

Budget 2023/24: we want to hear from you

Feedback from public survey

26 January 2023

Executive Summary

This report summarises the responses received to the budget 2023/24 proposals survey. The survey was launched following the approval of the 2023-24 budget update, Medium Term Financial Strategy and savings proposals at Cabinet on 30 November 2022.

1,467 responses were received to the survey which ran between 1 December 2022 and 8 January 2023. This is a very positive response rate when compared to similar engagement exercises.

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.

However, when we look at the comments made in later questions, when respondents talked about specific services, it tended to be those that were ranked lower in terms of priority. This inconsistency is not unusual in surveys of this type. It is also worth noting that the comments about individual services are consistently from a small proportion of the overall survey sample.

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

- Increase in council tax (250)
- Cuts and reductions in services (135)
- Vulnerable groups i.e. disabled and elderly residents (82)
- Cost of living (79)

When asked if respondents had any further comments on the proposals, the largest group of responses highlighted the importance of governance and transparency (121) from the council, as well as reference to staff and councillors.

821 respondents provided comments on where the Council should spend more/less, and areas that we could do differently. The majority of comments (155) were around the importance of keeping streets clean and safe.

The theme of clean and safe streets is replicated in the responses to where the council should be looking to bid for external funding with safer communities (89.58%) and cleaner streets (84.32%) coming out top.

Engagement methodology

Following the Cabinet meeting on 30 November 2022, the council launched a five-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 responses 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, and 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
- Mayors weekly message and Chief Executive's staff message
- Social media posts (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram)
- Intranet article, plus update asking staff to share with their networks
- 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 561 community and voluntary contacts via the council's VCS team
- All councillor emails
- Shared with youth council and via the youth engagement teams
- Shared with community safety networks
- Facebook post shared with local groups
- Contact centre available to take residents views over the phone if required.

In the week before the survey closed, a further round of communications was undertaken to encourage responses. These included:

- Press release
- Social media posts
- Intranet article
- Reminder to all community groups and councillors
- Message to schools
- Mayor's weekly message and Chief Executive's staff message

Analysis of responses

1,467 responses were received to the survey which ran between 1 December 2022 and 8 January 2023. This is a very positive response rate when compared to similar engagement exercises.

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 communications activities included messages to children's centre and schools. However, the response rate for people aged 0-19 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.

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 (61%). This is higher than the borough profile from the 2021 Census, where 48.4% of the population identified as White. Black, Asian and Mixed ethnic groups were underrepresented in the response rate compared to the Census 2021 profile for Croydon.

11.6% 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 (45%) which is very similar to the Census 2021 level. The next highest response group was those with no religion and this was also similar to the borough profile according to the 2021 Census data. However, 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, 53.1% of respondents were married. This is an over representation compared to the 2021 Census profile, where 32.8% were married. There was also a higher 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:

All 1,467 respondents completed 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 & Families).

The next group of services, ranked 3rd and 4th on average, were universal services: rubbish and recycling collection, and keeping streets safe and clean.

The average ranking then shows a clear gap, from 3.99 to 5.09. Housing, parks and open spaces and economic growth scored between 5.09 and 5.71 on average.

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.

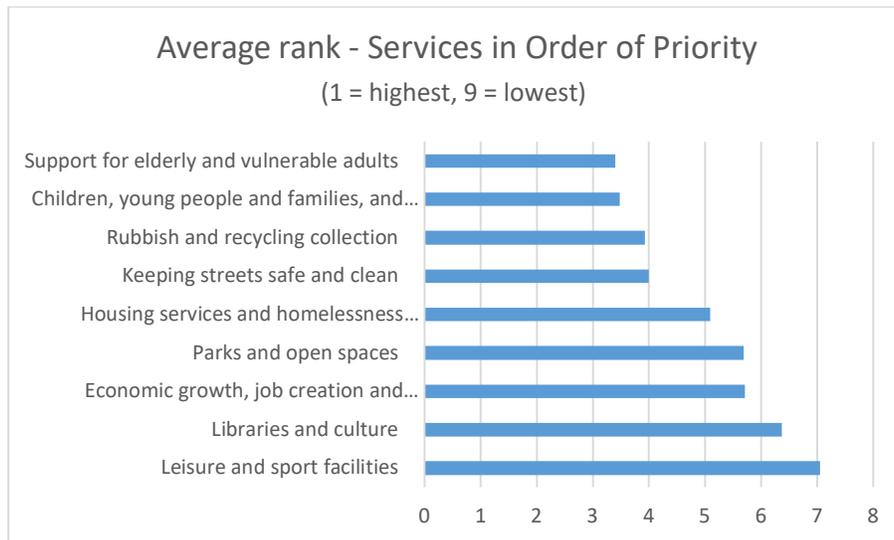
For example, although housing services and homelessness prevention had an average rank of 5.09, the most common ranking was actually 3. Meaning a large number of respondents ranked housing services higher than the average suggests.

The reverse is true for economic growth. Whilst the average score was 5.71, placing it above libraries in the priority order, the most common rank was 9. The most common score for Libraries, however, was 7.

Table 1:

| Order of priority | Service | Average rank | Mode (most common rank) |
|---------------------|--|--------------|-------------------------|
| 1 (most important) | Support for elderly and vulnerable adults | 3.40 | 1 |
| 2 | Children, young people and families, and education | 3.48 | 1 |
| 3 | Rubbish and recycling collection | 3.92 | 3 |
| 4 | Keeping streets safe and clean | 3.99 | 4 |
| 5 | Housing services and homelessness prevention | 5.09 | 3 |
| 6 | Parks and open spaces | 5.69 | 7 |
| 7 | Economic growth, job creation and regeneration | 5.71 | 9 |
| 8 | Libraries and culture | 6.37 | 7 |
| 9 (least important) | Leisure and sport facilities | 7.05 | 9 |

Chart 1:



Question 2: Do you think our budget proposals will impact you and if so, how?

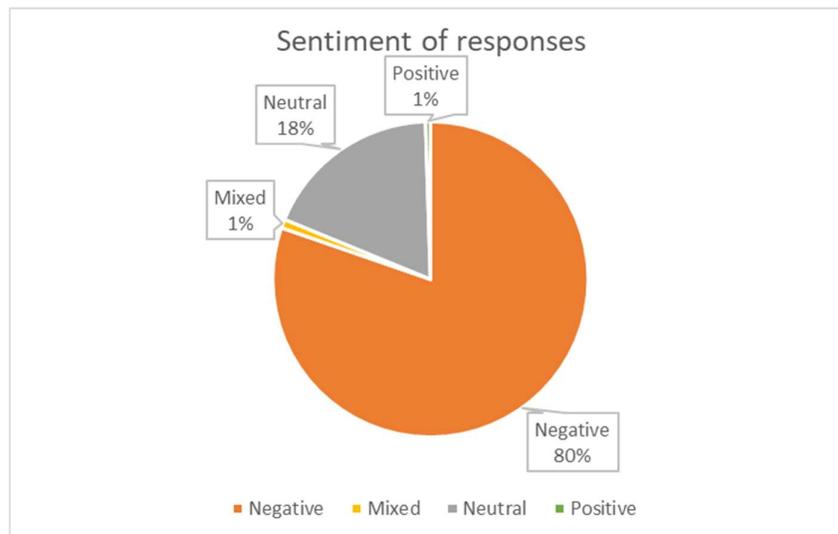
As part of the budget engagement, we wanted to understand if residents felt that the budget proposals would impact on them. We also asked residents to indicate how, and within the analysis have categorised these responses as having a positive, neutral or negative impact. For example, some respondents suggested that the increase in Council Tax would have a negative impact on them because of the financial impact this would have on them.

941 people responded to this question:

- 730 (77.6%) indicated that the budget proposals **will** have an impact
- 54 (5.7%) indicated that the budget is **not likely** to have an impact
- 157 (16.7%) did **not clearly state** whether the proposal will have an impact on them.

The chart below demonstrates how residents indicated the budget proposals would impact on them.

Chart 2:



Further analysis of the responses to this question was undertaken to identify which budget proposals people identified as impacting on them.

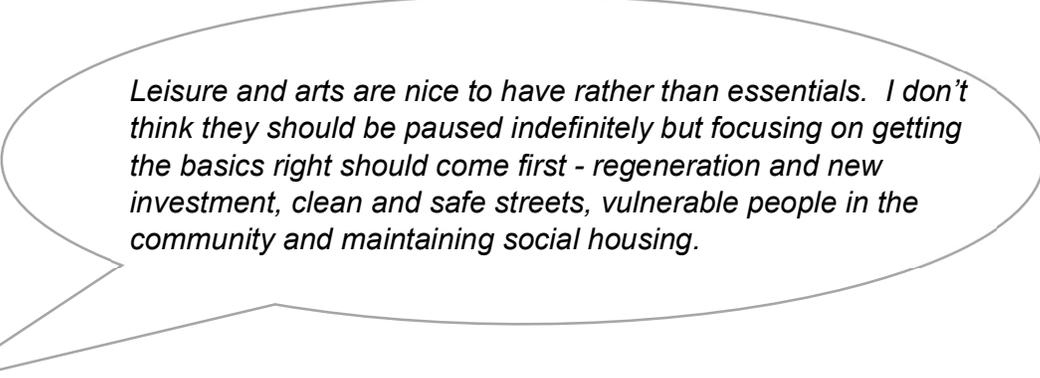
The table below provides a breakdown of the key proposals that were identified by respondents as having an impact. The table highlights those where 5%+ of respondents (47) commented.

Table 2:

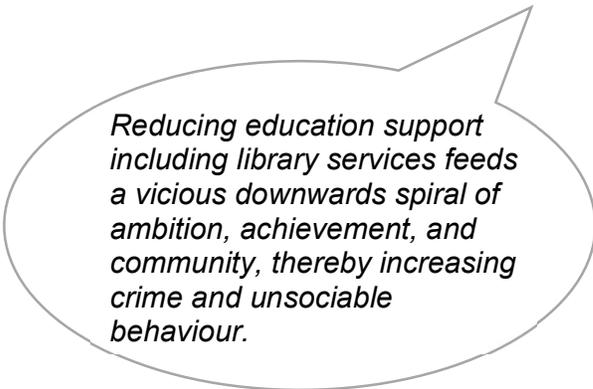
| Area (number of responses) | Description |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Council tax (240) | The respondents expressed their worries about any council tax increase and its impact. In particular there were comments that Council Tax was increasing when services were poorly performing or reducing. |
| Service cuts and reduction (135) | 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. |
| Libraries (103) | Libraries was identified as a specific service area where respondents indicated that they or the community would be affected. The responses were concerned about reductions in the service. |
| Vulnerable groups (82) | The respondents were worried that vulnerable groups (pensioners, disabled, elderly etc.) may be particularly affected by the cuts and additional costs. Comments in this area included concerns about the impact on the voluntary and community sector, which supports vulnerable residents as well as the direct services provided by the Council. |
| Cleanliness and maintenance (79) | The respondents indicated that further cuts may affect the cleanliness and maintenance of the streets and community spaces. |
| Cost of living (79) | The respondents indicated that their standard of living might decrease due to the proposed changes, with the budget proposals coming alongside the wider cost of living changes and inflationary pressures facing households. |
| Safety (47) | The respondents indicated that safety (both crime and environmental risk e.g. flood) might be affected by the budget proposals. |

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

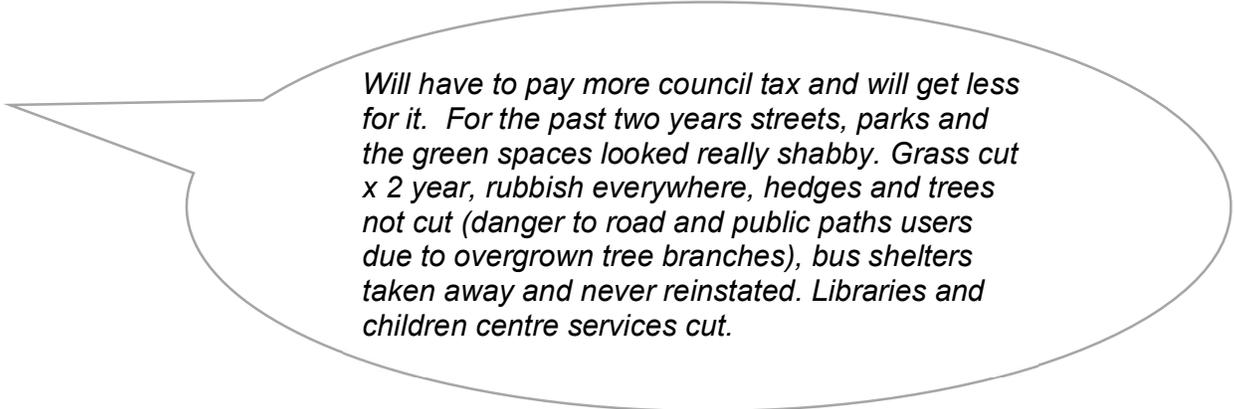
Examples of responses:



Leisure and arts are nice to have rather than essentials. I don't think they should be paused indefinitely but focusing on getting the basics right should come first - regeneration and new investment, clean and safe streets, vulnerable people in the community and maintaining social housing.



Reducing education support including library services feeds a vicious downwards spiral of ambition, achievement, and community, thereby increasing crime and unsociable behaviour.



Will have to pay more council tax and will get less for it. For the past two years streets, parks and the green spaces looked really shabby. Grass cut x 2 year, rubbish everywhere, hedges and trees not cut (danger to road and public paths users due to overgrown tree branches), bus shelters taken away and never reinstated. Libraries and children centre services cut.

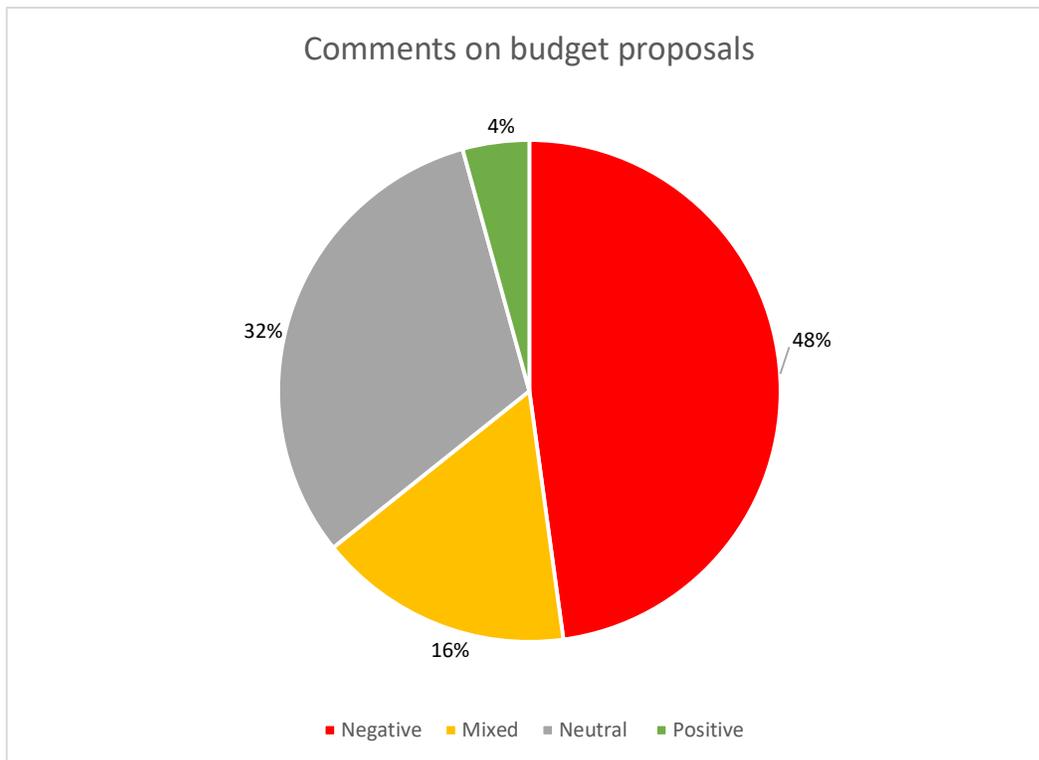
Question 3: Do you have any further comments on our proposals?

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.

690 respondents provided comments. In analysing these comments, we have coded the comments in two ways. Firstly, each response was identified as positive, negative or neutral. Some comments gave both positive and negative comments – these were coded as mixed responses

As shown in the chart below, 48% of the respondents expressed negative opinions about the budget proposals. 32% of the respondents expressed neutral feelings towards the proposals. Only 4% of the comments to this question were positive about the budget proposals.

Chart 3:



The second stage of analysis was to code the comments according to the issues or themes raised by the respondent. As this was a free text response, there was significant variety in the comments.

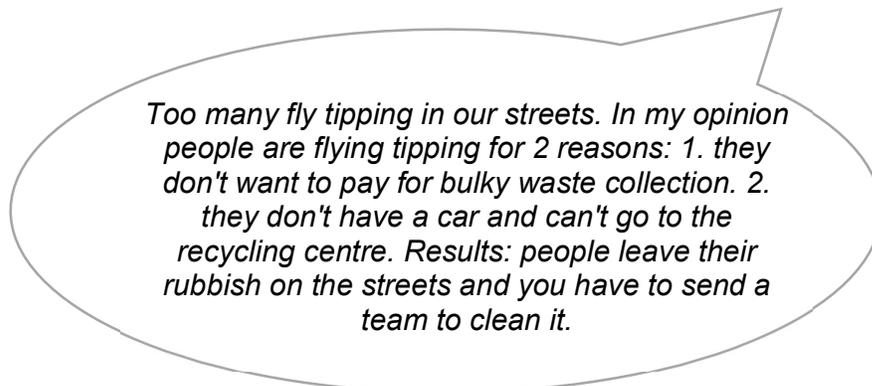
The table below provides a breakdown of the key themes raised by respondents. The table highlights those where 5%+ of respondents (35) commented.

Table 3:

| Theme (number of responses) | Summary |
|---|---|
| Council / staff / governance (121) | The respondents indicated themes around senior pay, councillor allowances, us of consultants/agency staff and being more transparent in relation to expenditure and decision making. References were also made to historic matters, such as commercial investments and projects |
| Local Businesses and Economic Regeneration (56) | The respondents indicated the importance of innovation and investing in local businesses, town centres and open spaces |
| Libraries (47) | The respondents indicated that they or the community would be affected by the library cuts |
| Clean streets / safety (49) | The respondents indicated that safety in Croydon should be considered when discussing budget proposals. The respondent indicated concerns about street/town centre/neighbourhood cleanliness |

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

Examples of responses:



We should prioritise people, health and wellbeing, and make sure the poor and vulnerable are looked after. In the current situation, it's less important to spend money on removing graffiti, cutting the grass, sweeping the streets every day or improving district centres. We should also prioritise working with communities to improve their own situation locally, and promote volunteering and group activities to get things done where there is no money to pay for services.

I was struck during the pandemic at just how many people wanted to volunteer or for example, take Ukrainians into their homes. It was a massive response. Could we harness that goodwill and potential in Croydon more? If we had a safe, credible way of linking volunteers with targeted projects to help schools, libraries, assisting seekers etc. People want Croydon to be successful. Also develop a pool of ambassadors who have Croydon roots to inspire people that Croydon really is a great place to live, work, raise a family and enjoy your older years. Good luck and thanks for the survey- nice to be given the chance to have our view on such important subjects.

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.

1,467 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.

Table 4:

| Investment areas | Strongly support and somewhat support | Strongly do not support and somewhat do not support |
|--|--|--|
| Safer Communities | 89.58% | 1.43% |
| Cleaner Streets | 84.32% | 3.07% |
| Improving our town and district centres | 83.30% | 3.61% |
| Protecting young people and helping them to reach their full potential | 83.30% | 3.89% |
| Supporting older people to live longer healthier live | 82.48% | 4.09% |
| Investing in our parks and open spaces | 79.13% | 4.64% |
| Raising standards in council homes | 65.37% | 7.57% |
| Public sports and leisure facilities | 65.03% | 9.95% |
| Community projects or services that support communities | 64.82% | 10.64% |

Question 5: Is there anything that we currently spend money on that you think we should not, or anything that you think we could do differently?

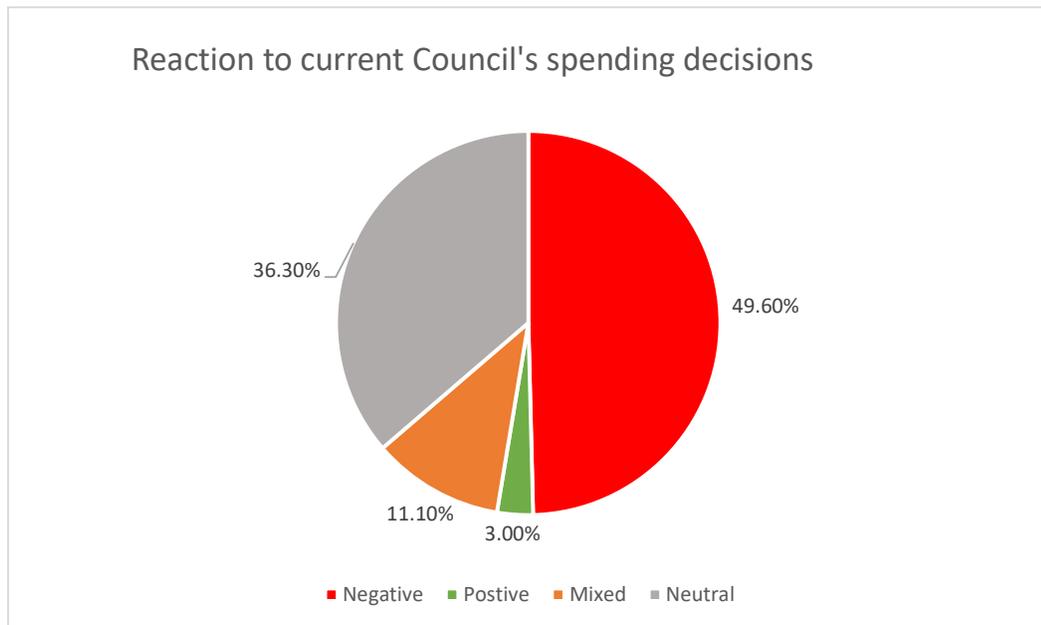
As part of the engagement survey, it was important that respondents were not limited to only comment on the budget proposals that had been identified in the Cabinet report. This question sought general feedback on any areas that the Council should change its expenditure on. The response format was a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

There were 821 comments responses and a wide range of reactions to the spending decisions of the council.

Similar to other free text answers, the first stage of analysis was to code the comment as to whether it was positive, negative, mixed or neutral.

Most of the respondents (49.6%) felt negative about the spending decisions, but a considerable proportion (36.3%) of responses were neutral towards these decisions. The chart below provides a summary.

Chart 4:



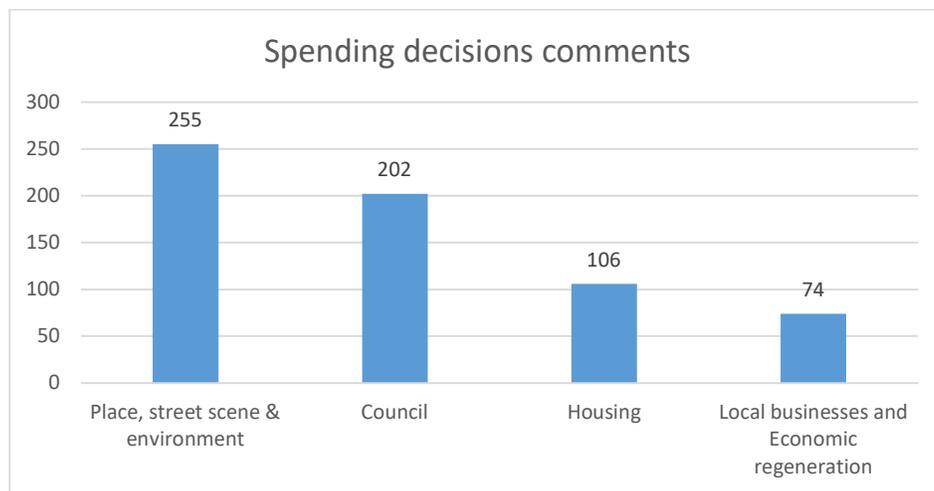
The next stage of analysis was to code the response according to the theme(s) of the comments. These included grouping according to a service area, or to a corporate wide matter such as transparency of spend, councillors or staff generally. Similar to previous questions, this report summarises the key themes raised where 5%+ of respondents (42) commented.

The analysis also identified some misconceptions, such as “stop all the bonuses for top management”, when the Council’s pay policy does not include provision for bonuses.

As can also happen in these types of surveys, there were opposing views in the responses. For example, some comments were arguing for the removal of low traffic neighbourhoods and enforcement cameras; other comments were seeking for enforcement to be strengthened and expanded.

The main themes identified in the responses is summarised in the chart below, with further details then provided on each theme.

Chart 5:



Place, street scene and environment (255 responses)

The main themes that were identified in this category were in relation to street scene and cleanliness, and roads. The respondents emphasise the importance of increasing general appeal of the borough.

Table 5:

| Tag | Description |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Appearance and Clean Streets (110) | The respondents indicated the importance of cleaner streets, graffiti removal and protecting green spaces. There were suggestions to utilise more volunteers and to invest more funding in these services to improve the appearance of towns and spaces across the borough. |
| Roads (67) | The respondents indicated the importance of keeping the roads clean and streets made more accessible for pedestrians. There were a range of views in relation to things like cycle lanes and |

| Tag | Description |
|-----|---|
| | traffic enforcement. Some wanted increases in these areas, others wanted these to reduce or be removed. |

Council (202 responses)

Within this theme the categories were broader, covering a range of different aspects. Themes included:

- Staff salary and performance, particularly in relation to senior salaries and the use of consultants, with the general theme being that these should be reduced
- Mayor/Councillors, with comments about the role of Mayor and Civic Mayor, and costs involved, as well as the salary and allowances for Councillors, with the general theme being these should be lower
- Staff retention / concern about the impact of the Council's financial situation on staff

Across the Council based comments there were also comments to previous activities and the need for increase transparency with stronger audits and more information sharing.

Housing (106 responses)

Whilst there was a significant proportion of comments about housing, the themes were extremely varied. Comments highlighted the need for investment in housing stock, with reference to ensuring the empty or underused buildings were a priority. There were also competing views in many areas (more housing vs less housing). There was concern about the wider economic position and the impact this would have on housing and homelessness.

Local business and Economic Regeneration (74 responses)

Within this area a key theme was in relation to previous activities or schemes. The largest theme, and only one with more than 5% of responses, was made in relation to town centre/regeneration, with reference to Westfield not proceeding and the need for a clear vision to improve the town centre.

Community Engagement (43 responses)

Comments in this theme focused on creating a sense of community, getting the public involved in community matters, including community projects. References were made to supporting the voluntary and community sector, as well as opportunities for greater volunteering.

Examples of responses:

Sell the leisure facilities off, they'd be better run by private gyms.

Spend it on streets cleans off graffiti and litter

Why has Croydon council got such an enormous and palatial new office building? Presumably you can get people working at home more and downsize. That place must cost a fortune. Maybe some of the answers to the financial problems lie close to home? Will tough decisions be made about that building or will it be libraries and arts facilities that get thrown on the bonfire instead?

There's no point in saving pennies by, for example, turning the lights off, or cutting teams size down by a few members. Big projects need to be created that will bring significant wealth to Croydon, but that's so easy to say and I have no idea what such projects might consist of...

Stop wasting money on traffic calming measures like the 20mph zones

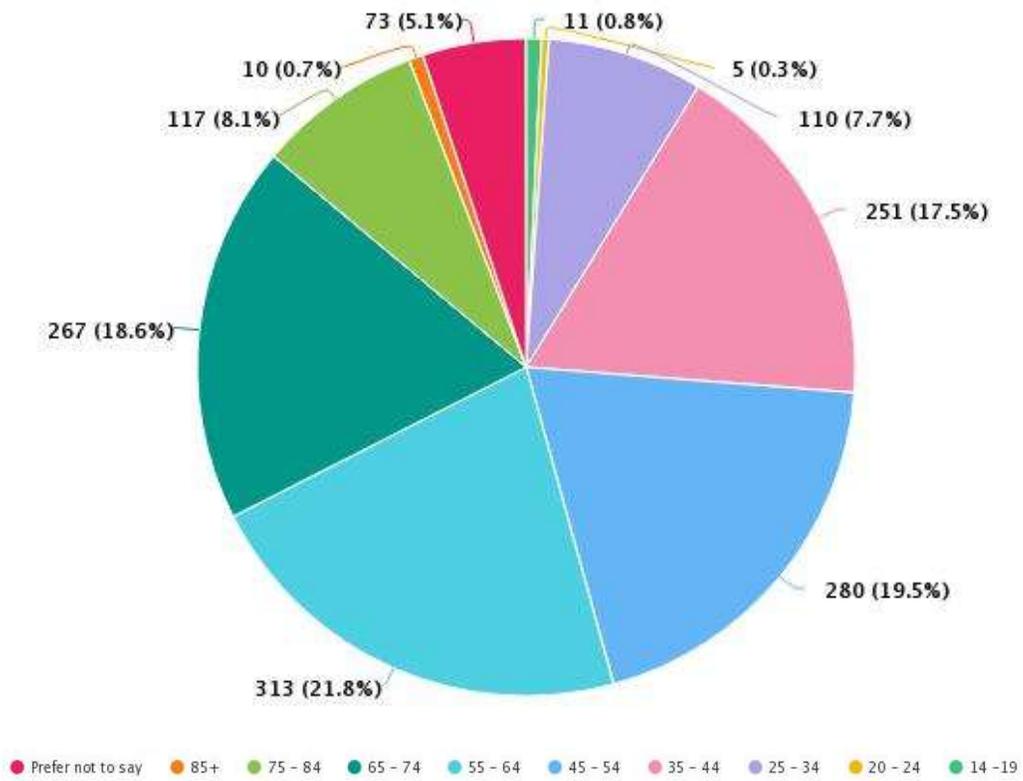
Spend the reserves paying of more debt will decrease the amount of interest payable if there is no money left so be it. That's how normal people have to operate.

Financially supporting community schemes should be something only to be considered during "years of plenty". While the council is cash-strapped, local communities will need to rely much more on their own resources and ingenuity

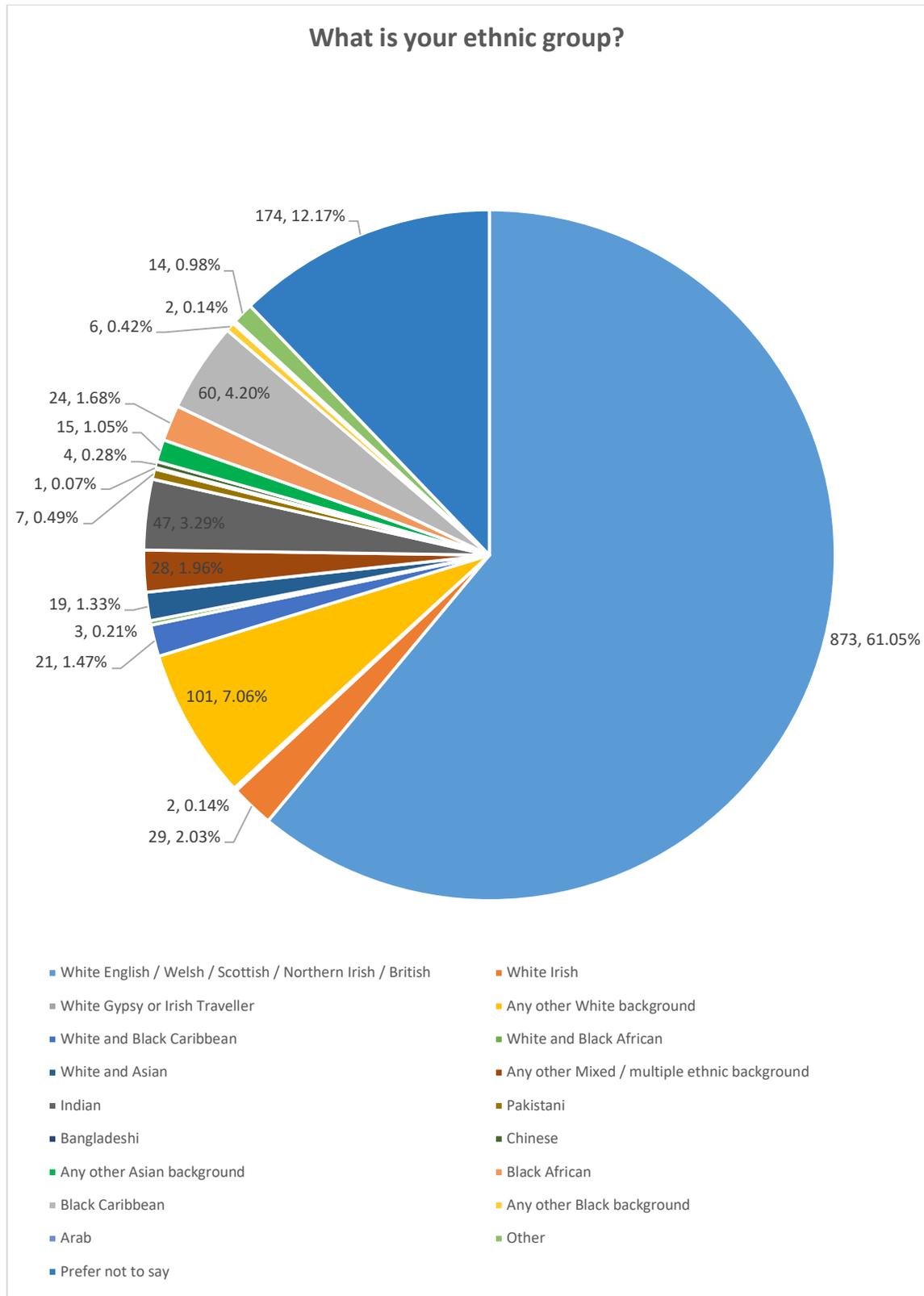
More money should be spent in improving current housing conditions and helping the vulnerable with living conditions

Appendix – Demographic analysis

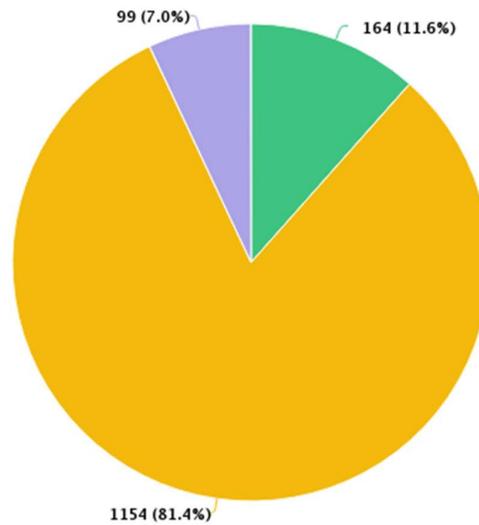
Age – Which age group applies to you?



Ethnic group – What is your ethnic group?



Disability – Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

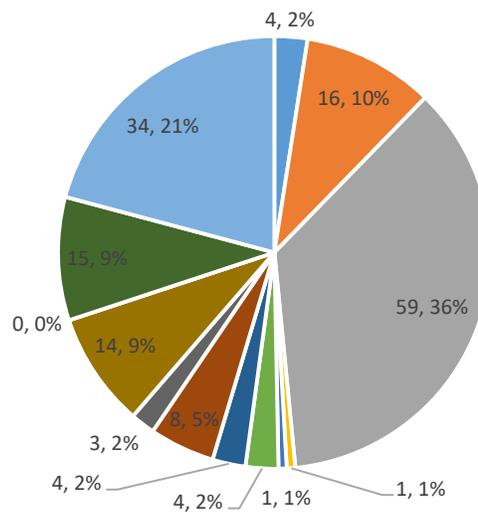


Question options
(Click items to hide)

- Prefer not to say
- No
- Yes

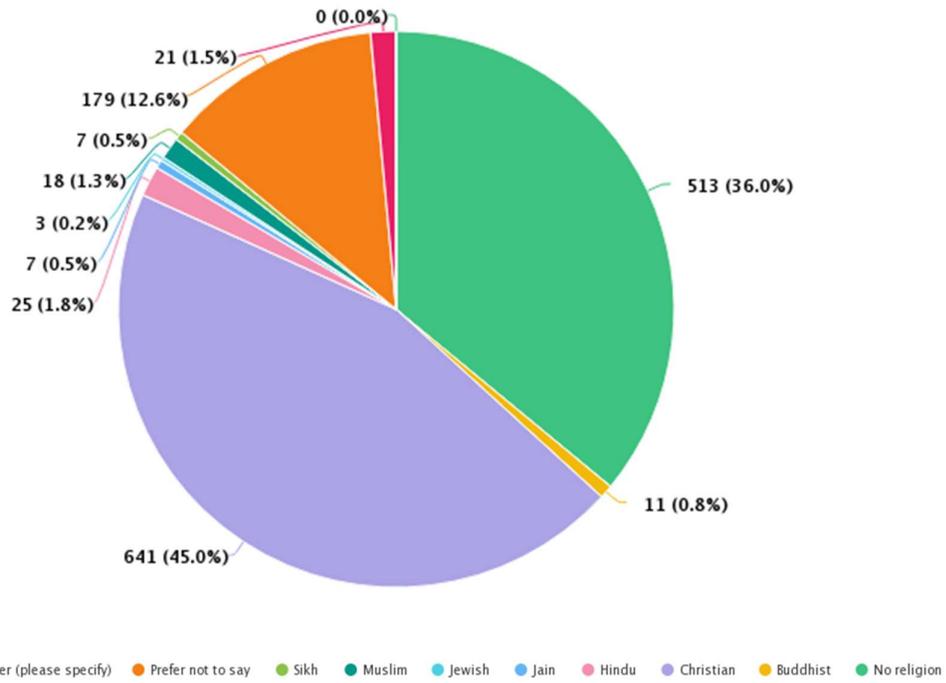
Disability – Please select the disability(ies) you consider yourself to have:

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

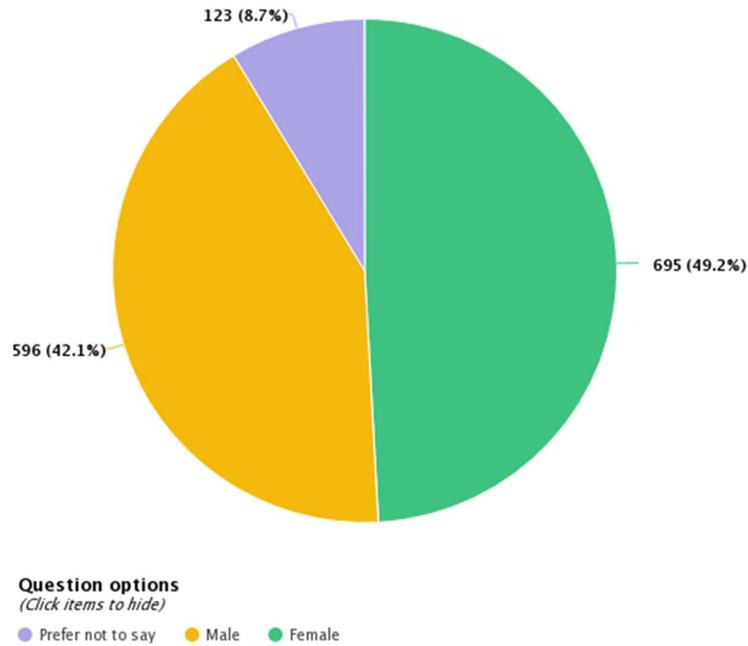


- Visually Impaired
- Hearing Impaired
- Mobility disability
- Learning disability
- Communication difficulty
- Hidden disability: autism (ASD)
- Hidden disability: ADHD
- Hidden disability: asthma
- Hidden disability: epilepsy
- Hidden disability: diabetes
- Hidden disability: sickle cell
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

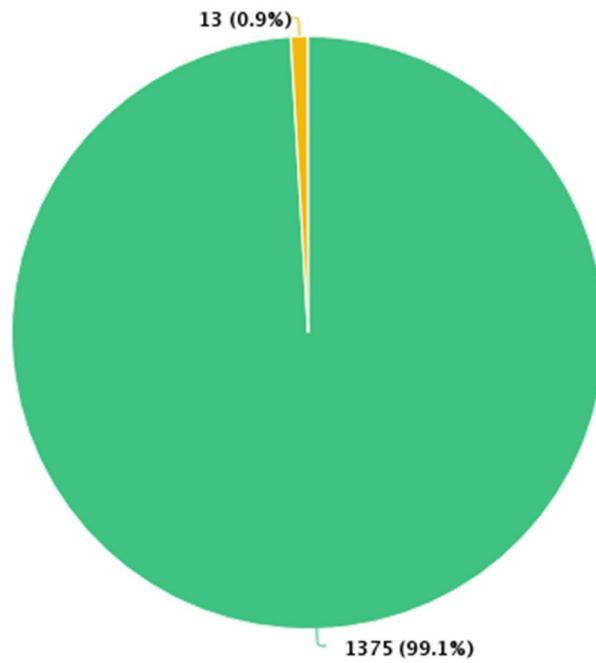
Religion – What is your religion?



Sex – What is your sex?



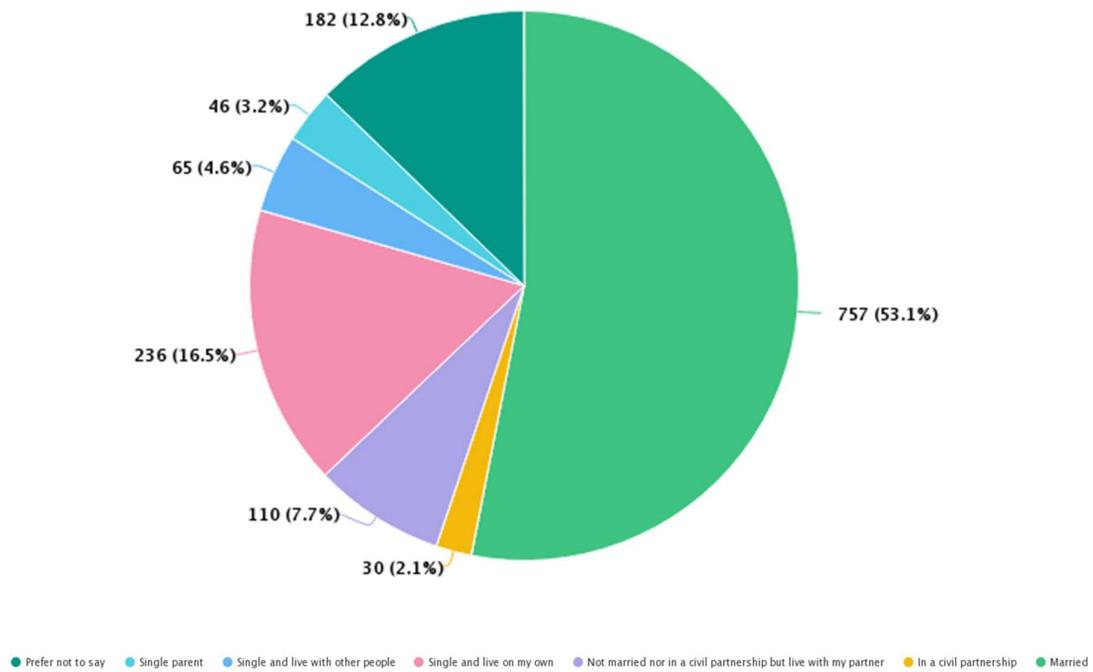
Gender – Is the gender you identified with the same as your sex registered at birth?



Question options
(Click items to hide)

- No - please tell us your gender identity
- Yes

Legal status – What is your legal marital or registered partnership status?



Pregnancy – Are you or your partner pregnant?

