

**Flintshire County Council**

**Have your say!**

**2025/26 Budget Consultation**

**December 2024**

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**The purpose of the consultation:**

To outline the challenges facing the Council in balancing its budget for 2025/26.

To seek the views about what's important to residents along with their thoughts on strategies to bridge the budget gap, not only by Flintshire County Council but by other Council's across the UK.

To support members in their consideration of options to help balance the books.

**When people could have their say:**

The consultation opened on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2024 and closed on 24 November 2024.

**How people could have their say:**

People could have their say by completing a short on-line questionnaire.

Residents who were unable to complete the survey online were signposted to any of the five Flintshire Connects Centres where support was available.

**The questions:**

Seven consultation questions were asked and supplemented by the statutory equality monitoring questions.

**Number of people taking part:**

3480 people took part. Not everyone who started went on to complete all questions. All responses received up to abandonment are included in this summary report.

## **What people told us:**

### **1. Understanding the challenges**

92% of people taking part confirmed they had read the information about the budget challenges on the website.

### **2. The importance of services**

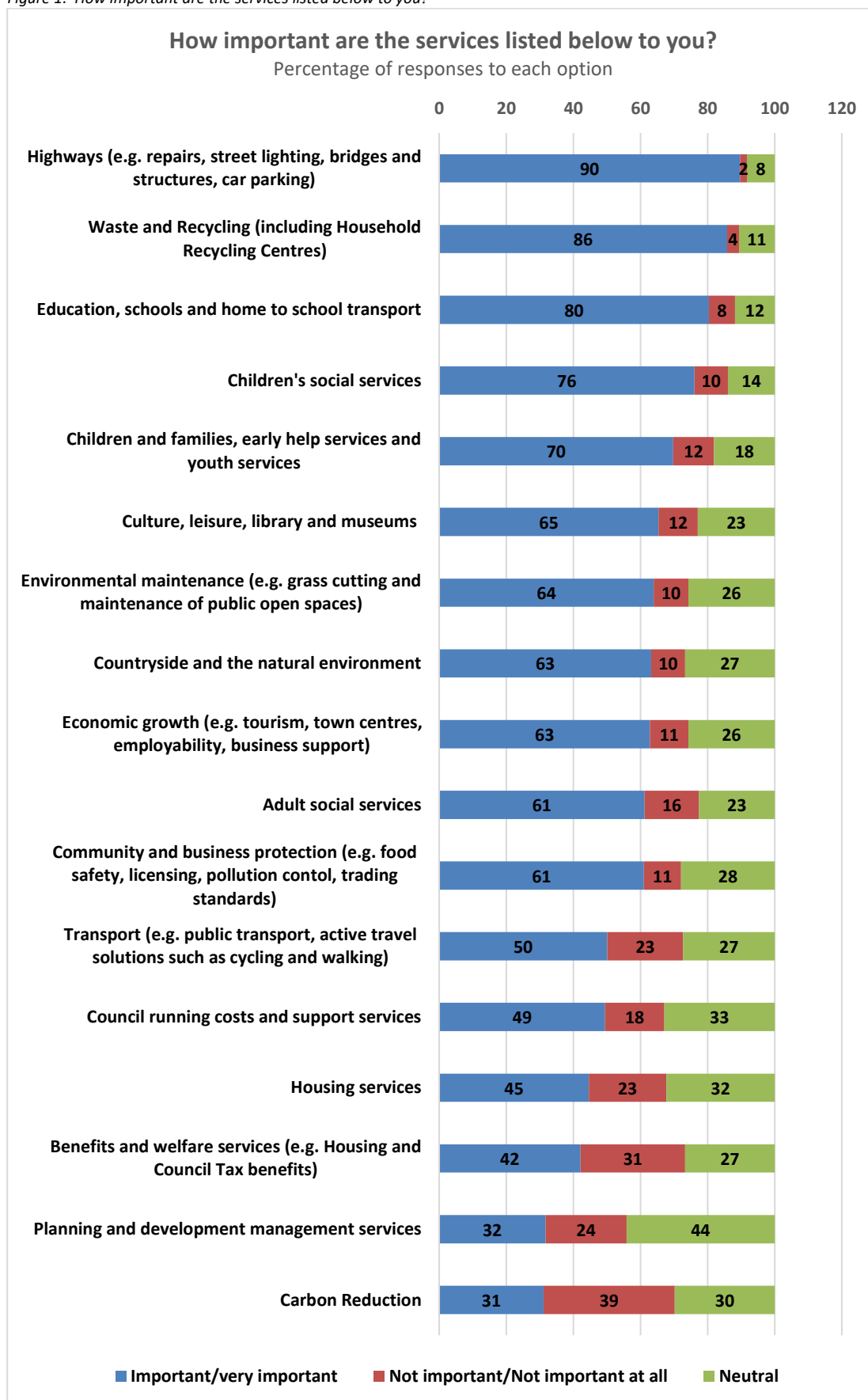
When asked to identify what council services were important to them Highways (90%), Waste and Recycling (86%) and Education (80%) returned the largest majority.

Carbon Reduction was most evenly split 31% very important/important, 39% not important/not important at all and 30% having no strong views one way or the other.

When considering responses to this question it is important to note that people were not asked to rank what was most important to them, merely to identify whether a service was important to them or not.

The full table of responses can be found at Figure 1.

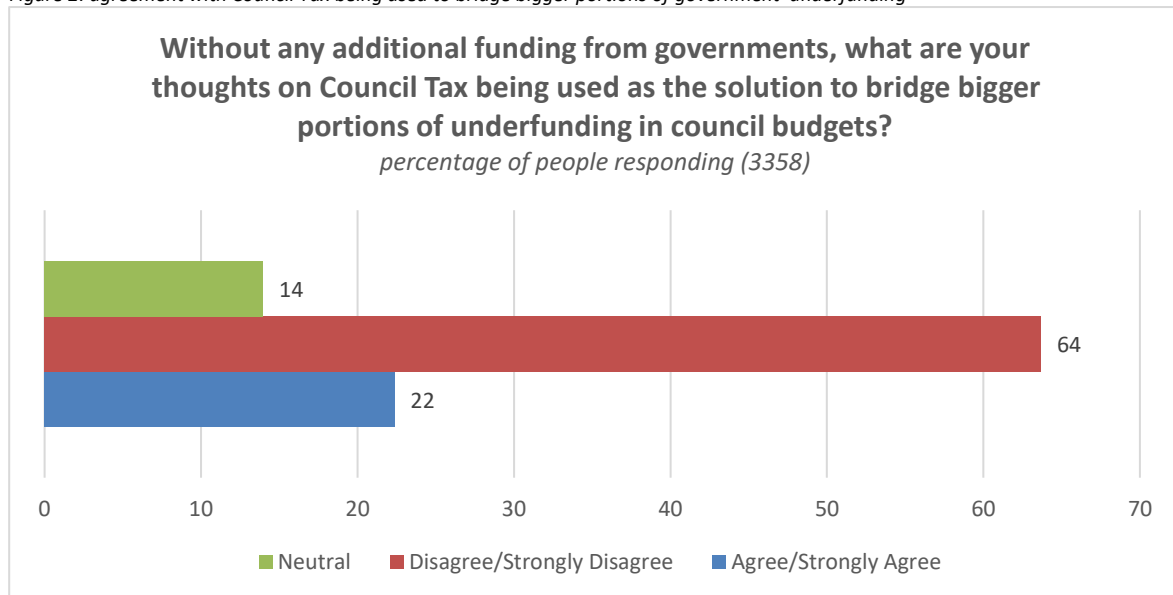
Figure 1: How important are the services listed below to you?



### 3. Council Tax

The majority of people responding to this question disagreed with Council Tax being used to close the rising gaps in underfunded council budgets.

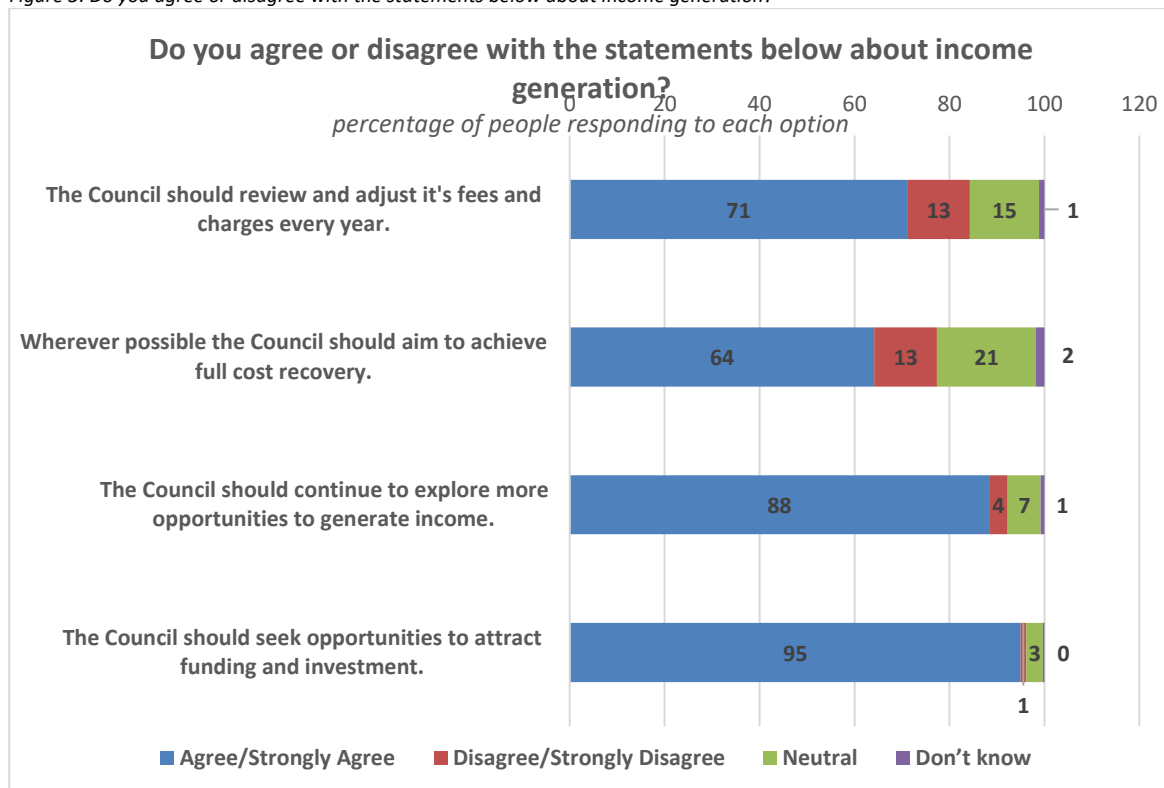
Figure 2: agreement with Council Tax being used to bridge bigger portions of government underfunding



### 4. Income Generation

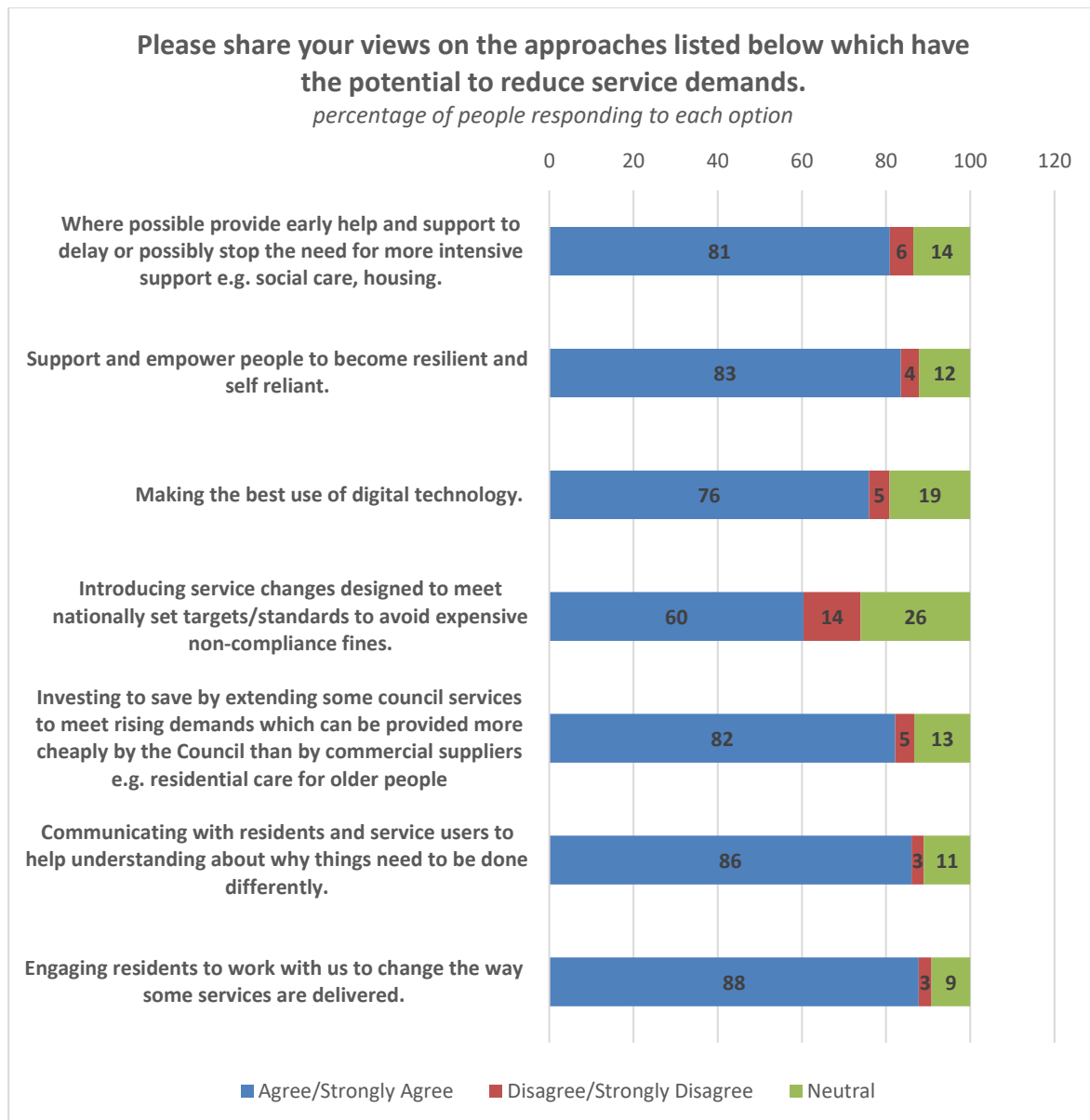
There was strong support for the council generating more income.

Figure 3: Do you agree or disagree with the statements below about income generation?



## 5. Managing demand pressures

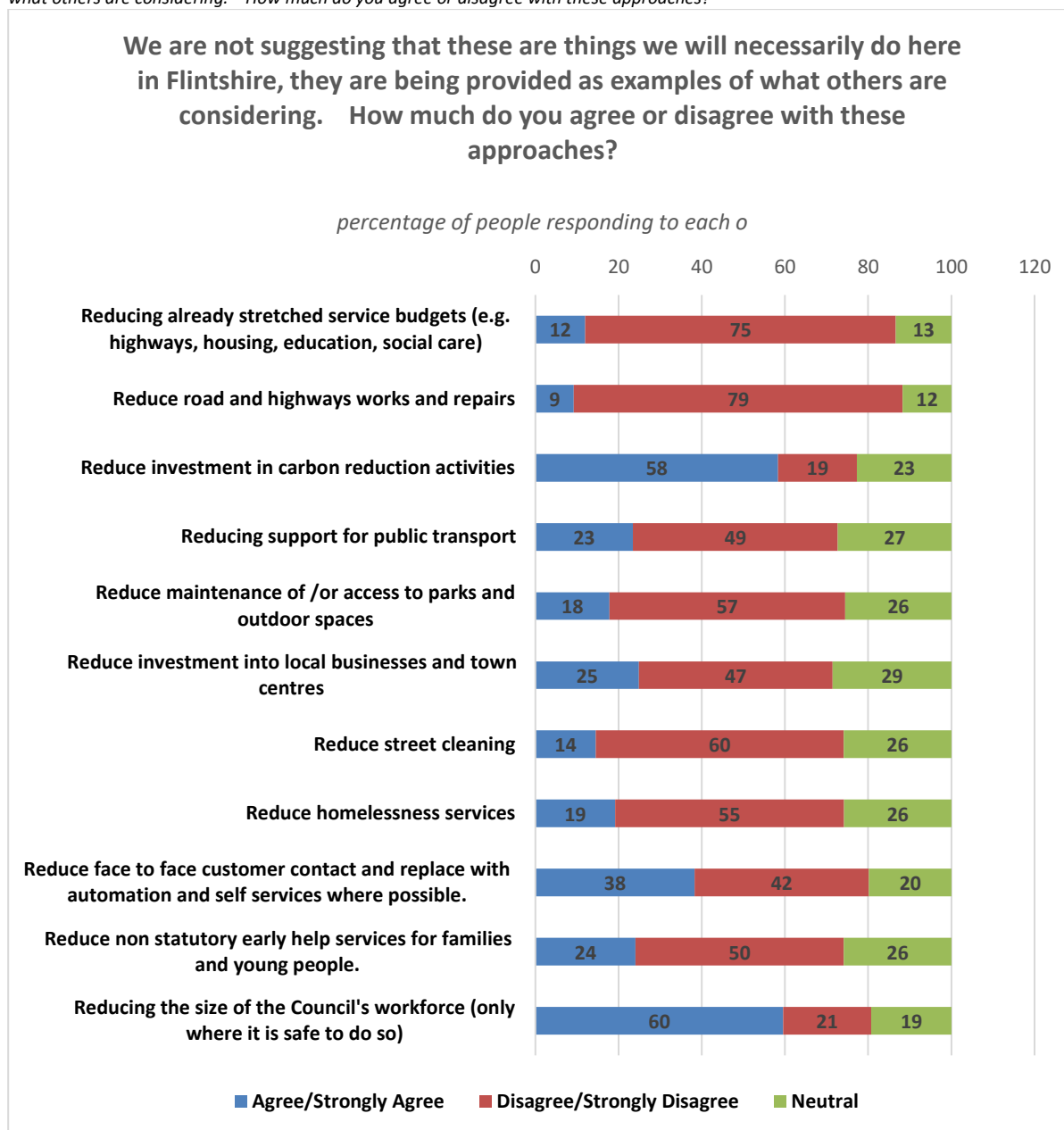
There was support in the Council adopting measures that had the potential to reduce demand on services.



## 6. Prioritising our spending

People were invited to express their level of agreement/disagreement with options being considered by other council to cut spending.

Figure 4: We are not suggesting that these are things we will necessarily do here in Flintshire, they are being provided as examples of what others are considering. How much do you agree or disagree with these approaches?



## **7. Feedback**

Residents were also given the opportunity to provide additional comments and feedback. A total of 1,363 people shared views and opinions which have been summarised below:

### **7.1 National Funding**

Of those who provided feedback, people wanted to see fairer Welsh Government (WG) funding for Flintshire, with an expectation for the Council to actively seek, and press for, a fairer funding settlement. Longer term WG funding settlements would also be beneficial.

### **7.2 Council Tax**

There was strong feeling from the majority of responses that Council Tax increases should not be applied to bridge the budget gap. It was generally felt that residents are feeling the strain of the increasing costs of living and as a result of year-on-year underfunding in council budgets they are being asked to pay more for less.

Some felt that pushing residents into further financial hardship, as a result of Council Tax increases, would be counterproductive potentially resulting in less Council Tax being collected and increasing demand for council services.

A smaller number of people providing feedback felt that Council Tax should be increased to bridge the gap.

### **7.3 Council Structure / workforce / elected members**

Generating the most feedback, suggestions covered:

- Streamlining management structures/layers
- Reducing pay and benefits
- Performance management
- Hybrid working
- Outsourcing services
- Retaining/bringing services back in-house
- Reducing/ceasing the use of consultants/agency workers

There was a strong perception that the Council employs too many managers who are paid too much and that generally there are too many council workers who are overpaid, receive too many perks and benefits and inflated pensions.

There was a view that performance management needs improvement and that auditing and systems thinking should be applied to streamline processes and procedures to cut out waste.

There were conflicting views around hybrid working with some people wanting to see employees returning to an office environment to improve performance, whilst others were suggesting hybrid working as a solution to cutting expensive building, heating and electricity costs.

Some felt that outsourcing work to the private/commercial sector should be stopped - along with the employment of agency workers and consultants - all of which were considered expensive options which the councils existing workforce could do more cheaply and efficiently in-house. Others had an alternative view that outsourcing could be a more cost-effective and efficient option.

Similar to views expressed around the councils structure and workforce, the role of elected members also generated significant feedback with a strong feeling that there were too many elected members who were paid too much for their services and with a need to improve performance management.

#### **7.4 Working with others**

A number of suggestions were put forward to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

- Developing and encouraging a variety of volunteering opportunities – empowering local people to look after local communities/services.
- Capitalising on the wealth of knowledge and expertise available in Flintshire by working with local businesses and communities to generate innovative solutions.
- Working with local colleges to provide practical hands-on work opportunities which both benefits the curriculum and the council.
- More cohesive joined up working between council services.
- Merging with other councils.

#### **7.5 Council assets**

Comments around the use of council assets included:

- Selling off surplus land/buildings at full market value relevant to its future use.
- Generating income through lease/hire of public facilities.
- Maximising the use/benefits of buildings for multi-use by different services/agencies to create community hubs.

#### **7.6 Strategic Planning**

There was a feeling that data driven decision making along with long-term sustainability needed to be key considerations on where funding should be invested.

There was also a general feeling that short term planning was not particularly efficient or effective.

There were concerns over the decision to bring libraries and leisure services back in-house at a time when finances are so dire, and how that decision may impact services in the future.

## **7.7 Procurement and contracts**

Views around procurement and contracts included:

Improvement of contract procurement processes to ensure competitive tendering and best value for money – cheapest isn't always best, whilst there is also the risk of paying too much.

Strengthen procedures to ensure the delivery of high-quality work, to specification and on time - issuing and collecting penalties where work falls short.

Stop awarding contracts to external suppliers/contractors where it can be done more efficiently and effectively in-house.

Investigate and maximising what added value can be achieved through procurement along with opportunities for the inclusion of social value clauses for example housing developers contributing to the costs of increased service demand e.g. waste collection, road maintenance, parks and amenity spaces – and enforce them.

## **7.8 Income generation**

Ideas to generate income put forward included:

- Investing in the creation of commercial enterprises in fields such as waste management, renewable energy and affordable housing with profits reinvested into communities.
- Maximise income generation for all fee-paying services to help support those services that can't charge.
- Considering all the services that could be offered by the Council at an affordable cost – applying sliding scales/dynamic pricing - and widely publicise them.
- The use of crowdsourcing and/or obtaining non-profit charitable status to enable donations for community projects/initiatives.
- Stronger enforcement and collection of non-compliance fines where applicable.
- Actively chase and recover monies owed to the Council.

## **7.9 Economic growth**

Suggestions for economic growth:

- Invest to optimise attractions that bring people into the county and have potential to generate income for the council e.g. tourism, markets, events, along with protecting those which are already established.
- Invest in the county to make it a place that people want to live, work, visit and stay.
- Speed up processes that will bring investment into the county e.g. planning, licencing, etc.

## **7.10 Digital transformation**

Exploring and introducing new technology and ways of working to transform services, reduce costs and improve service delivery was considered beneficial by some, however there were others who cautioned against this being used as a blanket approach particularly for those who are not digitally enabled or whose needs prevent digital accessibility.

## **7.11 Early Intervention**

Of those commenting, there was a view that *'prevention is better than cure'*.

Investing earlier to slow down or stop the need for more intensive support/work has the potential to reduce the need for more expensive solutions further down the line. These views related to a range of different services, for example:

- Adult and children's social care services
- Education
- Community resilience and responsibility
- Highways repairs/maintenance
- Waste and recycling
- Parks and open spaces
- Leisure and library services

## **7.12 Efficiencies**

Some people felt the benefits of delivering services in-house should be considered/ reviewed before awarding the work to external suppliers/contractors, whilst others felt that outsourcing work to external providers would be more cost effective.

The reduction of waste across all council services was felt to be a priority ensuring value for money and cutting out red tape and duplication of effort.

In addition to reducing waste, economy of scale/bulk buying should also be a key consideration when purchasing.

The empowerment of employees to be constructive and creative in identifying and delivering savings and efficiencies.

Review service delivery to ensure it meets the needs of residents/customers taking account of new technologies and online opportunities.

Suggestions about how to keep general housekeeping costs down were also provided such as switching lights and heating off/down and using electronic communications as much as possible to cut down on postage costs.

Cutting back on Welsh translations was suggested as a means of reducing spending. Some responses identified as Welsh speakers and/or were supportive of the drive to increase the use of Welsh, they felt that in times of such financial hardship this was perhaps not an essential service. Ways of achieving this ranged from stopping

translations altogether to collecting and storing the language preferences of our residents and communicating with them accordingly.

### **7.13 Service prioritisation**

Of those who commented some were of the view that there should be a return to focusing on statutory/basic services only, and spending on non-essential services should be reduced, or temporarily suspended, to bridge the budget gap.

Some were of the opinion that front line services such as Education, Housing, Social Services and Streetscene should be protected from cuts.

There was a view that national policy, to improve recycling rates should be temporarily suspended. Potentially fining councils for non-compliance was felt to be counterproductive.

It was also felt that spending on carbon reduction measures should be reduced or stopped.

### **7.14 Education**

Comments received specifically in relation to education included:

- The protection of school budgets.
- More investment needed in ALN/SEN provision.
- More investment in mental health services.
- Reducing/stopping free school transport.

### **7.15 Housing/residential development**

Comments received specifically in relation to housing/residential development included:

- Improving rent collection for council houses, along with introducing contract holder (tenant) contributions for repairs/improvements.
- Getting empty council houses back to a condition for reletting more quickly, both to help with homelessness and to increase income.
- Look to things other councils have done to introduce innovative solutions for homelessness.
- Stop picking up costs for services which should be funded directly by housing developers.
- Whilst some people suggested building more houses for the homeless and to generate more council tax income, others were of the view that stopping housing building would stem the growth of Flintshire's population and help reduce demand on services.

### **7.16 Social Services**

Comments received specifically in relation to Social Services included:

- Lobbying for removal of the social care cap and charging more realistic rates for care provided.

- Pushing for joint funding where there is equal responsibility between the Council and NHS to deliver services, e.g. continuing care/community health services.
- Collecting all money owed to the Council for the care services it provides, including that owed by the NHS.
- More investment in social workers to get people out of hospital and into care.

### **7.17 Streetscene**

Comments received specifically in relation to Streetscene included:

- The protection of waste and recycling budgets/service frequencies.
- Focusing on essential/statutory services only.
- Investing in road repairs/maintenance to halt further deterioration and potentially larger costs in the future.
- Reviewing opening times for Household Recycling Centres and applying simplified processes for the recycling of materials – to encourage people to recycle more and reduce fly tipping.
- Household black bin collections – some people were against moving to a three weekly collection services whilst others were in favour of moving to a four week collection service.
- Increase charges for non-statutory services e.g garden waste.
- Switching off/reducing street lighting through the night.
- Reduce grass cutting frequencies.
- Reviewing public transport services to ensure most efficient use resources.

### **7.18 Communication, consultation and engagement**

Some welcomed the opportunity to have their say on the budget challenges, however, there was a general feeling that more could be done to improve communication, consultation and engagement with residents on a wide range of topics.

Internal communications between services was also highlighted as an area for improvement.

### **7.19 National Policy Decisions**

A number of comments were received which related to national policy decisions and included:

- Spending on the introduction of 20mph speed limits across Wales.
- Benefits and universal credit.
- Free school meals.
- Free bus passes.
- NHS free prescriptions.
- Immigration.

## **The consultation process and which groups of people took part**

### **Who could get involved:**

Available online the consultation was open to everyone.

Elected members, town and community councils, the Council's workforce, professional, community and equality networks, social media and the press.

### **How people were engaged:**

Targeted communications requesting support to amplify our communications were sent by email to:

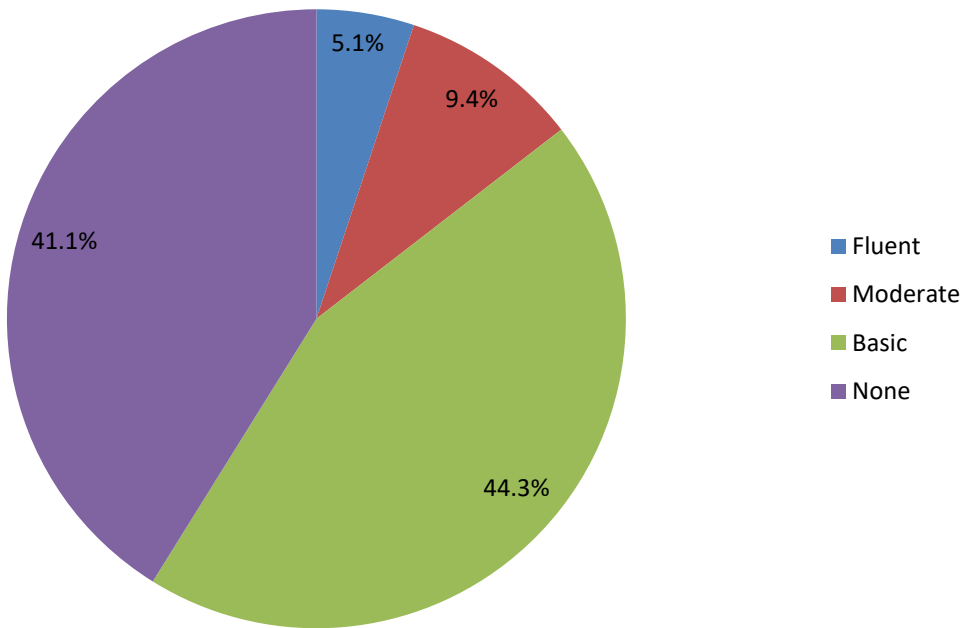
- FCC Councillors
- Town and Community Councils
- Professional networks / service user groups:
  - FCC workforce
  - Housing tenants
  - Schools
  - Older people
  - Young people
  - Families
  - Voluntary and charitable organisations
  - Businesses
  - Equality groups

Communications were also issued through:

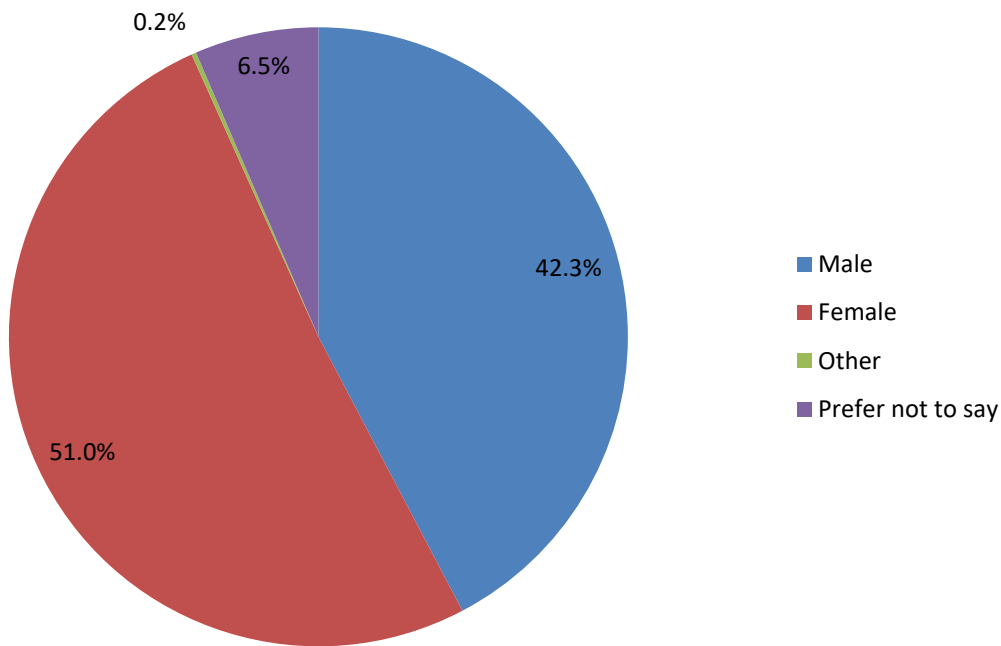
- Council's website – a main banner on the home page, through the consultation and engagement hub and pop-up alerts on visits to the site
- A main banner on the Council's Infonet (intranet)
- Social Media
- Gov Notify (electronic news email to subscribers)
- Press release, media coverage

Groups of people who took part

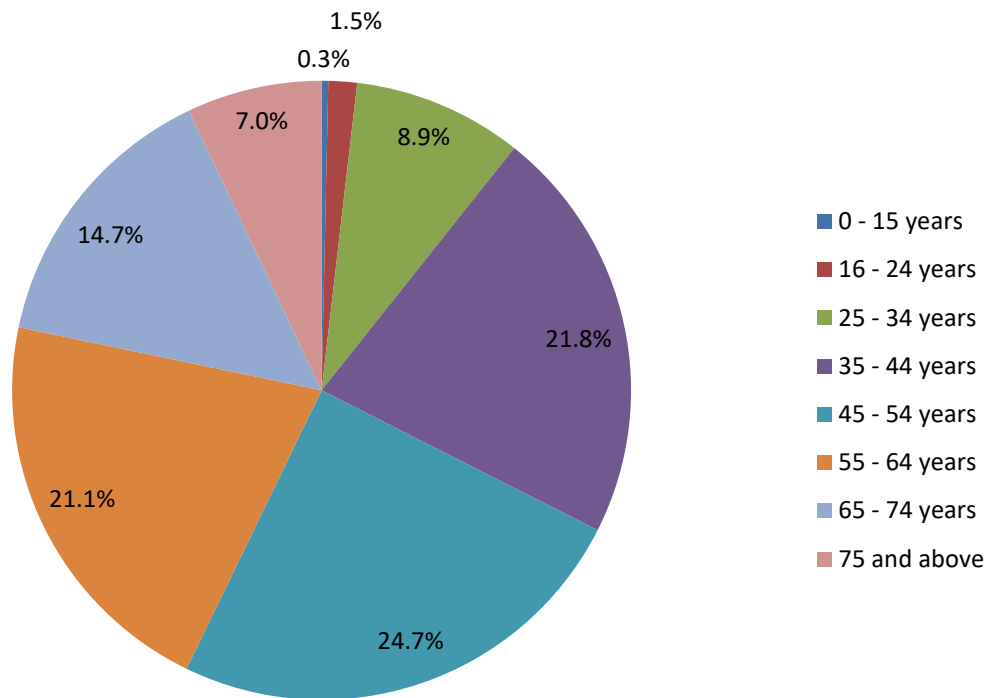
How would you describe your Welsh Language skills?



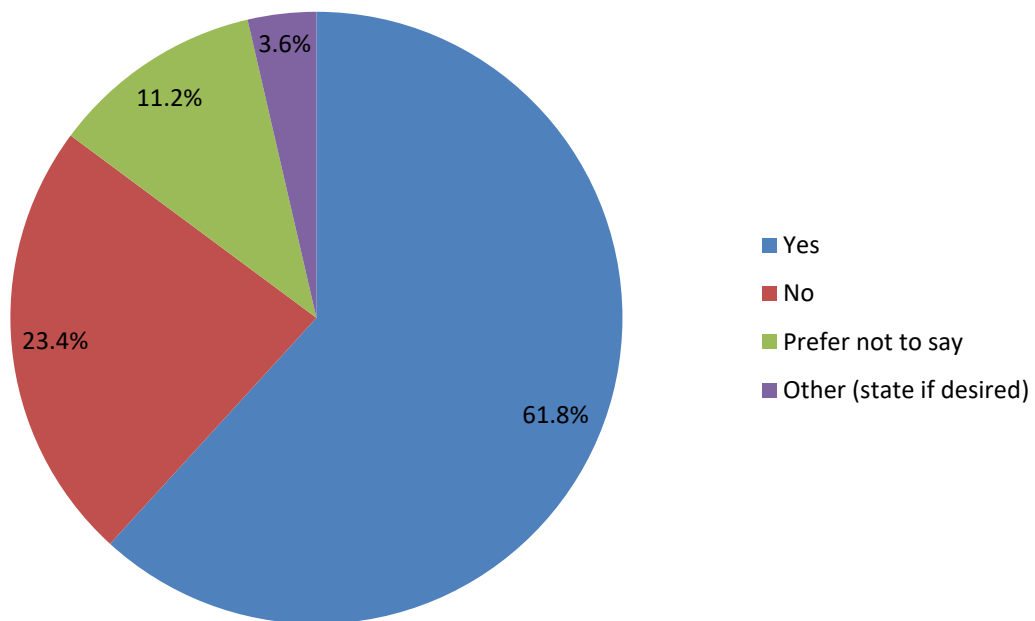
Sex



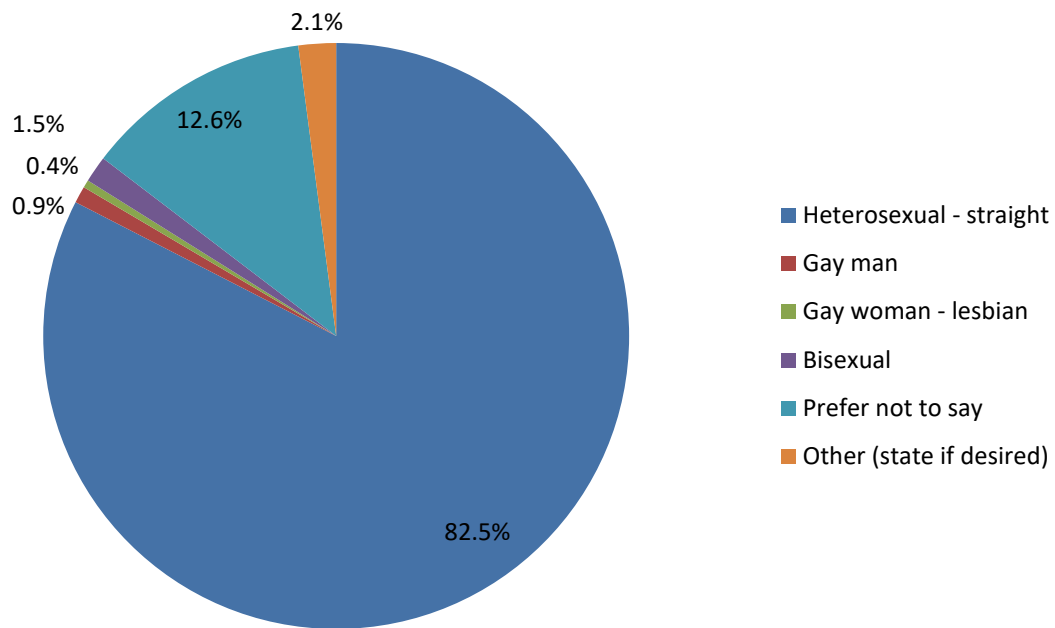
Please indicate your age by ticking the appropriate box:



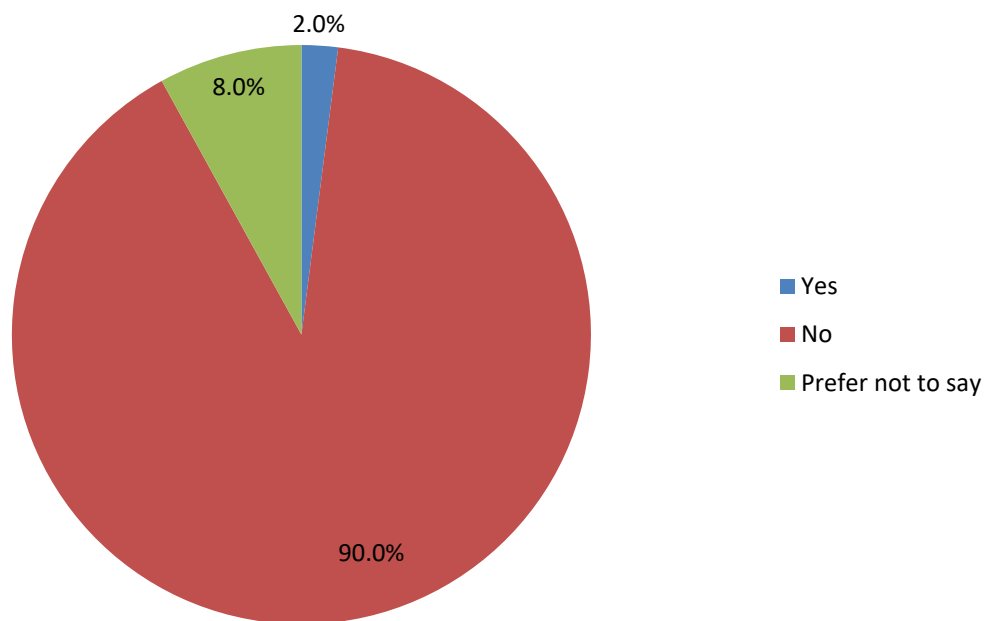
Are you married or in a civil partnership?



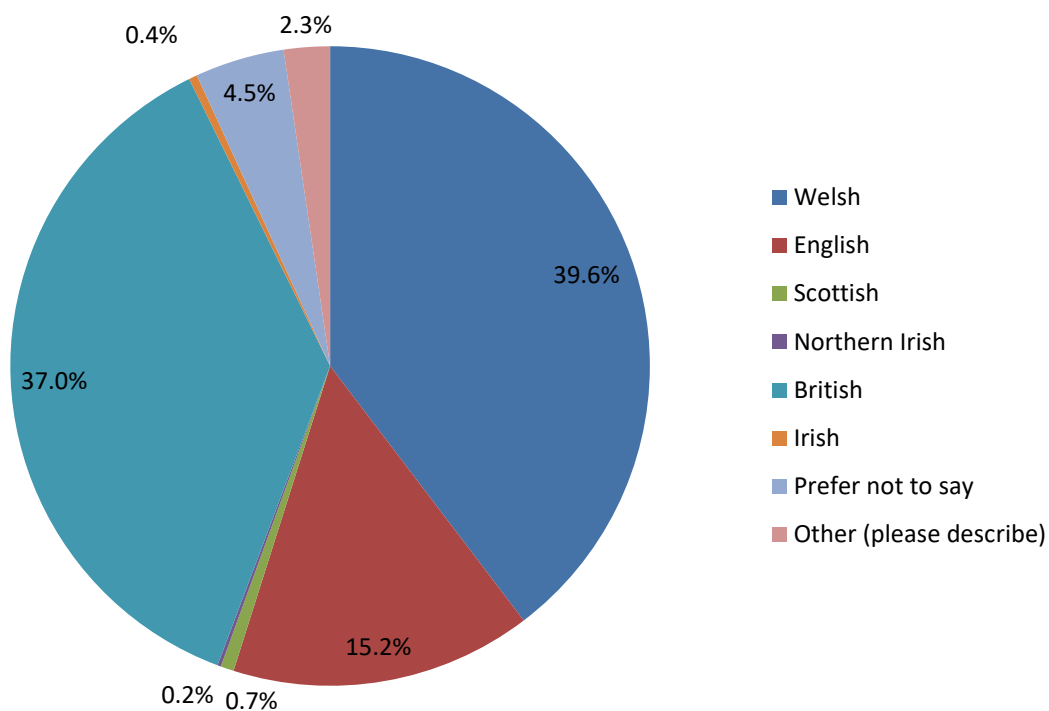
Sexual Orientation: Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?



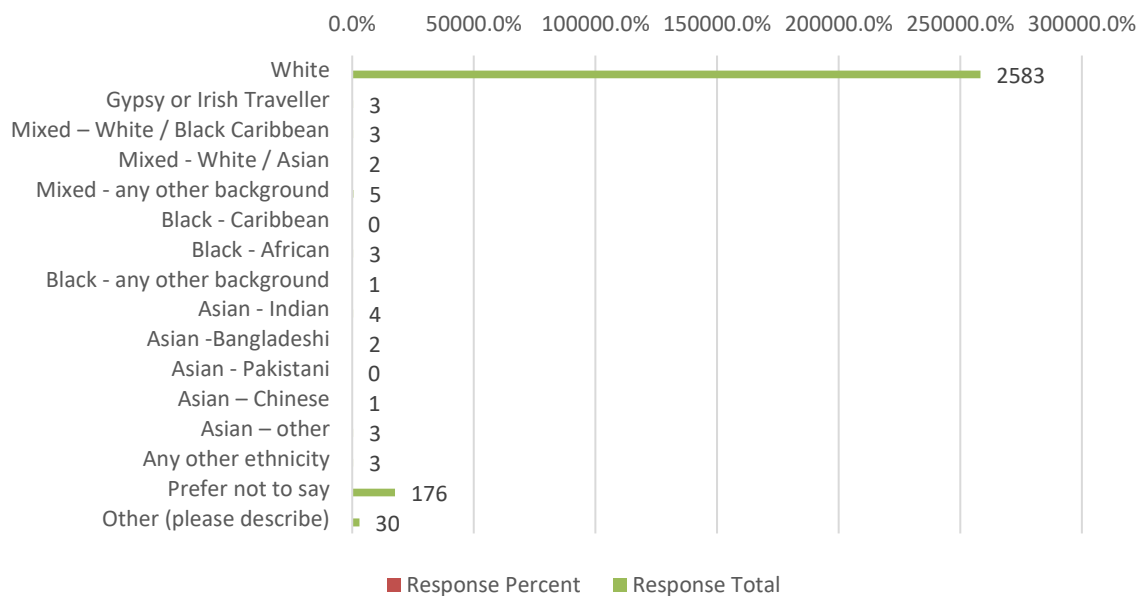
Has your gender identity changed from that assigned at birth?



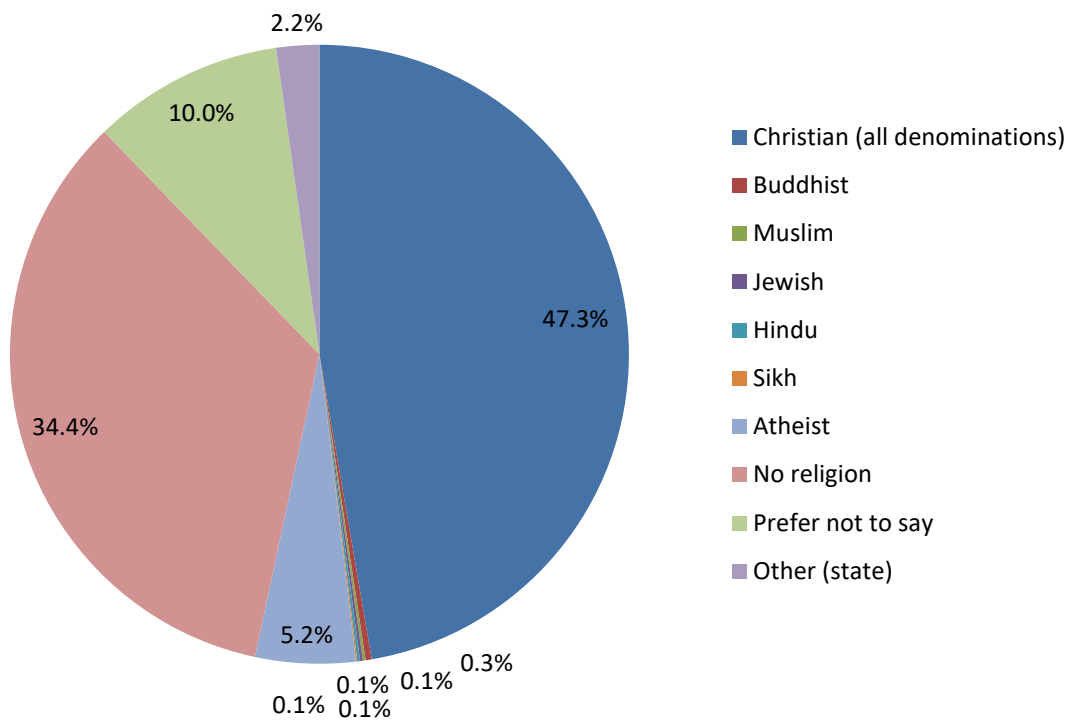
### How would you describe your national identity?



### What is your ethnic group? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background.

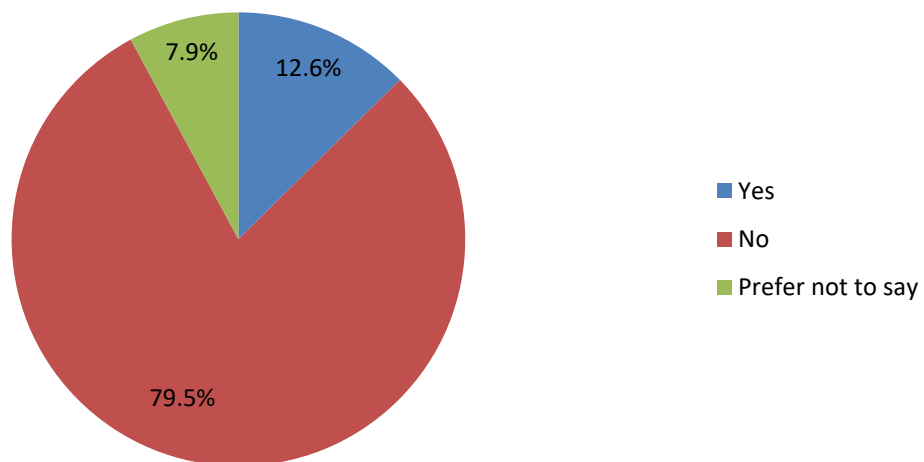


### What is your religion?



Section 6(1) of the Equality Act 2010 states that a person has a disability if:

- (a) That person has a physical or mental impairment, and
- (b) The impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to



Do you look after or give help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either: long term physical or mental ill-health/impairment; or problems related to old age.

