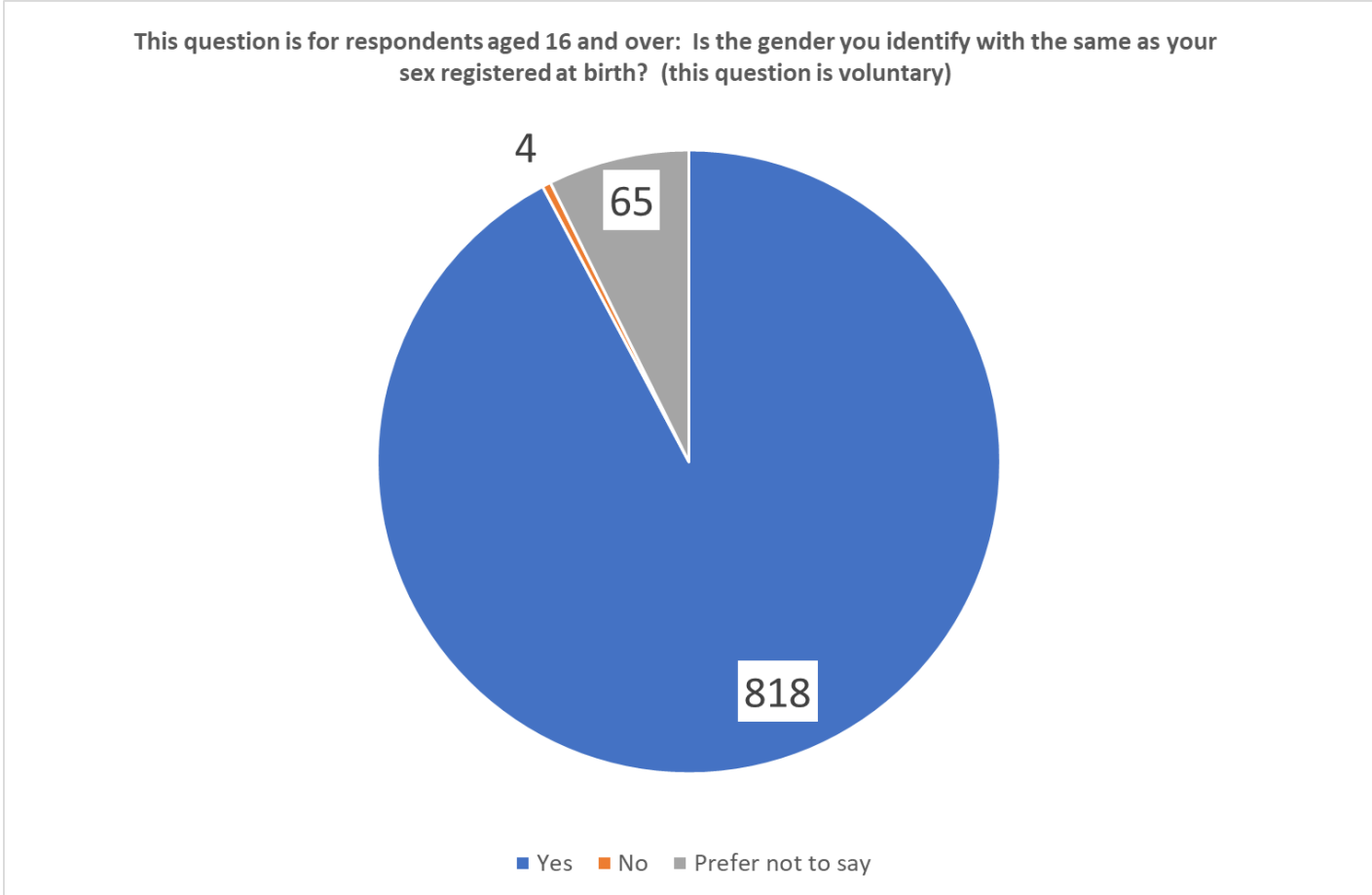
What is your religion?



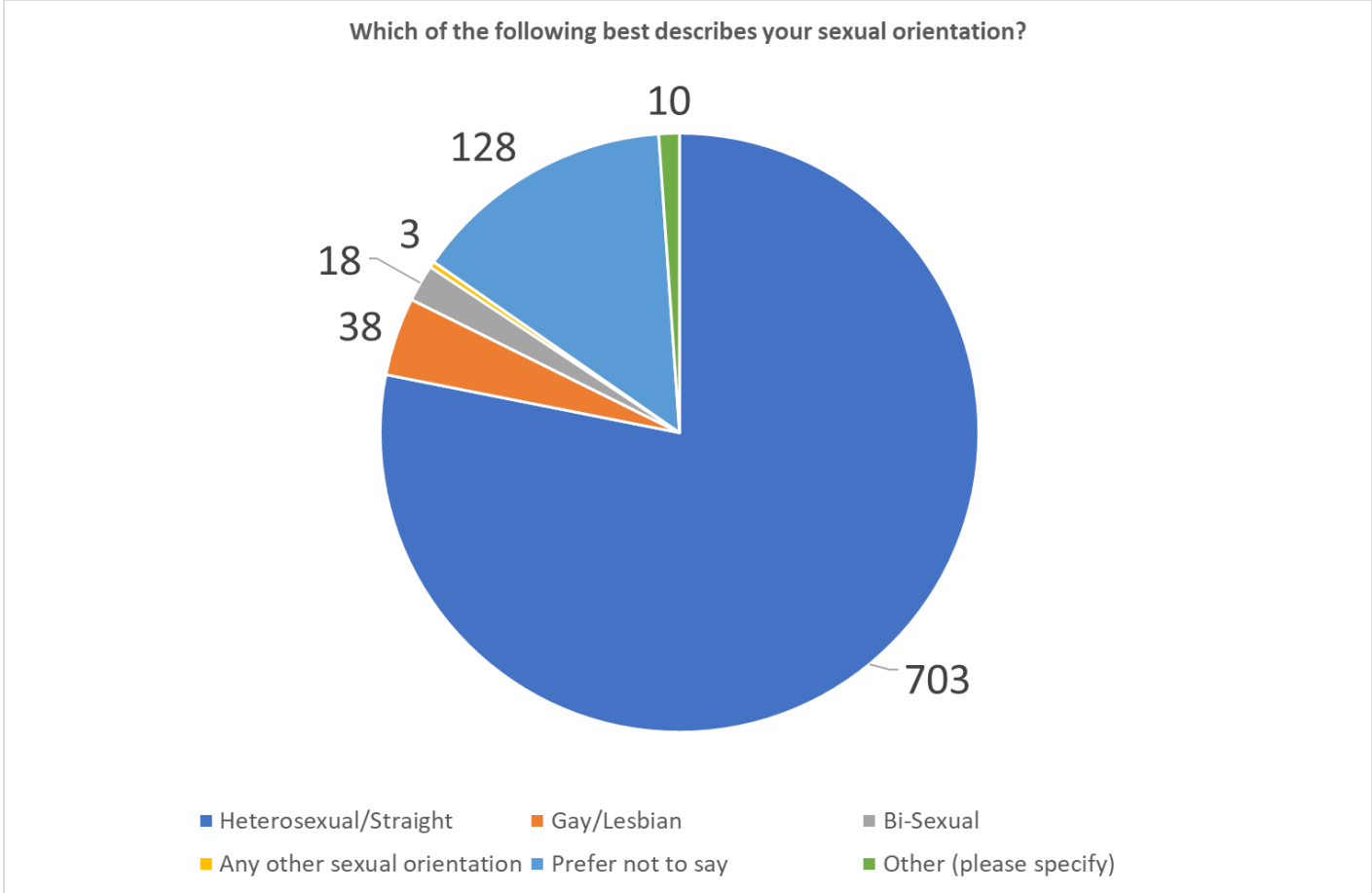
What is your sex?



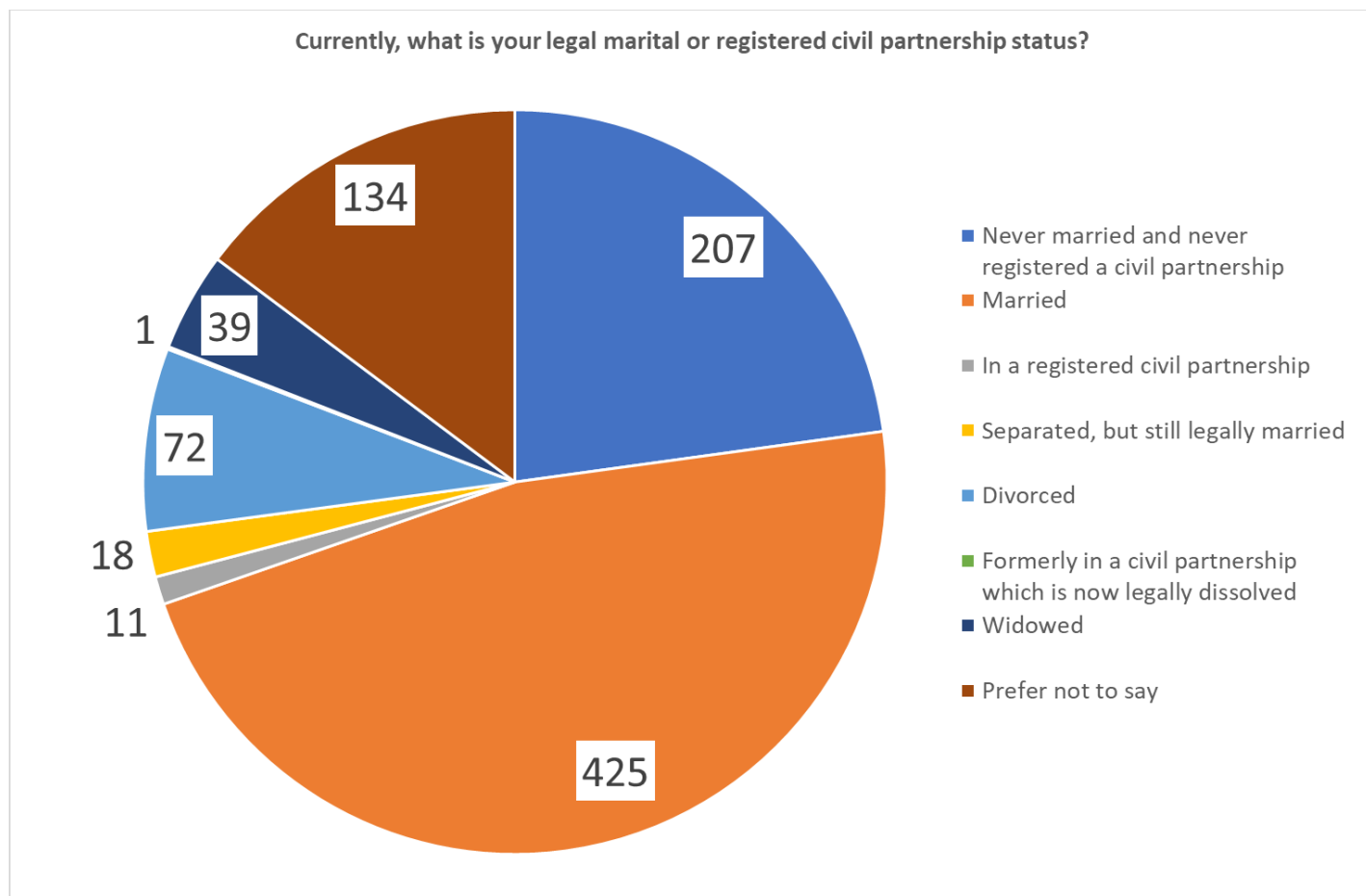
Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?



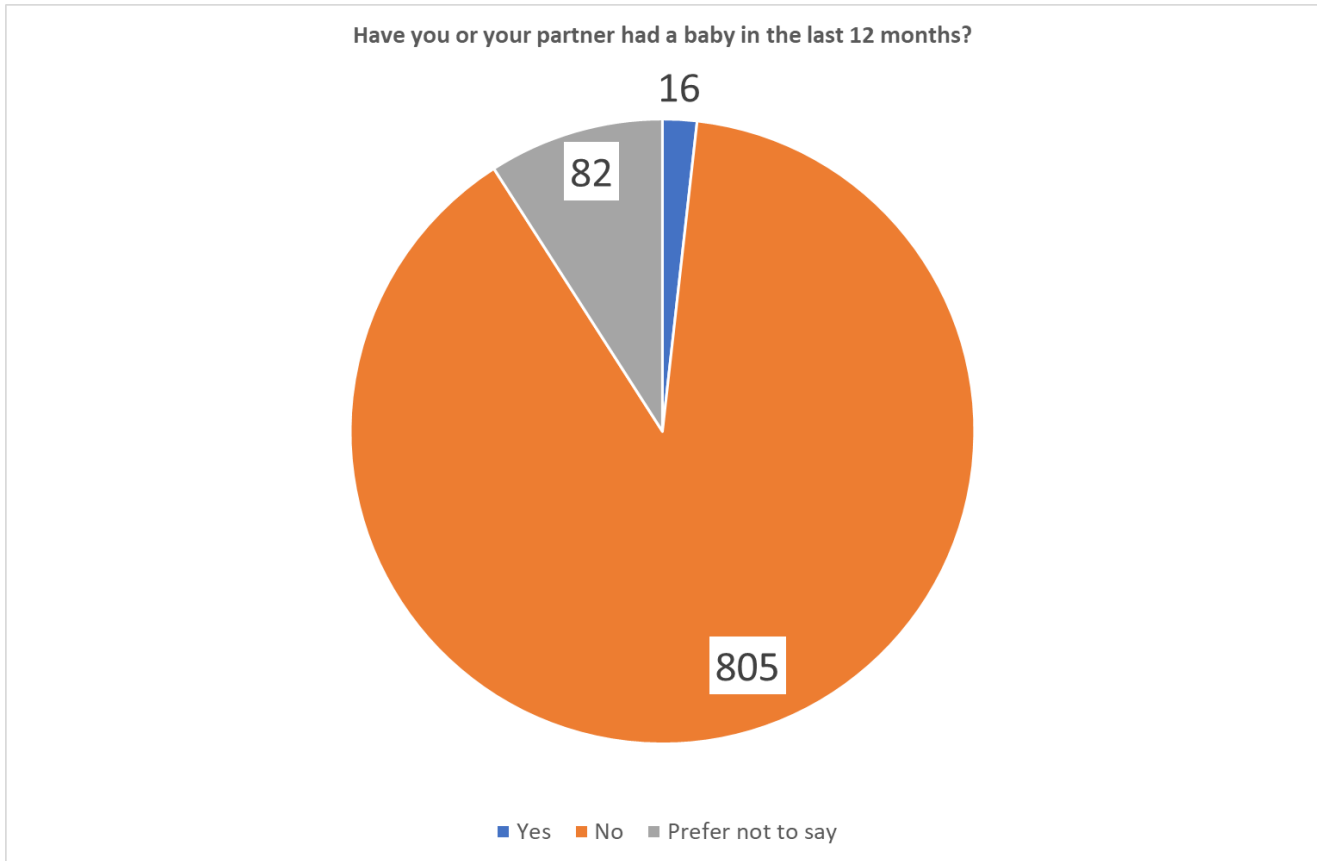
Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?



What is your legal marital or registered partnership status?



Have you or your partner had a baby in the last 12 months?



Appendix – Feedback from the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Youth Participation Forum

'Croydon Superstars' (SEND Youth Participation Forum)

Response to the Annual Community Budget Survey 2024-25 (Nov. 23)

Overview

SEND Students aged between 11 and 22, from Priory School, Red Gates School, St Giles School, Coulsdon College, Bensham Manor School and Croydon College were consulted on their priorities for the 2024-25 budget. Students completed one of two tasks. Task A involved choosing from a selection of community activities linked to the 9 budget proposals, represented by widgets (simple images). The students were then asked which activities they would like to see more of in their local community to meet their needs and those of their families. Task B involved ranking the 9 budget proposals from highest to lowest priority and had a further opportunity for individual suggestions, based on case studies (see qualitative data at this end of the report).

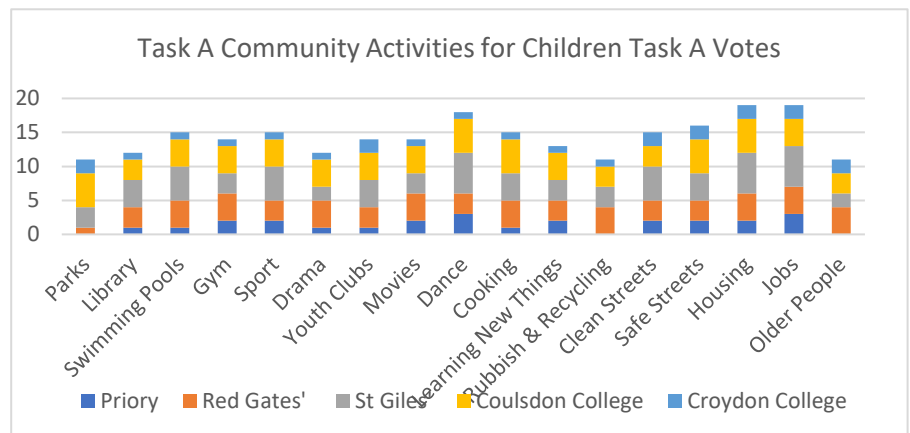
Task A

19 students out of the 21 who completed Task A agreed they would like to see more housing and jobs created next year 24_25. Their next priorities were dance activities, with 18 votes, and safe streets, with 16 votes. Their ranking of the budget proposals, based on these votes, is:

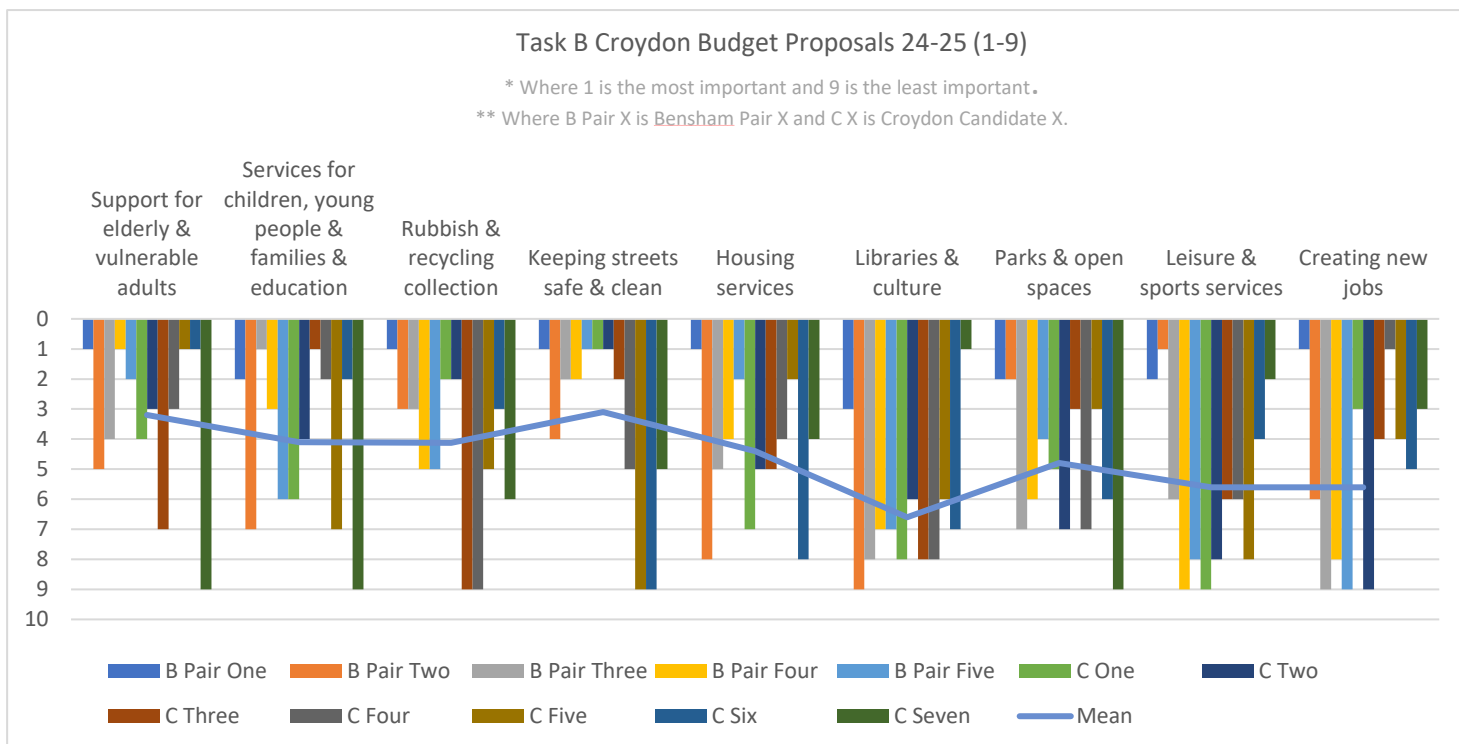
1. Housing services
1. Creating new jobs
3. Leisure & sports services
4. Keeping streets safe & clean
5. Services for children, young people & families & education
6. Libraries & culture.
7. Parks & open spaces
7. Rubbish & recycling collection
7. Services for elderly & vulnerable adults

Task B

At Bensham Manor this activity was completed in pairs, whereas at Croydon College it was completed individually. Overall, keeping streets safe & clean, support for elderly & vulnerable adults and services for children, young people & families & education were highlighted as priorities, with significantly lower means. Proposals ranked 3-5 were less differentiated, suggesting they collectively hold similar importance across the students, as were leisure & sports services and creating new jobs, though they were ranked lower. Libraries & culture received the markedly lowest mean.



1. Keeping streets safe & clean	3.1
2. Support for elderly & vulnerable adults	3.2
3. Services for children, young people & families & education	4.1
4. Rubbish & recycling collection	4.2
5. Housing services	4.4
6. Parks & open spaces	4.8
7. Leisure & sports services	5.6
7. Creating new jobs	5.6
9. Libraries & culture	6.6

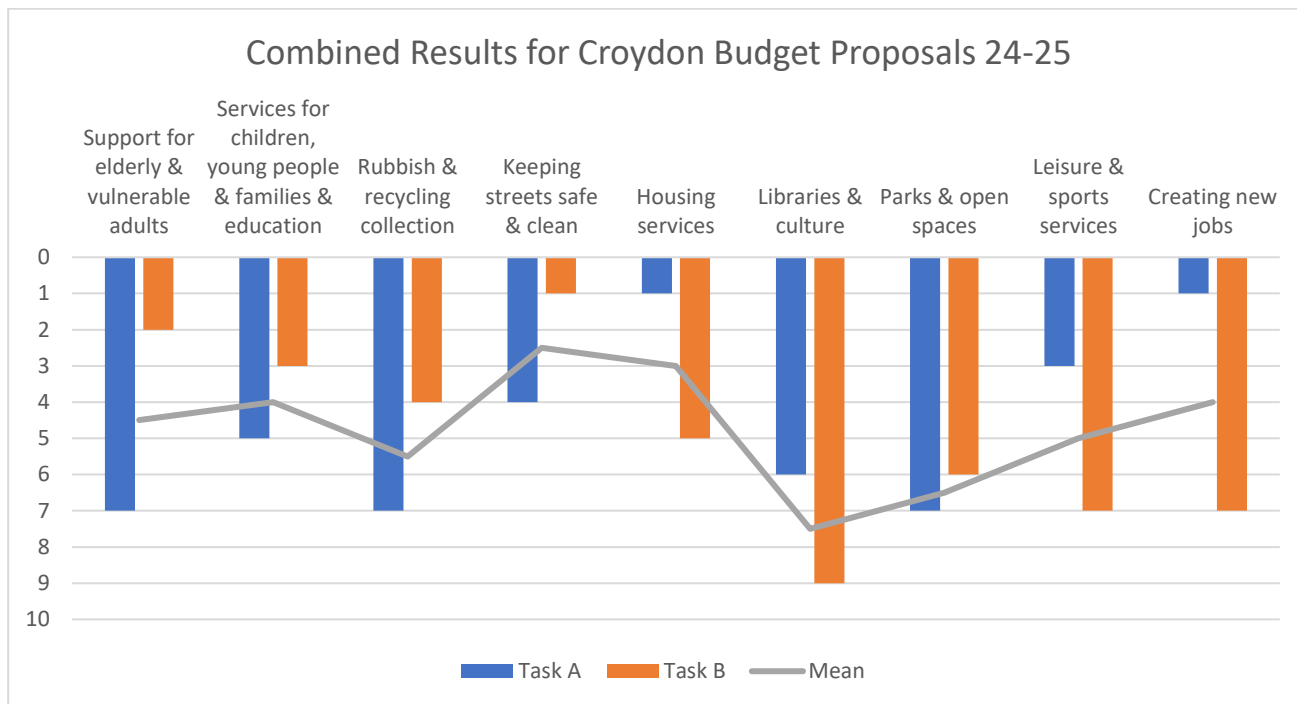


Combined Results

By combining the tasks’ results, the adjacent overall ranking was produced, where keeping streets safe and clean, housing services, services for children, young people & families & education and creating new jobs were ranked 1-3.

The tasks were given equal weighting as 21 students participated in Task A, whilst 19 participated in Task B. Whilst the means are more differentiated, the variation between tasks is generally large, with the groups agreeing most on their lower ranking of parks & open spaces. It should be noted that comparing the two tasks is limited, as Task A was ranked based on frequency whilst Task B expressed preference, as it was ranked by priority.

Croydon Budget Proposals	One	Two	Three	Four	Five
1. Keeping streets safe & clean	4	1	3	2.5	
2. Housing services	1	5	4	3	
3. Services for children, young people & families & education	5	3	2	4	
3. Creating new jobs	1	7	6	4	
5. Support for elderly & vulnerable adults	7	2	5	4.5	
6. Leisure & sports services	3	7	4	5	
7. Rubbish & recycling collection	7	4	3	5.5	
8. Parks & open spaces	7	6	1	6.5	
9. Libraries & culture	6	9	3	7.5	



Qualitative responses

Students had the most suggestions for keeping streets safe & clean, support for elderly & vulnerable people, services for children, young people & families & education and leisure & sports services, and the most frequently made suggestions involved increasing accessibility to community activities for SEND people such as themselves. Other priorities include improving homelessness provisions and more sports activities.

Croydon Budget Proposals 23-24	Qualitative Suggestions
Keeping streets safe & clean	Address Knife crime.
	Address dangerous litter (e.g. needles).
	Generally clean streets.
Support for elderly & vulnerable adults	More systems to support people with disabilities.
	More accessibility for visually impaired and disabled people.
	Disability-friendly public transport.
	More ramps.
Services for children, young people & families & education	More specialist medical care for SEND children.
	More special provision schools.
	Create SEND provisions in mainstream schools
	Support for children to access public transport safely.
	More minibuses.

	More therapy centres.
Rubbish & recycling collection	
Housing services	Homelessness provision Jobs, houses and food for the homeless
Parks & open spaces	More parks in open spaces.
Leisure & sports services	More sports: swimming, football, tennis, basketball, boxing, etc. Specialist clubs for SEND children. Increase lunch funding (has been reduced to £3.50) Family activities Art clubs Drama clubs Common rooms More activities (e.g. games like Monopoly) Indian cinemas
Creating new jobs	
Libraries & culture	
Other	Address cost of living. Lower prices and bills Increase lunch funding (has been reduced to £3.50)

