



ANNEX 6

About the consultation

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council's constitution requires the organisation to consult on its draft budget proposals.

Prior to the 2022-2023 budget, consultation had been focussed on inviting comments from the business community and the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee. However, as budget proposals can include changes to a range of services, including making financial savings through reductions in some areas, the Council has increased the promotion of the consultation to reach a wider audience, using a survey format to make it easier for everyone to give their views.

This report provides an overview of this year's process and a summary of the consultation findings.

Key Findings

The consultation received a total of 73 responses, and the majority of budget proposals received a positive response from at least 60% of respondents. However, there were areas where responses were predominantly opposed to the proposed approach.

- The proposal to increase Council Tax was supported by a majority of respondents, receiving 60% of responses in agreement, with 34% opposed and 6% other.
- Although the proposed Council Tax increase was supported by the majority of respondents, there were a range of comments expressing concern over the impact of increases on residents facing cost of living pressures.
- Views on Fees and Charges proposals were mixed. Price increases were generally supported for hire of community centre rooms, environmental health and licensing, planning related charges, and charges for Council Tax summons and liability orders. Views on parking fees were mixed, with increases for car park permits and the introduction of free 20 minute parking in Horley supported, but other increases in parking charges opposed by a majority of respondents. Increases in fees for paid-for greenspaces and waste and recycling services, including regarding sports pitch hire, cemeteries and allotments, garden waste, bulky waste and waste containers were

opposed by a majority of respondents, although there was majority support for increases to trade waste charges and banner advertising charges.

- The most common theme in comments regarding Fees and Charges was concern regarding the secondary impacts of increases, such as potential increases in fly-tipping, discouragement of residents from utilising amenities such as allotments and sports pitches, and fears of potential disruptive parking practices.
- For Service Budget proposals, all proposals for savings and income generation were supported by a majority of respondents, with all such proposals receiving over 70% support. There was also generally support for increases in service costs from a majority of respondents, but this was more mixed, with the balance generally between 50% and 60% being in favour. Support was strongest for moving to more environmentally friendly fuels for bin lorries (78%), upgrading street sweepers (72%) and for supporting Environmental Health enforcement and housing inspections (69%), but views were mixed on spending on making Council buildings more energy efficient (47% agree, 45% disagree), and increasing budgets to cover ICT costs (44% agree, 42% disagree).
- Comments on Service Budget proposals were varied in content. A recurring theme was ensuring that spending secured good value for money for residents; there were mixed views on whether this should be focussed on statutory areas or if wider work towards local wellbeing should be a priority. There were also views expressed on ensuring spending is distributed across all areas of the borough, and that local amenities were maintained.

Methodology

The consultation on the draft budget proposals for 2024-2025 was conducted primarily through a structured survey. The public were also invited to send any general comments relating to the 2024 – 2025 budget proposal to the Reigate and Banstead Borough Council engagement email inbox or via Freepost.

The Survey

This survey deployed 'closed' questions for each budget proposal for 2024-2025. These 'closed' questions asked respondents to indicate if they 'agreed', 'disagreed' or had an 'other' view of each proposed policy amendment. These closed questions allowed for a decisive snapshot of respondent sentiment to each proposed budget policy amendment.

In addition, for each section of the budget 2024-2025 survey, free text comment boxes were available. These qualitative free text boxes enabled respondents to provide any comments, concerns and suggestions relating to the 2024-2025 budget.

These free text comments and non-survey returns were analysed using a ‘thematic analysis’ approach. This involved reviewing the free text comments and assigning codes to each comment. A code is a label assigned to a piece of text. These codes were used to identify and summarise the frequent themes expressed within the comment data. This approach allowed for a significant volume of free text data to be structured into digestible findings.

The survey did not use mandatory questions, except for confirming in which capacity respondents were responding. This meant respondents could skip questions and choose to only give their sentiments on budget proposals relevant to them. This mitigated the risk of survey fatigue (where respondents would be overwhelmed by the number of questions) and meant respondents were discouraged from randomly selecting an answer to a question irrelevant to them.

The mixed method approach described above allowed for both an assessment of overall sentiment towards proposals and provided an awareness of specific concerns from individuals. In addition, this helped provide a deeper understanding of *why* respondents ‘agreed’, ‘disagreed’ or expressed an ‘other’ view towards each 2024-2025 budget policy proposal.

Promotion

The consultation was promoted through a press release, social media, council e-newsletters to residents and businesses, and emails to approximately 530 stakeholders. Deadline reminders were also provided in the closing weeks of the consultation period.

The survey was available online through the Council’s website, with accessible hard copies available upon request. Respondents were able to return completed surveys and comments online, by Freepost, or by email, and were also able to get in touch via telephone through the Council’s customer contact team.

Respondents were invited to provide information on the capacity in which they were responding and demographic information to help provide an understanding of the overall characteristics of respondents. This survey did not collect any identifiable personal data. This meant that the respondents were able to take part anonymously. More information on participation in the consultation is available in the participation section of this report.

The consultation was open from 20 November 2023 until 15 January 2024 and received 73 survey returns, and 1 other response. The survey responses include partially completed surveys, as the optional nature of the questions allowed respondents to provide answers only for their areas of interest or concern.

Results

The survey was divided into sections, covering the main areas of the draft budget proposals – Council Tax, Fees and Charges, Service Budgets, and Staffing Costs. For each section,

figures for overall sentiment and key themes of comments received are presented below. The feedback from other, non-survey, responses is also included. The full list of comments submitted is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

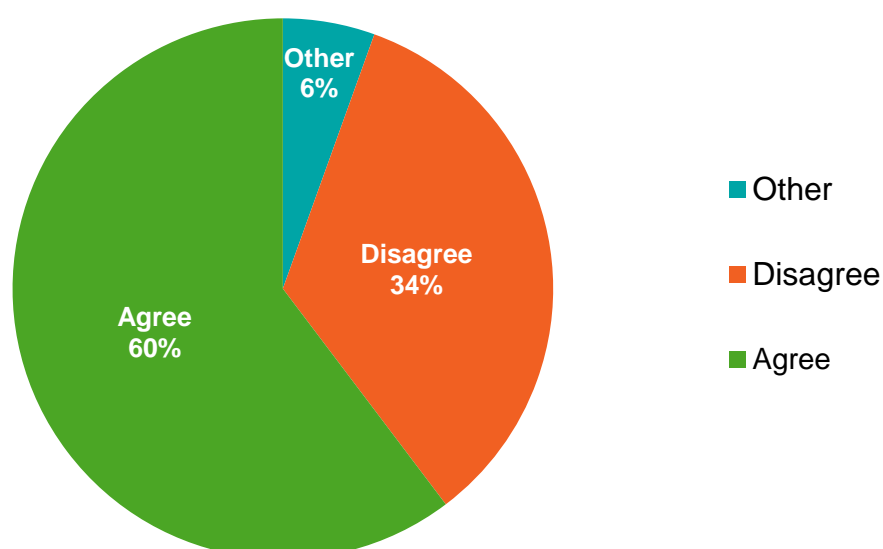
Council Tax

The draft budget proposed an increase of 2.99% to the Borough Council's component of Council Tax (affecting approximately 11% of total Council Tax, and representing an annual increase of approximately £7.47 for a Band D property.)

The majority of responses (60%) were in favour of the proposed increase.

Figure 1: Support for proposed increase in Council Tax

On our proposal to increase Council Tax, do you?)



Key Comment Themes

- There was concern expressed regarding the potential impact of Council Tax increases on those facing pressures around cost of living, the significant cost overall Council Tax can represent
- There was also a recurring theme of wishing to ensure that Council services delivered value for money

Fees and Charges

Proposed changes to fees and charges included increases across Community Partnerships, Neighbourhood Operations, Planning, and Revenues, Benefits and Fraud. These constituted:

- Increases to Council Tax and Business Rates non-payment fees (summons and liability charges)
- Increases to some environmental health and licensing charges, including private hire and hackney carriage licensing, business inspections, and pre-inspection advice.
- Changes to some room hire charges at the Council's community centres
- Increases to fees for garden waste, bulky waste, trade waste and waste containers
- Increases in Greenspaces fees for allotments, cemeteries, advertising and sports pitches
- Increases to planning pre-application charges and for street and numbering

Increases were generally supported for hire of community centre rooms, environmental health and licensing, planning related charges, and charges for Council Tax summons and liability orders.

Views on parking were mixed, with increases in fees for car park permits and the introduction of free 20 minute parking in Horley supported, but other increases in parking charges opposed. Increases in fees were generally opposed for greenspaces and waste and recycling, including regarding sports pitch hire, cemeteries and allotments, garden waste, bulky waste and waste containers, although there was support for increases to trade waste charges and banner advertising charges.

Views received for each category of changes are presented below. Percentages may not sum to 100 as not all respondents completed all questions and figures are rounded.

Figure 2: Support for proposed increases to revenues & benefits fees and charges

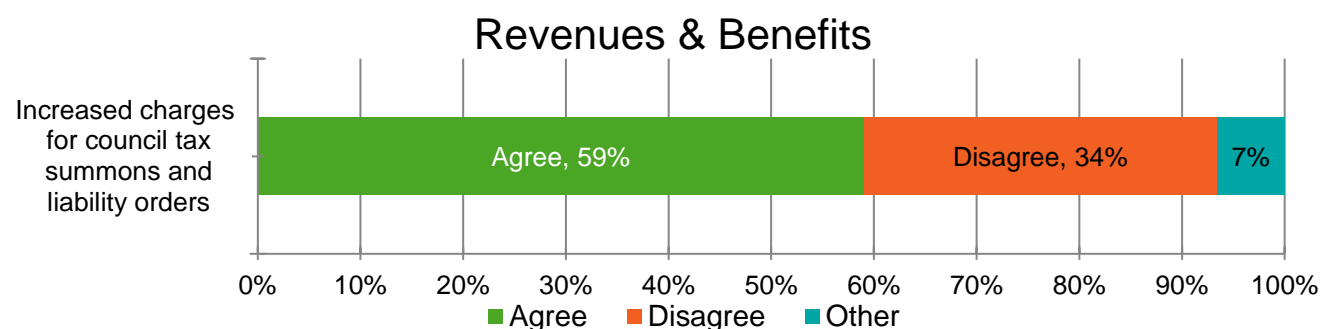


Figure 3: Support for changes to community centre fees and charges

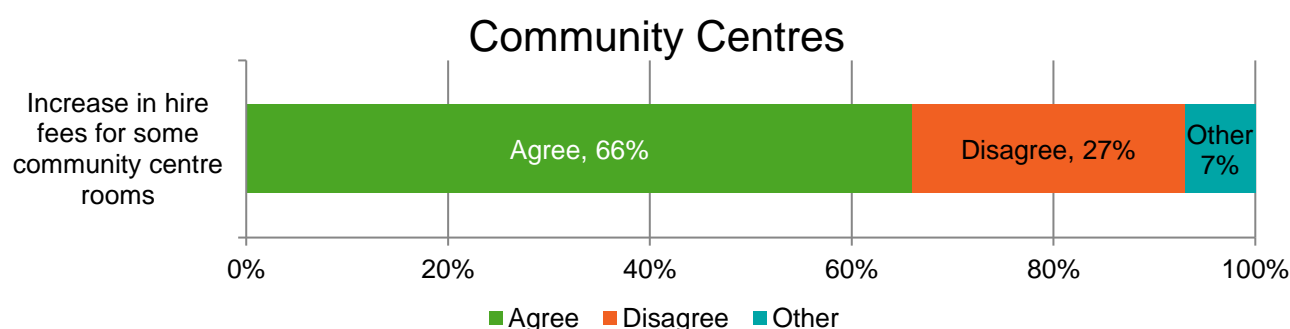


Figure 4: Support for changes for environmental health and licensing fees and charges

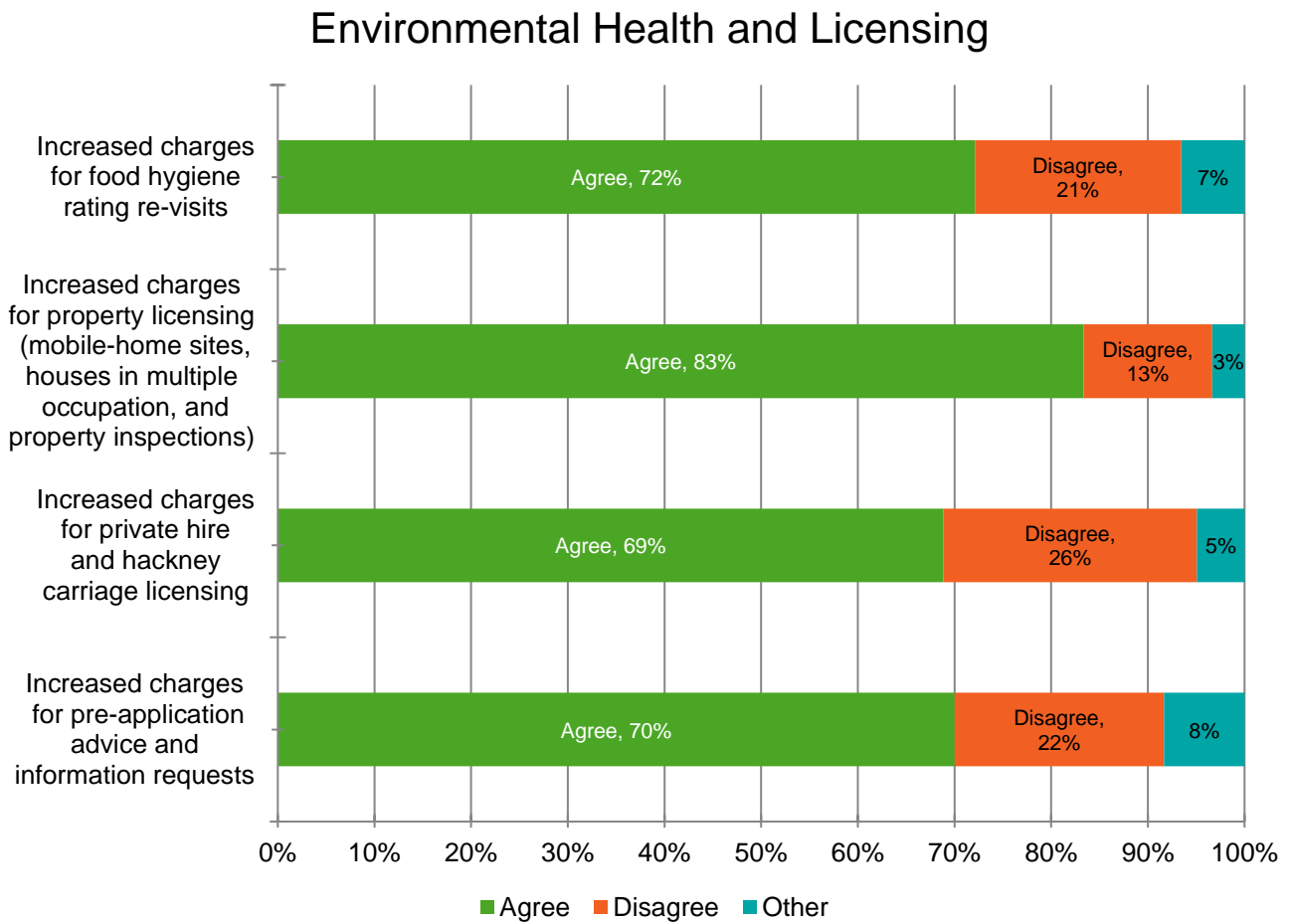


Figure 5: Support for changes to parking fees and charges

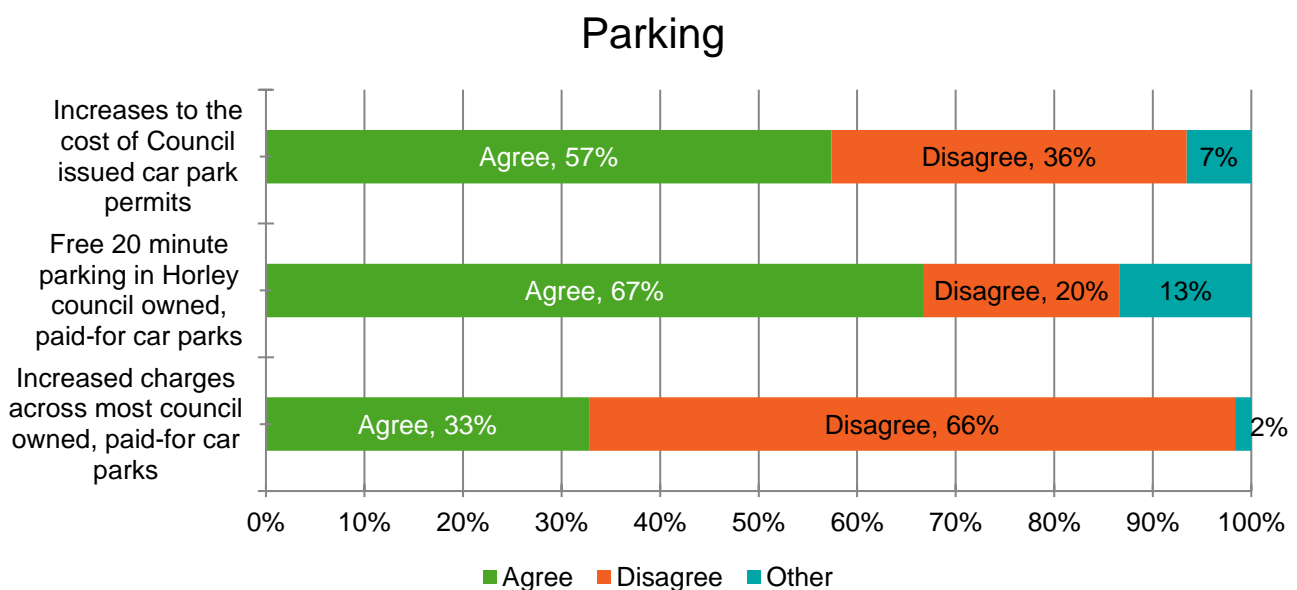


Figure 6: Support for increases to waste and recycling fees and charges

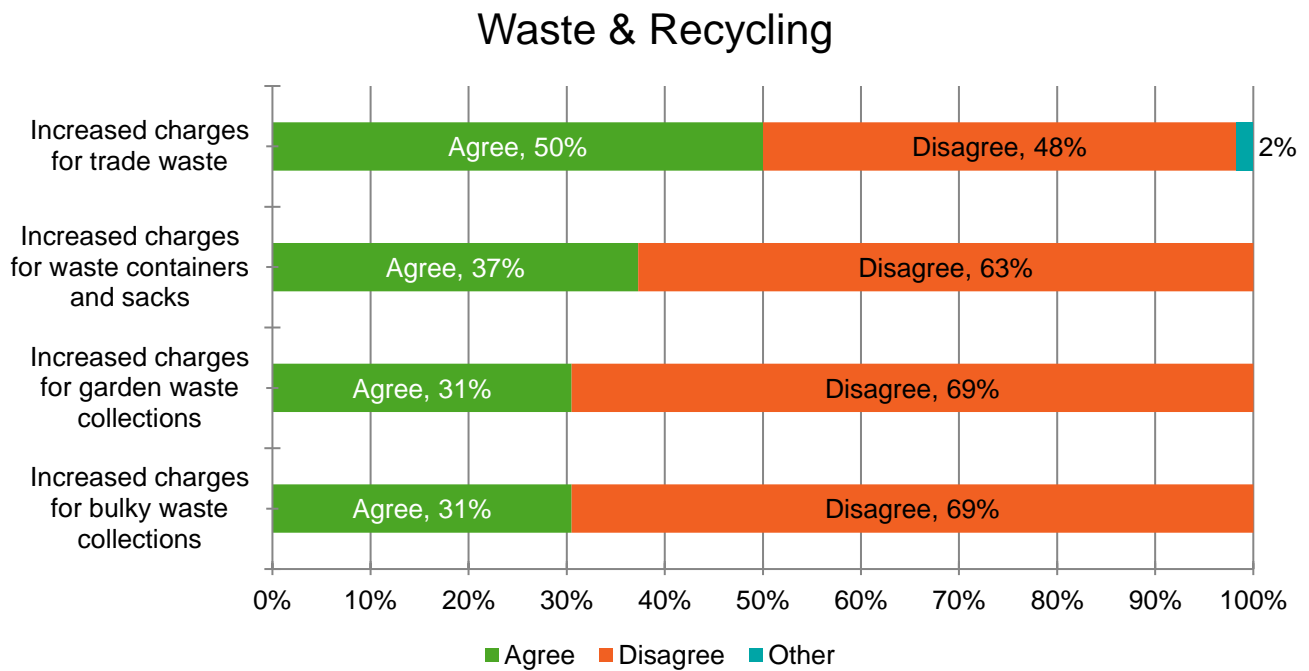


Figure 7: Support for increases to greenspaces fees and charges

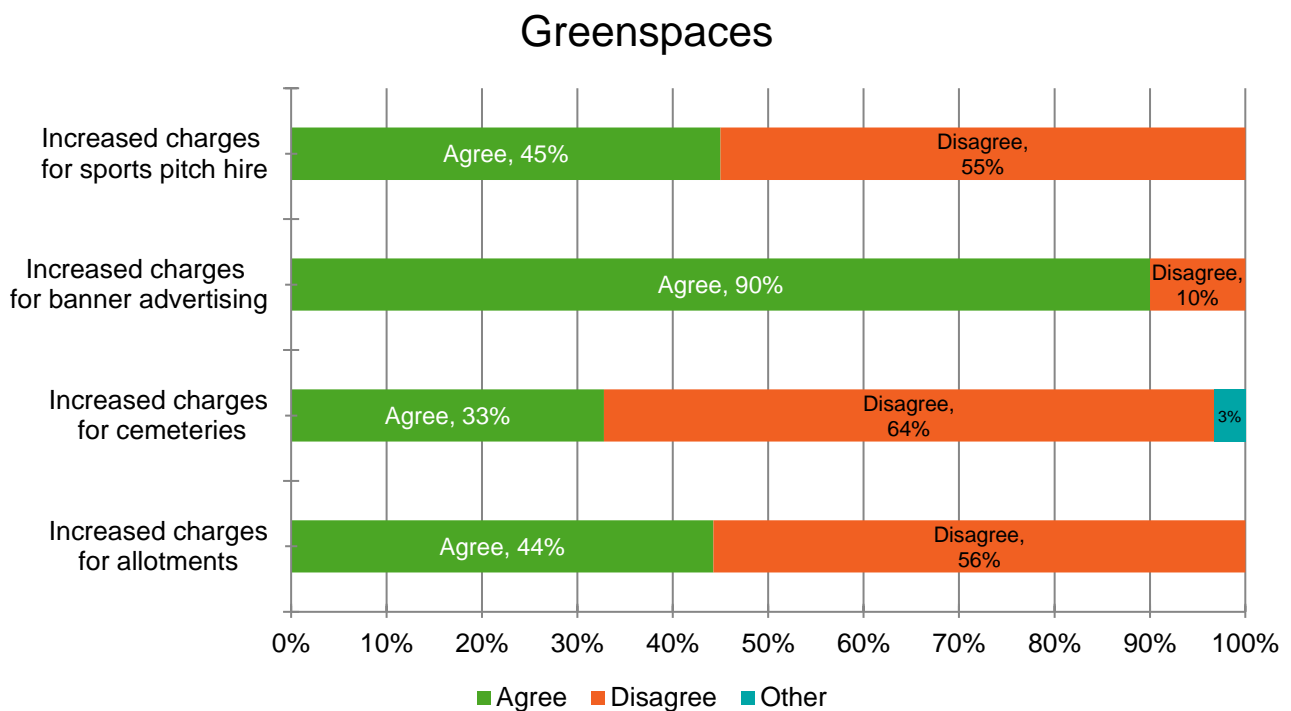
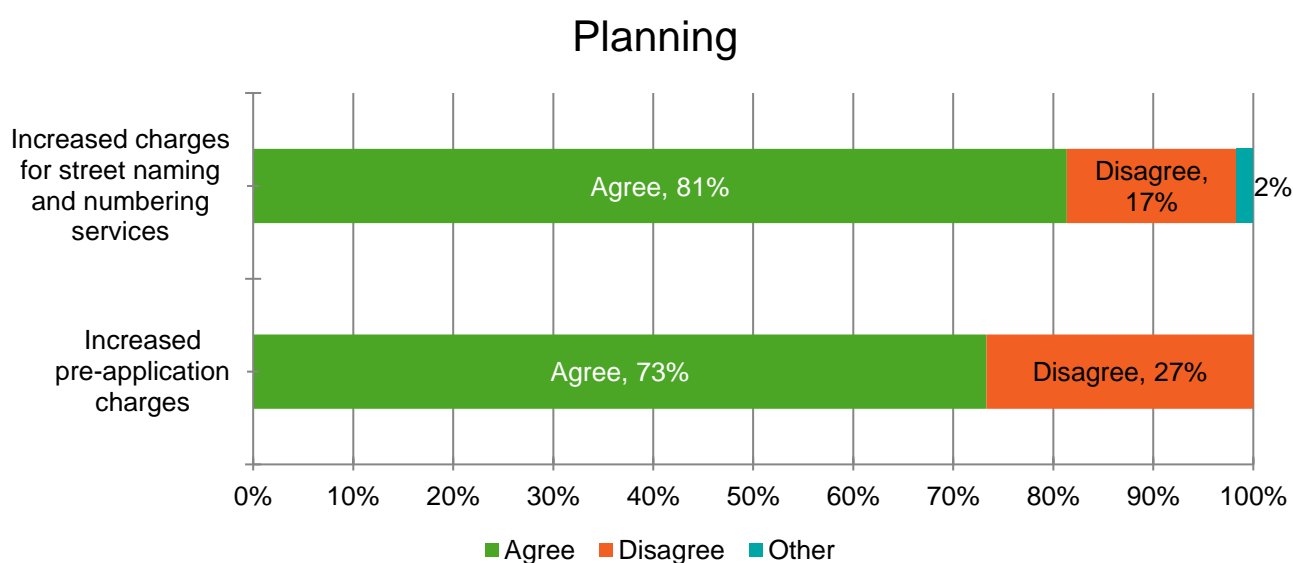


Figure 8: Support for increases to planning related fees and charges



Key Comment Themes

- There were concerns regarding the secondary consequences of increases to fees and charges, including regarding risks of fly-tipping, reduced physical activity, and antisocial parking.
- There was interest in supporting town centres, including having appropriate and affordable parking, and interest in free 20-minute parking beyond Horley.

Legislation requires that consultation on matters regarding a range of licensing and parking matters be conducted according to separate statutory requirements, and there will therefore be separate statutory consultations for these areas. Responses to these consultations will be considered by the relevant service areas and the final approach to the proposed changes to the related fees and charges will then reflect these considerations.

Service Budgets

Proposals for changes to service budgets included reductions to some costs, increases to direct income from assets, and a number of increases to costs. These encompassed:

- Savings from renegotiating contracts, utilising some external funding, and more efficient practices.
- Additional income from commercial properties, generating more income from markets, and encouraging more use of bookable community centre facilities.
- Investments in a range of measures around energy efficiency and environmental sustainability, increases in budgets to match increased costs (such as ICT systems and public amenity maintenance), contractual and cost of living pay increases, and targeted service improvements.

Responses indicated strong support for reductions to costs and additional income generation, with support for these elements ranging from 72% to 93%. Views on increases to costs were more mixed, although most proposals received over 50% support. Support was weakest for capital funding to make Council buildings more energy efficiency (47% agreement, 45% disagreement) and increasing budgets to cover increasing external IT systems support and maintenance costs (44% agreement, 42% disagreement).

Views received for each category of changes are presented below. Percentages may not sum to 100% as not all respondents completed all questions and figures are rounded.

Figure 9: Support for changes to service budgets



Figure 10: Support for generating additional direct income

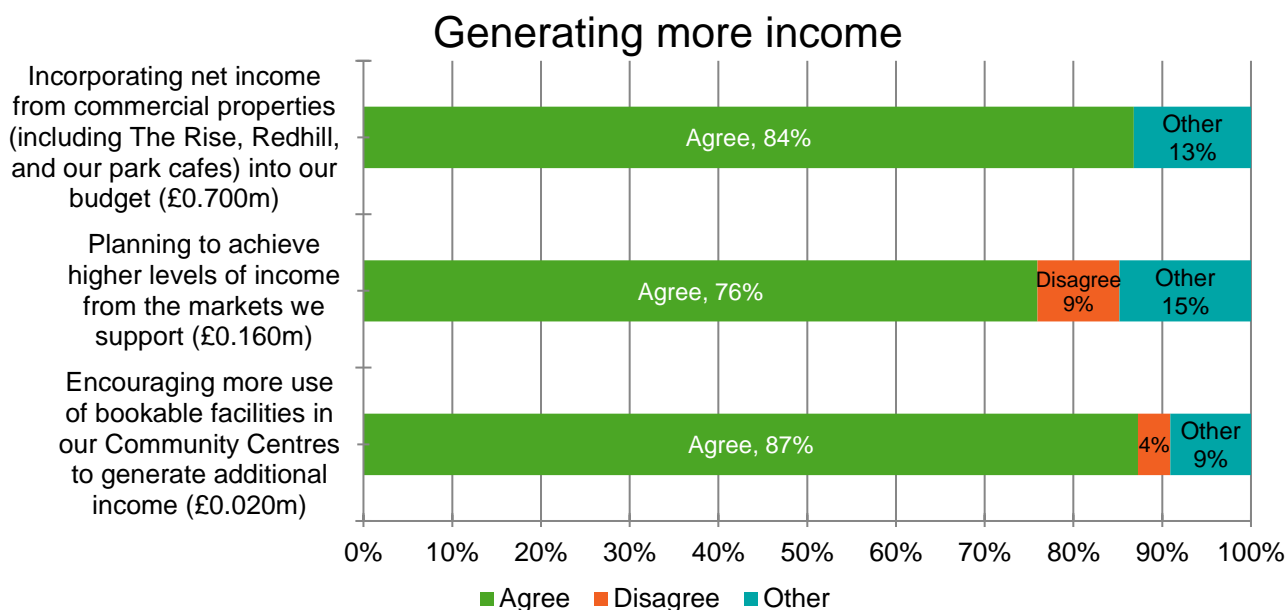


Figure 11: Support for increases to direct costs

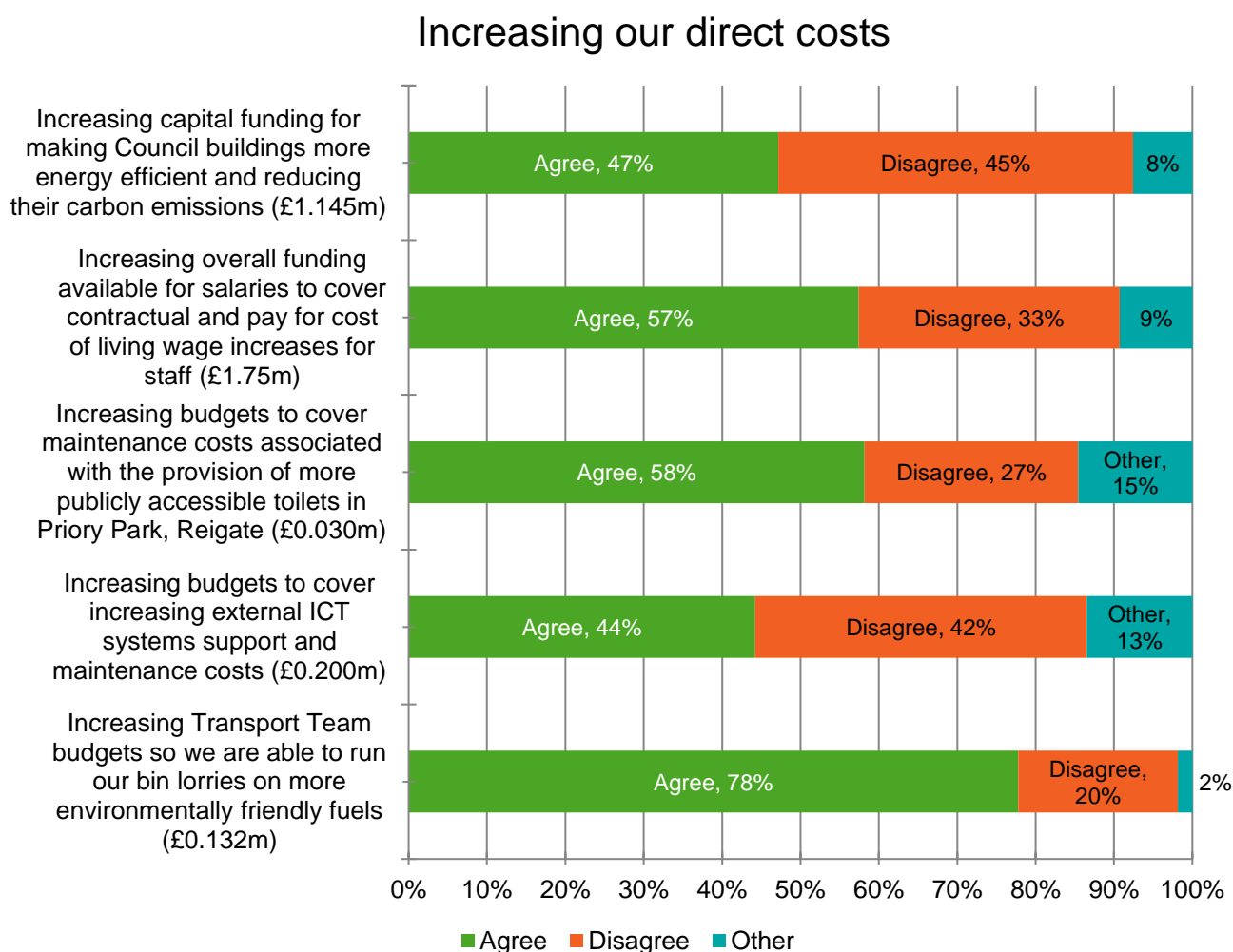
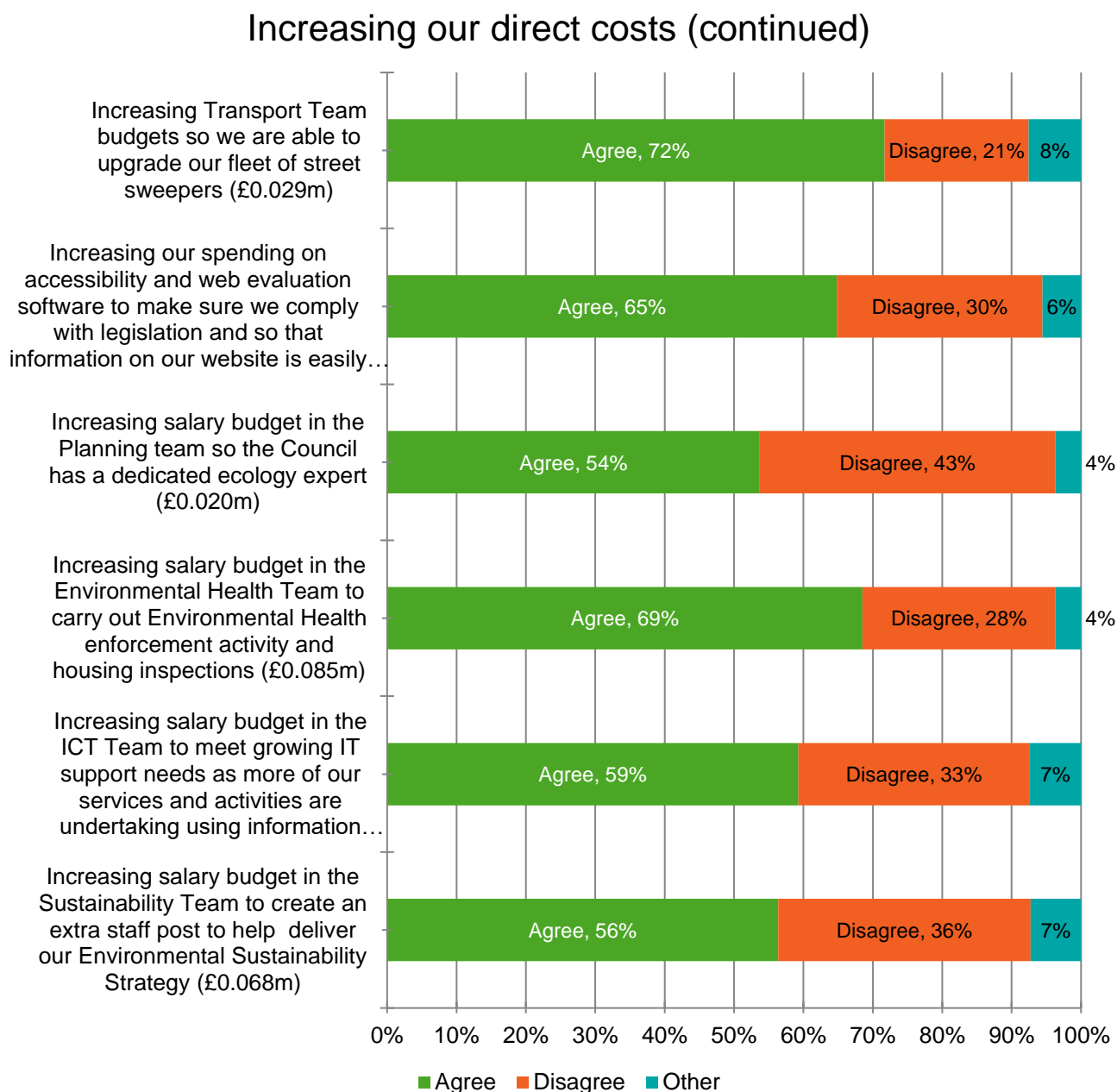


Figure 12: Support for increases to direct costs (continued)



Key Comment Themes

- There was consistent interest expressed in ensuring that spending represents value for money for the borough and its residents, and that Council activities are efficient
- There were a number of comments expressing interest in seeing more detail of the proposals raised to help inform views.

Other Feedback

In addition to the survey responses, the Council also received an email response from Salfords and Sidlow Parish Council.

This response requested that the Council consider funding community transport in the borough. Information was included on the local public transport context, the potential transport challenges faced by rural residents and those with limits on their access to personal vehicles or with disabilities limiting their ease of access to transport. Attention was drawn to the importance of reflecting equality considerations in planning such services. There was also reference to the Surrey County Council Digital Demand Responsive Service, which was identified as not yet being available within the borough.

The budget proposals do not currently include allocation of any new funding for community transport. The Community Partnerships team will continue to work with Surrey County Council and other local partners to explore potential transport initiatives, and will take account of the response from Salfords and Sidlow Parish Council, while also continuing with the existing taxi-voucher service. Where any service or funding changes are subsequently proposed, these will be included and consulted on as part of future service planning/budget setting rounds.

Demographics

The Council received 74 responses to the consultation, including 55 completed surveys, 17 partial surveys and 1 other response. All survey respondent data was anonymised, and no personal identifiable data was collected in the survey, except for an option for respondents to provide their email address if they were interested in being contacted in relation to the Council's Corporate Plan review. Respondents were able to skip all questions other than regarding the capacity in which they were responding, or give a 'prefer not to say' response to any question.

Survey participants were asked to provide a range of demographic information to help inform the evaluation of the survey and the Council's engagement work. This included information on the capacity in which the participant was taking part (i.e. as a resident or a representative of an organisation), as well as information on age, gender, ethnicity and any impact on their lives from health problems or disabilities.

Most respondents identified themselves as residents (85%), with smaller numbers identifying themselves as representatives of a community or voluntary organisation (18%), working in the borough (15%), running a business in the borough (6%), as a visitor (3%), or other (3%). Respondents were able to select more than one response and percentage totals therefore exceed 100%.

With regard to other demographics, most elements were approximately aligned with the wider population of the borough, as captured by information from the 2021 Census. As compared to these levels, the largest variations from census figures were in terms of age and ethnicity.

A significantly higher proportion of respondents than the borough average identified themselves as being in the 45-54 and 55-64 age range, and there was a very low relative rate of response from those identified as being in the 25-34 and under 25 age range. Fewer respondents identified as belonging to a minority ethnic group relative to the borough population, with a higher proportion of respondents identifying as white (British), white (Irish), or white (other) background.

A slightly higher proportion of respondents identified themselves as female relative to the borough population; reported levels of health and disability impacts were broadly consistent with the borough population.

In considering the survey results and the reported demographics of respondents, there should be an awareness of the small sample size of the survey responses relative to the population of the borough. Results, whilst indicative of areas of interest and suggestive of broad sentiment, cannot necessarily be assumed to be representative of the wider population or the borough as a whole.

Collected demographic information is provided below.

Figure 13: Capacity in which respondents took part in the survey

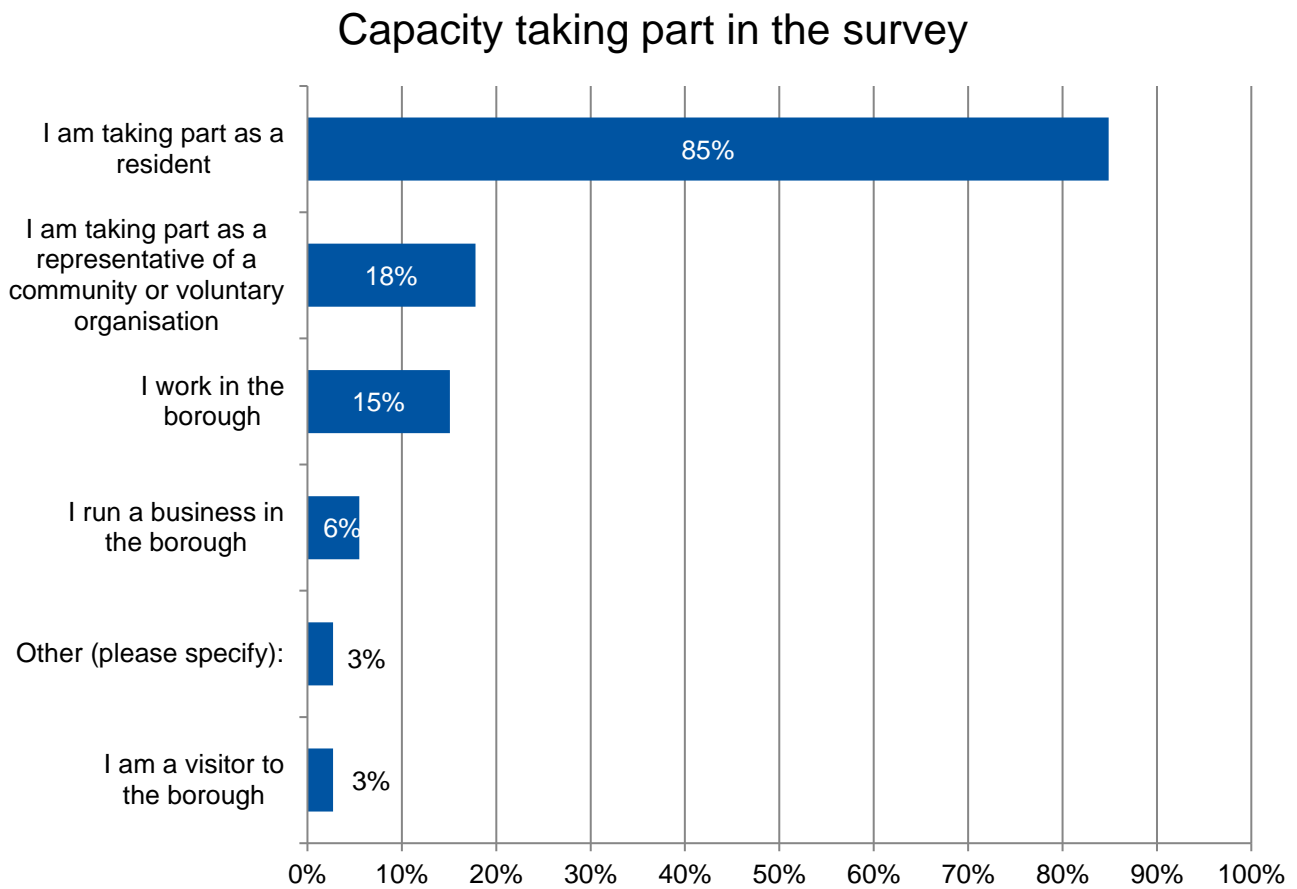


Figure 14: Gender of respondents taking part in the survey

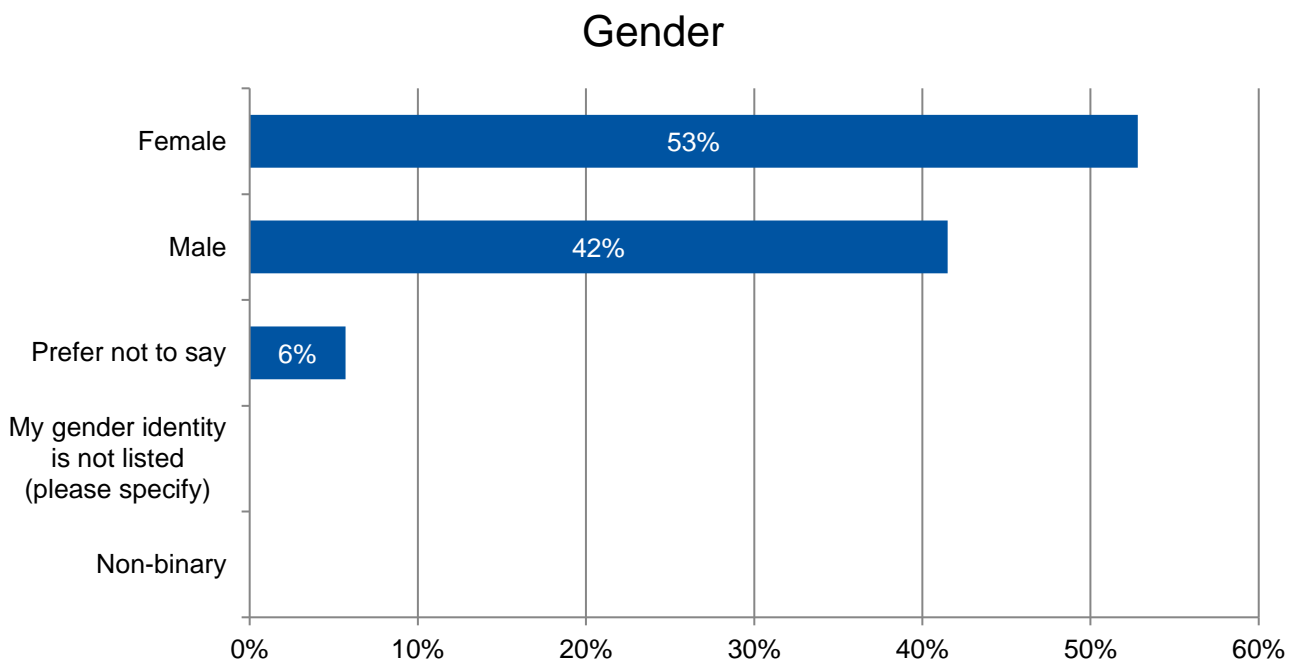


Figure 15: Age of respondents taking part in the survey

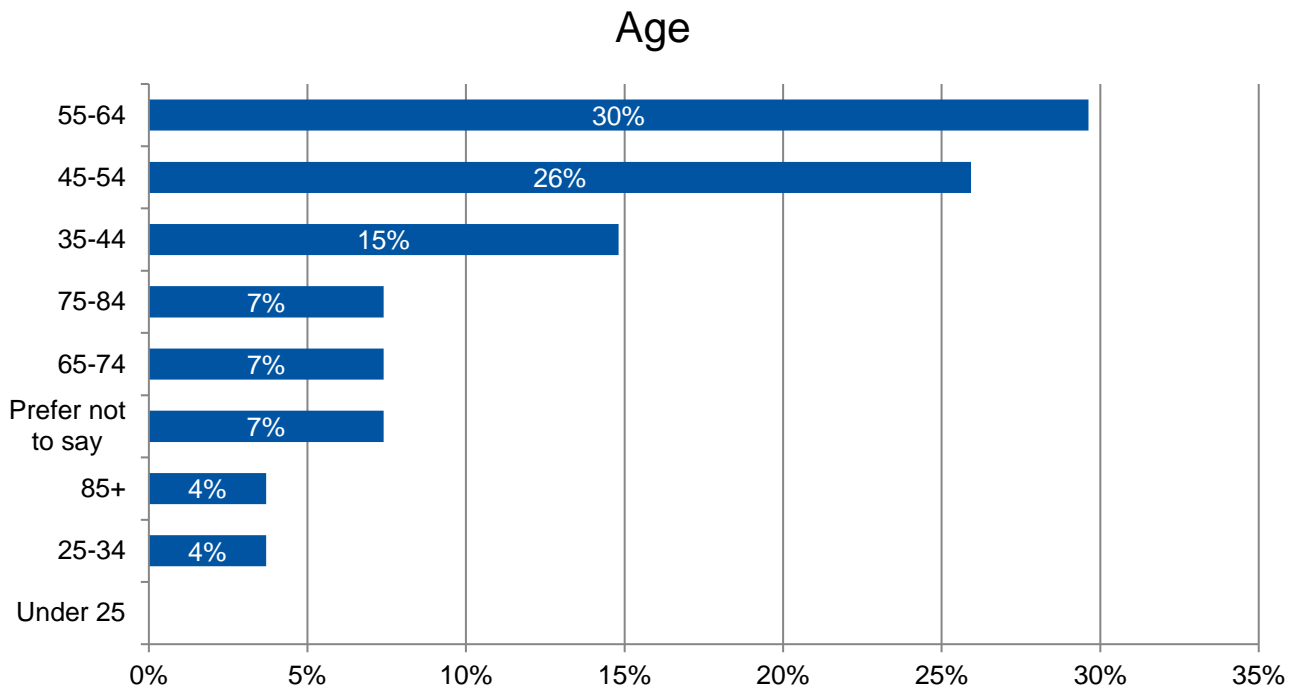
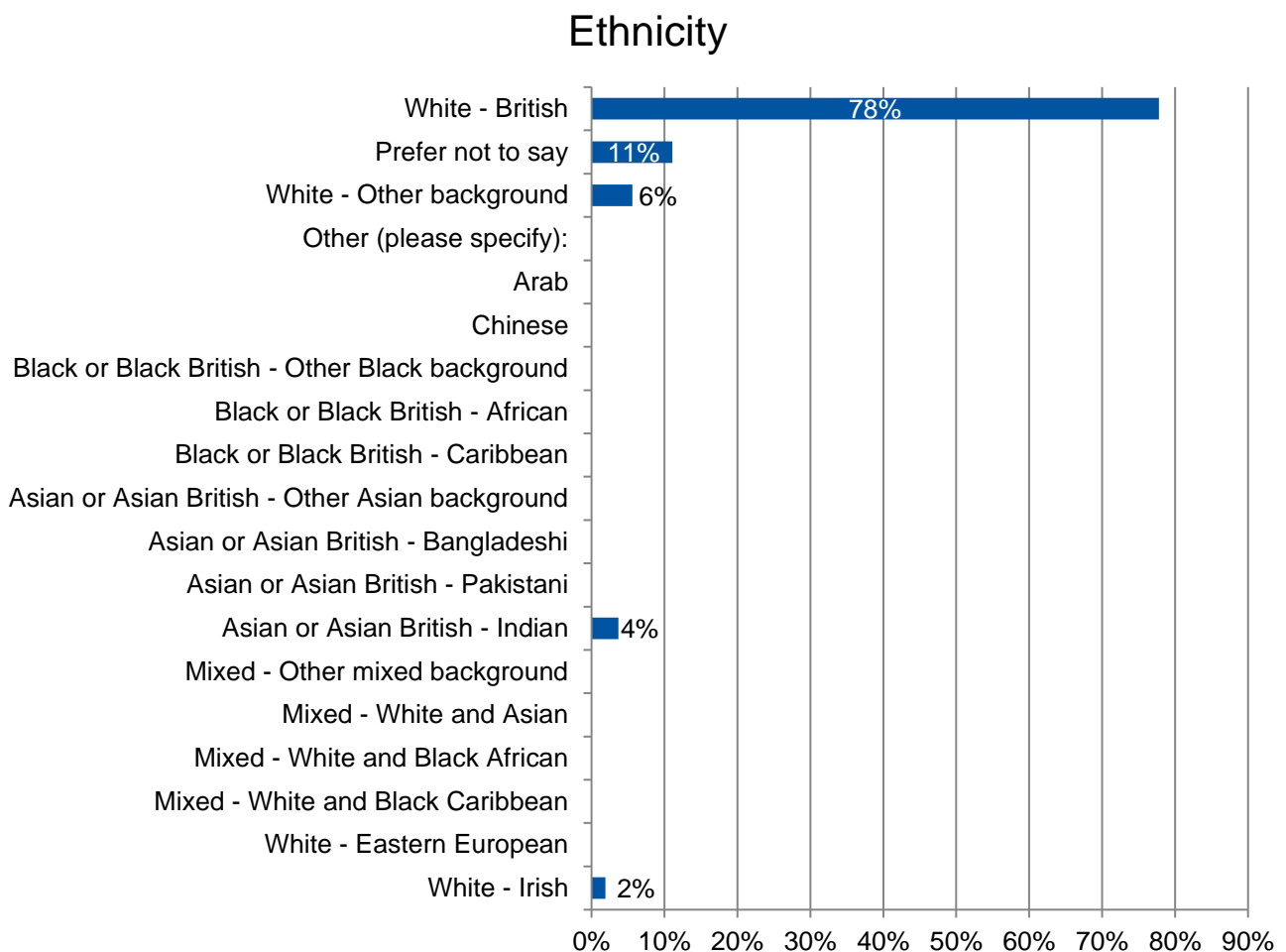


Figure 16: Ethnicity of respondents taking part in the survey



Appendix 1: Comment Analysis

Comments on the survey were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. This involved a review of all 106 comments to identify themes relating to any observations, concerns or suggestions by respondents.

To ensure the themes identified are comprehensive and represent all views raised, the review of comments was repeated until no further themes could be identified. These themes were then categorised into topics.

The quotes below were chosen to represent the full range of observations, concerns and suggestions raised by the survey respondents.

Comments by question

Council Tax

Topic 1: It is a fair increase if the money is spent well

- *Feel services are lacking and only agree to an increase if council tax is beneficial to the community*

Topic 2: Council Tax is too high at the moment

- *Because it is too high already!*

Topic 3: The council tax increase could negatively impact people who are vulnerable or experiencing a cost of living crisis

- *I am 85 and housebound due to disability. I receive no government benefits other than the state retirement pension. I find this regular annual increase in Council Tax a constraint on my resources.*
- *People are really struggling and council tax is not spent sensibly*

Topic 4: Reassess Council Tax Brackets

- *People are paying too much already, with incorrect banding on new builds a 3 bed is not a band E*
- *Our Council Tax brackets have not been looked at in years & properties not reassessed. I am aware of neighbours who have increased the size of their homes, considerably & yet they still pay lower CTAX than me.*

Topic 5: The Council should plan for a reduction of Council Tax in the future

- *You should be aiming to decrease council tax every year, not increasing it. With new events such as the Pub in the Park which would generate tens of thousands for the*

council per event (at the expense of taxpayers losing the park for several weeks a year), you should have a lot more money and not need so much from council tax

Topic 6: Suggestions

- *Invest in young people, Mental health and recreational facilities like youth centres and talking therapies.*
- *There are plenty of cuts that can be made, such as reducing executive pay and stopping the allowance for a mayor. In tough times for residents a mayor is a total waste.*
- *The council should look to make savings against costs before seeking to raise council tax from residents already affected by the cost of living. Have the council considered increasing the charges to council tax payers in receipt of benefit for example?*
- *Council Tax is the largest single tax my household pays each year. I think that the Government central support grants, as they used to be, should be reinstated, so there is more of a contribution from central Government and income tax. Also, that the very wealthy / exceptionally wealthy should contribute more.*
- *Improve efficiency. Cut out waste. Stop spending MY money on pointless woke exercises. My income isn't increasing, why should yours.*

Fees and Charges

Topic 1: Concern that increase in waste fees will cause more fly tipping

- *Increased waste charges: the result will be more fly-tipping & consequently a higher burden on the council finances.*

Topic 2: Concern that increased sport facility hire charges will negatively impact health of residents

- *There aren't enough sports pitch / facilities in the Borough. Increasing charges will result in more teams being unable to play and will negatively residents mental & physical health.*

Topic 3: Disagreement with increased allotment hire fees

- *With the cost of living rising & people wanting to grow their own food, why would you want to increase Allotment costs?*
- *Allotments are a resource that provide food, social interaction, health and fitness benefits and environmental benefits and the cost of these have gone up a lot already*

Topic 4: Parking should be kept at an affordable amount

- *Pavement parking is ridiculous at the moment so need to keep car parks at a reasonable amount. Remember those who park in a car park are considerate drivers, those who don't are inconsiderate. Focus getting money from those who park irresponsibly.*

- *Ridiculous to increase cost of car parking in town centres. People can't afford the charges, so park on residential streets, leaving car parks half empty. If the car parks were a sensible price, more people would use them.*
- *I suspect increase in parking charges will lead to an increase in antisocial parking.*
- *Why is the free 20min parking only being applied to Horley?*

Topic 5: Concern that VCS sector may be negatively impacted

- *I believe community spaces need to remain at the same cost as the local voluntary sector is already providing huge support to statutory services at a time of increased need and increased pressure to themselves. I believe the council needs to look at a creative partnership approach with the third sector in order to minimise risk and maximise services to all residents.*

Topic 6: Suggestions

- *Need to focus increase in charges on those who will be able to pay and not increase where it will impact on those who need services.*
- *There are plenty of savings that can be made such as reducing executive pay and scrapping the allowance for the mayor.*
- *We need to encourage people to take part in sports activities*
- *You could provide card once every 2 weeks if we had a proper bin rather than a small box, with more rubbish becoming recyclable we will get more and more card*
- *I hope the council will take into account the need to encourage a conscientious approach to waste and climate change. While charges may need to increase, I hope this will be balanced with some sort of incentive for behaving responsibly, sustainably and with consideration for the environment.*

Reducing direct costs

Topic 1: Need more information to make an informed decision

- *Can't vote to remove unused budgets from service areas without knowing further detail e.g., which service areas?*
- *I have answered "other" to some questions as I'm unsure what impact these savings will have on services.*
- *External funding: Do you mean that you would fundraise to replace your level of funding on behalf of community partnership? Further discussion would be welcomed on this going forward. We feel there are partnership opportunities within RBBC and partners which could be advantageous across the borough.*

Topic 2: Suggestions

- *This is chickens feed - I want to see "sack half the admin staff because no one would notice anyway"*

- *Service reviews to consider whether discretionary services should be delivered by the third sector or other providers rather than the local authority.*
- *Housing Team: This would depend on the core services. Housing and homelessness is increasing and support mechanisms have a monetary value, to reduce this anywhere would be challenging. Bear in mind that tenants, clients on many occasions prefer independent advice and support which we do provide. Through partnership working or collaboration will aim to reduce the impact of housing and homelessness issues. We would welcome further discussion on this.*

Generating more income

Topic 1: Need more information to make an informed decision

- *I'm afraid I don't fully understand what your intentions are - again it is taking money from one area & adding it to another. It is not a genuine saving or increase in income.*
- *What markets do you mean? The market in the town centre or other markets?*

Topic 2: Risk of overusing priory park for commercial events

- *I believe that Priory Park has reached a limit on its commercial exploitation. There is a risk that overuse by events, bouncy castles, fairs and music events will prejudice the appeal of the Park to those who simply wish to enjoy a quiet space. I doubt whether park run or football matches generate much income, but heartily support the Park's use for these purposes.*

Topic 3: Do not increase community facility hire for charitable/community groups and individuals

- *Community facilities are vital. Any cost increase of hire should be based on who is hiring it - so for businesses or commercial entities - increase, for charities/community groups and individuals - no increase.*

Topic 4: Suggestions

- *Could you install more solar energy to generate energy? It would pay back in a few years and then generate income*
- *Your income from commercial properties sounds very low. A prime location such as the cafe in Priory Park alone should be bringing in hundreds of thousands each year in rent.*
- *If it's the market in the town centre, don't increase the costs, you'll kill our town centres!*

Increasing direct costs

Topic 1: More information is needed to make an informed decision

- *Need further detail on external contracts etc*

- *It would be helpful to understand the financial benefit of a £1.145m spend on the buildings. What is the return on Investment ratio and breakeven period for this spend? What is the Councils statutory obligation and benefit to residents of an environmental sustainability strategy? If no quantifiable benefit or statutory obligation, there is no business case to have a team let alone increase the staffing budget*
- *Where I have replied 'other', this indicates that I would need more information to make an informed choice.*

Topic 2: Explore savings and diversion of other funds before increasing costs

- *Before increasing costs please consider those who ultimately pay for them & who have not seen a commensurate increase in their income. I agree with your proposals but would like to see them achieved from your existing budget.*
- *Any staffing salary increases should be found internally. Every other company is having to do this without increasing costs*
- *I appreciate that Council wages need to keep up with the cost of living, but note that no details are given about the quantum of living wage increases save for the total amount, which is of course the largest budget increase listed.*
- *Could money be diverted from discretionary services like money support, which is not the council's responsibility to deliver and which there seem to be no outcome or output results for, to higher priority services without expecting the taxpayer to pick up the bill?*

Topic 3: Concerns about the scope and viability of the environmental sustainability strategy

- *The phrases such as "environmentally friendly", "more energy efficient", "sustainability" and "reducing carbon emissions" are the latest "buzz" words and are very subjective. In themselves they mean little and are overused to gain popular support without understanding and explanation.*
- *I am increasingly sceptical about local efforts with respect to Environmental Sustainability Strategies, environmentally friendly fuel conversions and reduction of carbon emissions. I appreciate that this is counter to all current trends, but I am now of the view (given the minuscule efforts made by major polluting countries) that environmental damage is inevitable and that any expenditure should switch to meet the consequences of climate change rather than preventing it*
- *The sums for the improvement of energy efficient and reduction of carbon emissions look very high. If the proposals are offset by savings in energy use then that would be more acceptable*

Topic 4: Views on spending for toilet facilities in parks

- *Public toilets need to be a priority for Priory Park but also Redhill and Earlswood Common.*
- *Reigate Park & toilets! Once again Reigate taking precedence over other areas in the borough who have been waiting years for any kind of investment. Not everything revolves around Reigate town centre.*

- *The council shouldn't be maintaining public toilets in Priory Park, build this into the contract with whoever hires the cafe and make them pay for it all.*

Topic 5: Suggestions

- *While I appreciate everyone has a right to a living wage, some council employees are paid significant salaries, while the third sector has had to freeze or reduce wages and is heavily reliant on volunteers and the voluntary contributions of paid staff. So I would suggest a more granular approach to salary increases which take into account the huge variability of pay across all council roles.*

Any other comments

Topic 1: Suggestions

- *See very little spending in the Nork area? New income streams should be explored across the Borough. Do we need a Borough Council and all the expense of staffing, offices etc. when we have a County Council?!*
- *Increase funding to provide more traffic wardens to patrol schools during drop off/pick up times. This will pay for itself with the amount of daily violations. Increase funding to reinstate CCTV in Redhill town centre. Having a fixed camera in the McDonald's area that also targets number plates of the cabs that park illegally there will pay for itself. Redhill residents deserve more safety measures and this CCTV is critical.*
- *Cover car parks in solar panels to offset energy costs.*
- *Please maintain expenditure on biodiversity and countryside and countryside partnerships. Please maintain our greenbelt, and don't build new homes in areas likely to flood.*