

Kensington and Chelsea Citizens' Panel – Future Support for the Voluntary and Community Sector

Consultation report and findings December 2025



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Introduction

Background

The Citizens' Panel is a large, demographically representative group of residents from across the borough who are regularly invited to give public preferences and opinions to inform Council decision-making. The Panel was launched in April 2021.

This Panel survey on future support for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) explores Panel members views on three key areas:

- Reducing the size of the Voluntary Support Sector Fund (VSSF), which provides unrestricted core funding to the sector to help with running costs of their organisations.
- Making VCS property arrangements more consistent, including by reducing the amount of property costs we are subsidising for the sector, for example tenants taking on responsibilities for property costs, including rent and repairs.
- Reviewing how the Council can make savings and generate income from its non-residential buildings.

Methodology and report

The survey was developed with colleagues from the Social Investment and Property Team, VCS and Community Partnerships Team as well as the Lead Members for each of these teams. The Panel survey was launched on 30 October 2025 with a direct email to all Panel members, or postal surveys if this is the preference of the Panel member. Four subsequent reminder emails and two reminder texts were sent to encourage Panel members to complete the survey as well as hard copies being available at the Citizens' Panel event which took place on 19 November 2025. **Please note that throughout this report where the term Panel members is used, this refers to the 244 Panel members who responded to this survey.**

The survey closed on 9 December 2025 and 224 completed surveys were received (211 online and 13 paper).

Introduction

Appendix

The appendices report contains the data tables of results and the details of all themed comments made by respondents in relation to the consultation. All other responses and data are in the report. The appendices report is available upon request.

Acknowledgements

The Council would like to thank Panel members that took the time to take part in the exercise and gave their views.

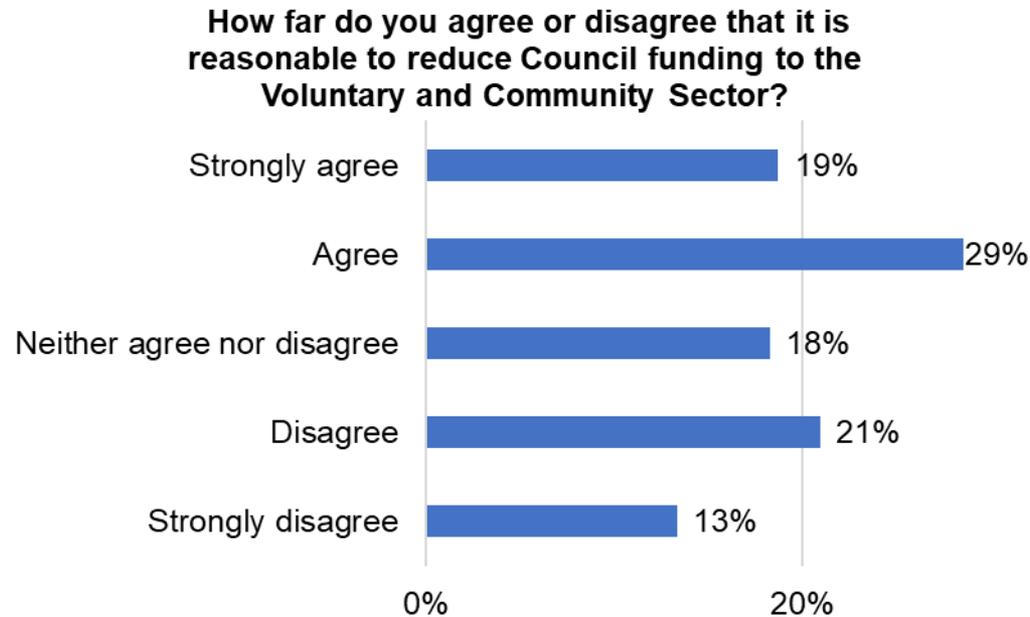
Results at a glance – Panel survey findings

- **Future support for the voluntary and community sector** – Almost half (48 per cent) of Panel members agreed that it is reasonable to reduce Council funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector given the current financial challenges, with 29 per cent agreeing and 19 per cent strongly agreeing. A total of 34 per cent disagreed (13 per cent strongly disagree and 21 per cent disagreed).
- **Voluntary Sector Support Fund (VSSF)** - The majority of respondents (62 per cent) believe that, given the financial context, core funding should still be provided through the VSSF. When asked which outcomes should be prioritised if core costs continue to be funded, the most common response was ensuring residents can access support that mitigates the impact of deprivation and disadvantage (62 per cent). When asked how funding should be prioritised if core costs continue with less funding available, the highest priority was given to those providing services directly to residents (51 per cent), this was followed by those working to reduce the effects of deprivation (44 per cent).
- **Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Property Policy** – When asked to select which ideas Panel members thought would help make the Council's property arrangements with voluntary and community organisations fairer and more consistent, the most frequently selected option was introducing clear and consistent rent and lease terms for all VCS tenants (65 per cent). Responses were almost evenly split on whether it is fair for voluntary and community sector organisations using Council property to pay all bills, utilities, and business rates without financial support from the Council, half of respondents (50 per cent) agreed that this is fair, while 49 per cent thought not.
- **Increasing income from Council owned properties** – The majority (67 per cent) of Panel members supported the idea that the Council should seek to increase income from its properties to reduce savings required from frontline services. Overall Panel members show support for exploring options to increase Council income. The most popular option was co-locating services in communities so more services are available, selected by 74 per cent. Increasing the number of buildings generating commercial income was supported by 72 per cent, while reducing the number of operational buildings used by Council staff was chosen by 63 per cent.

Future support for the voluntary and community sector

The introduction of the survey provided Panel members with a brief summary into the Council's biggest financial challenge ever. Respondents were asked, given the financial challenges covered in the introduction, how far they agreed or disagreed that it is reasonable to reduce Council funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector.

The responses show mixed views on the proposal. Almost half (48 per cent) of Panel members agreed with the proposal with 19 per cent strongly agreeing and 29 per cent agreeing. A total of 34 per cent disagreed (13 per cent strongly disagree and 21 per cent disagreed). A further 18 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.



Base: 224 (all responses)

Future support for the voluntary and community sector

Panel members, were given space to provide more detail about their previous answer. A total of 116 people gave an answer, the comments made have been themed and summarised in the table below. Examples of the comments made can be found on the next page whilst the full list of comments is available in the appendix report.

Theme	Count
Financial Efficiency, Accountability, and Prioritisation: Emphasises the necessity for financial efficiency, robust oversight, measurable outcomes, accountability, prioritisation of core services, and living within means to ensure responsible use of Council funding and value for money, while recognising the inevitability of funding cuts and the importance of evaluating benefits and prioritising projects that offer the best value.	47
Vital Role and Impact of the Voluntary and Community Sector: Highlights the sector's essential role in supporting vulnerable populations, fostering community cohesion, providing cost-effective services, and possessing unique local knowledge, making funding cuts unreasonable and potentially harmful.	41
Concerns, Alternatives, and Targeted Approaches to Funding Cuts: Addresses concerns about alternative budget cuts, advocates for case-by-case evaluation of services, explores alternative revenue sources, and prefers targeted cuts over across-the-board reductions.	32
Uncertainty, Need for More Information or Nothing More to Add: Reflects the difficulty in responding caused by lack of sufficient information, context, or clarity about the funding and its implications.	9

Future support for the voluntary and community sector

“If the future is as bleak as you are suggesting, my view is that the VCS sector contributions should be reduced to zero if that is what it takes to maintain core services to the required standards.

Ultimately, VCS contributions have to be seen as the “luxury” spend they really are: nice to do if you can afford it. But if you can’t, don’t.”

Financial Efficiency, Accountability, and Prioritisation

“The voluntary and community sector provides a range of services that are vital to local communities. One of the most difficult items to fund are premises and funding to secure premises is difficult to find. This needs to be recognised by the Council in making funding choices.”

Vital Role and Impact of the Voluntary and Community Sector



“Make the savings elsewhere, perhaps in downsizing wages or removing top heavy management structures??”

Financial Efficiency, Accountability, and Prioritisation

“It’s difficult to answer this Q because there is little context, e.g. What’s the proportion of the councils budget for the VCS services in relation to other services? What would be the impact? What other savings could be made in other areas of services?”

Uncertainty, Need for More Information or Nothing More to Add

“The area is full of very strong disadvantages and advantages. I think that the council should support the disadvantaged of the area.”

Vital Role and Impact of the Voluntary and Community Sector

“This sector has always borne the brunt of cuts over several decades which impacts the community and people who benefit from services and programmes provided. That impact has a cost that often far exceeds the amount of money planned savings hopes to save.”

Concerns, Alternatives, and Targeted Approaches to Funding Cuts

“There are areas that I would rather the council cut - but if those are statutory areas I guess you have little choice.”

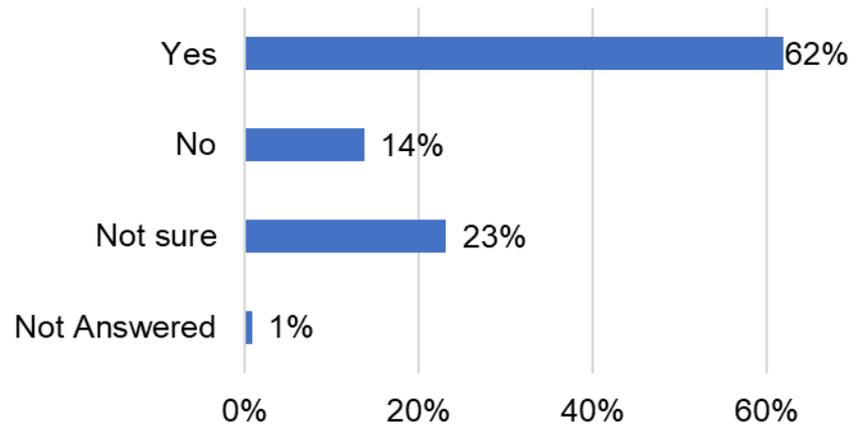
Concerns, Alternatives, and Targeted Approaches to Funding Cuts

Core funding through VSSF

The Panel received further information on what the Voluntary Sector Support Fund (VSSF) provides to organisations and the challenges it faces in the coming years.

The majority of respondents (62 per cent) believe that, given the financial context, core funding should still be provided through the VSSF. A smaller proportion (14 per cent) disagreed, while 23 per cent were unsure.

Given the financial context, do you think we should still provide core funding through the VSSF?



Core funding through VSSF

Panel members, were asked to explain what else they thought funding should be spent on. A total of 51 people gave an answer, the comments made have been themed and summarised in the table below. Examples of the comments made can be found on the next page whilst the full list of comments is available in the appendix report.

Theme	Count
Targeted and Accountable Funding for Vulnerable Populations: Funding should prioritise specific projects addressing vulnerable groups and high-impact areas, emphasising accountability, evidence-based outcomes, and professional monitoring to ensure effective use of resources.	20
Core Funding and Staffing Needs with Financial Constraints: Core funding and staffing support are debated, balancing the need for stability with calls for self-sufficiency and staff reductions due to financial constraints.	12
Financial Sustainability and Efficiency in Voluntary Sector and Council Operations: Voluntary organisations should aim for financial sustainability through fundraising, partnerships, mergers, and cost-sharing, while the council should reduce overheads and improve funding cost-effectiveness.	12
Prioritisation of Essential Services and Budget Management: Council funding should focus on essential public services and contribute to balancing the budget, maintaining cautious support to avoid service cuts amid economic concerns.	9
Community Involvement, Transparency, and Awareness in Funding Decisions: Local community input, transparency in funding decisions, and increased awareness about funding availability are crucial for informed and accepted resource allocation.	5
Uncertainty and Need for More Information: Reflects the difficulty in responding caused by lack of sufficient information, context, or clarity about the funding and its implications.	4

Core funding through VSSF

“Again, I think it depends on the cause and what their needs are. For some charities, paying for rent, or support could be the difference between them closing or surviving, whereas others, a project could be all they need.”

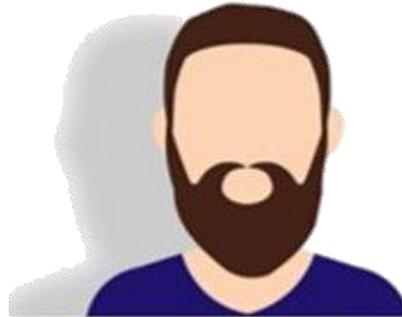
Core Funding and Staffing Needs with Financial Constraints

“Is there an opportunity to achieve economies of scale by merging it sharing costs/facilities across VCS? Could they be supported in contributing to their own sustainability at least in part?”

Financial Sustainability and Efficiency in Voluntary Sector and Council Operations

“I still don’t have enough context to be able to answer this question. What are the alternatives?”

Uncertainty and Need for More Information



“It is impossible to give a blanket answer, obviously some organisation should be prioritised over others-e.g. organisations helping vulnerable people over the ones promoting more superfluous services like arts.”

Targeted and Accountable Funding for Vulnerable Populations

“With severe budget pressures, Council funds should prioritise essential public services like safety, cleaning, and maintenance. Voluntary groups should increasingly rely on donations, partnerships, and national grant schemes rather than Council subsidies.”

Prioritisation of Essential Services and Budget Management

“Depends. if a charity has a proven record of projects they deliver and outcomes, yes. If not then no. You could also help in other ways such as offering space for free.”

Community Involvement, Transparency, and Awareness in Funding Decisions

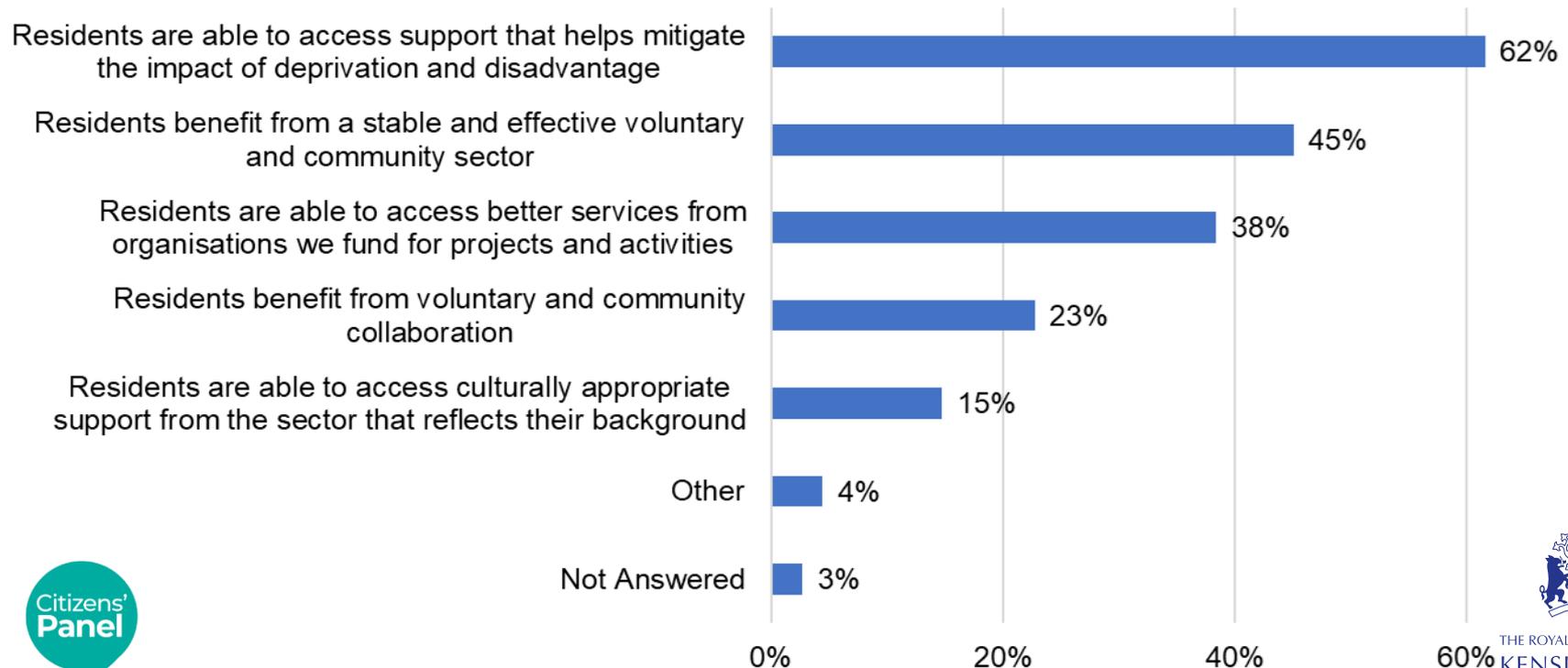


Priority outcomes for residents

When asked which outcomes should be prioritised if core costs continue to be funded, the most common response was ensuring residents can access support that mitigates the impact of deprivation and disadvantage (62 per cent). This was followed by enabling residents to benefit from a stable and effective voluntary and community sector (45 per cent) and improving access to better services from funded organisations for projects and activities (38 per cent).

Other priorities included fostering voluntary and community collaboration (23 per cent) and providing culturally appropriate support that reflects residents' backgrounds (15 per cent).

If we continue to fund core costs, what outcomes for residents should the funds be prioritised for?



Base: 224 (all responses)

Priority outcomes for residents

Panel members, who selected 'other' were given a space to share their views. A total of 23 people gave an answer, the comments made have been themed and summarised in the table below. Examples of the comments made can be found on the next page whilst the full list of comments is available in the appendix report.

Theme	Count
Concerns and Clarifications Regarding Funding Priorities and Survey: There are concerns about survey clarity, definitions of services, funding priorities including cultural support, prioritising contributors, and some unclear responses including difficulty understanding disadvantage and concerns about dependency on local authority.	11
Prioritisation of Essential and Basic Services: Funding should prioritise essential services such as health, safety, security, environmental needs, and core costs related to true deprivation and disadvantage, addressing residents' immediate needs and eliminating non-essential expenditures.	5
Data-Driven and Coordinated Funding Allocation: Funding decisions should be based on evaluating project effectiveness, ensuring coordination to avoid service overlap, and directing resources to services with the greatest or increasing demand using data.	3
Support for Community Cohesion, Inclusivity, and Accessibility: Funding should support activities that promote inclusivity, community cohesion, benefit diverse cultural backgrounds, and ensure stable, long-term contact points and accessible key locations to maintain continuity of support.	2

Priority outcomes for residents

“Again difficult to answer meaningfully as there is little information on what these services do, what problems they address and how effectively they do it.”

Concerns and Clarifications Regarding Funding Priorities and Survey



“If the Council continues to fund core costs - and I strongly believe it shouldn't - the only possibly acceptable case would be due to mitigate true deprivation and disadvantage. Anything else would be spending money on "luxury beliefs/indulgences" at a time when it's really not affordable. This would be a disservice to Council tax payers as a whole.”

Prioritisation of Essential and Basic Services

“Again, I think projects need to be looked at to ensure they are effective and also collaboration so things aren't overlapping.”

Data-Driven and Coordinated Funding Allocation

“Activities that are inclusive and cohesive and benefit residents, and support community cohesion i.e. although we come from different cultures we all hope for a better world for ourselves and our communities.”

Support for Community Cohesion, Inclusivity, and Accessibility

Prioritising who applies for VSSF

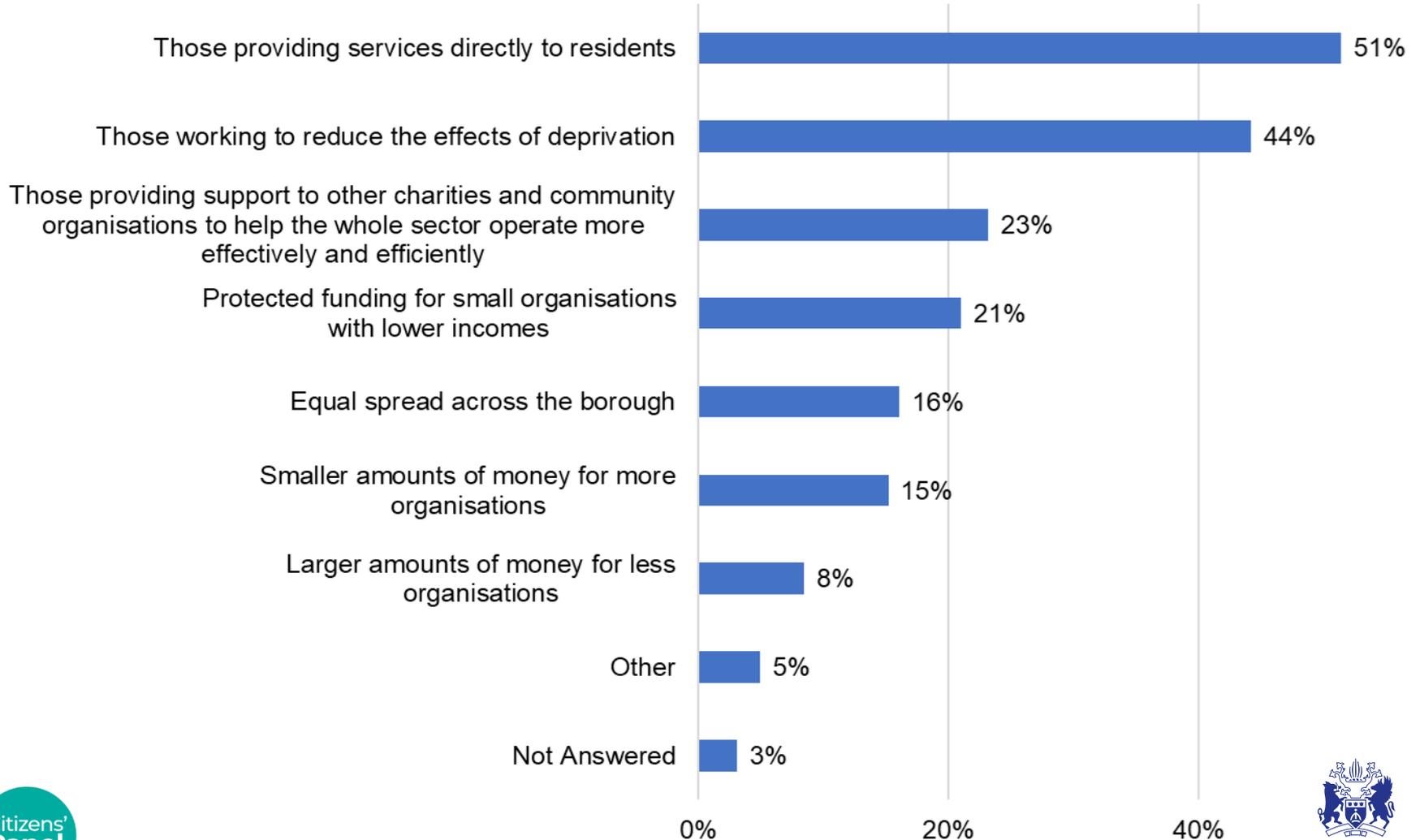
When asked how funding should be prioritised if core costs continue with less funding available, the highest priority was given to those providing services directly to residents (51 per cent). This was followed by those working to reduce the effects of deprivation (44 per cent). Other priorities included organisations providing support to other charities and community organisations to help the whole sector operate more efficiently and effectively (23 per cent) and protected funding for small organisations with lower incomes (21 per cent).

Equal distribution across the borough (16 per cent) and allocating smaller amounts to more organisations (15 per cent) were less frequently selected, while eight per cent favoured larger amounts for fewer organisations.

A graph detailing the full results can be found on the next page.

Prioritising who applies for VSSF

If we continue to fund core costs (VSSF) with less funding to go around, how should we prioritise those who apply?



Prioritising who applies for VSSF

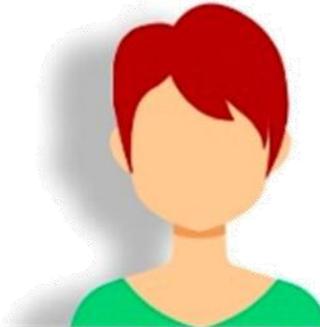
Panel members, who selected 'other' were given a space to share their views. A total of 29 people gave an answer, the comments made have been themed and summarised in the table below. Examples of the comments made can be found on the next page whilst the full list of comments is available in the appendix report.

Theme	Count
Prioritising Essential and Broadly Beneficial Services: Funding should focus on organisations providing essential, direct benefits to residents, especially vulnerable groups, with proven service uptake and broad equitable access.	12
Efficiency, Accountability, and Governance in Funding: Funding should prioritise organisations that demonstrate cost-saving, accountability, productivity, efficiency, strong governance, integrity, transparency, and quality assurance to ensure responsible and impactful use of funds through collaboration, mergers, and expense reduction.	11
Opposition and Alternative Perspectives on Funding Priorities: There is opposition to the current funding priorities, with suggestions for alternative budget cuts and emphasis on protecting the poorest residents.	3
Need for More Information and Clarity in Funding Decisions: There is a need for more information, clarity, and understanding to make informed decisions about funding prioritisation due to complexity and uncertainty.	1

Prioritising who applies for VSSF

“Fund the organisations with proven record of actions towards the residents of the borough, good uptake of services and participation.”

Prioritising Essential and Broadly Beneficial Services



“I think a lot of money gets wasted on wasteful unnecessary carbon reduction projects and bicycle lanes. Take the money from those things.”

Opposition and Alternative Perspectives on Funding Priorities

“Prioritise those that provide more impactful services; and those that are willing to collaborate with other services to reduce core costs.”

Efficiency, Accountability, and Governance in Funding

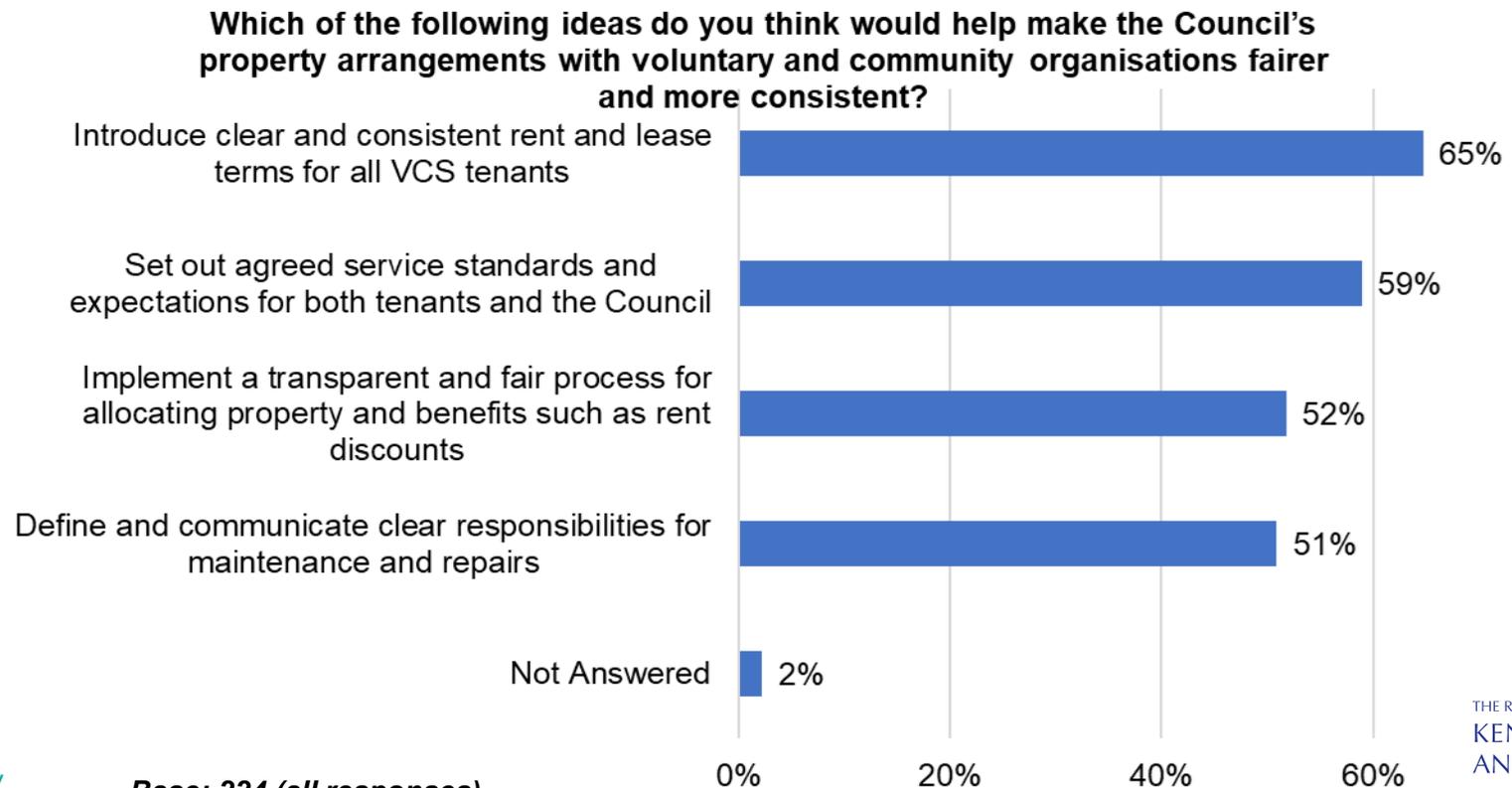
“Sorry- but would need to understand much more in order to comment.”

Need for More Information and Clarity in Funding Decisions

Voluntary and Community Sector Property Policy

When asked to select which ideas Panel members thought would help make the Councils property arrangements with voluntary and community organisations fairer and more consistent, the most frequently selected option was introducing clear and consistent rent and lease terms for all VCS tenants (65 per cent). This was followed by setting out agreed service standards and expectations for both tenants and the Council (59 per cent).

Implementing a transparent and fair process for allocating property and benefits such as rent discounts was chosen by 52 per cent, while 51 per cent supported defining and communicating clear responsibilities for maintenance and repairs.



Voluntary and Community Sector Property Policy

Panel members, were given space to provide more detail about their previous answer. A total of 39 people gave an answer, the comments made have been themed and summarised in the table below. Examples of the comments made can be found on the next page whilst the full list of comments is available in the appendix report.

Theme	Count
Fair and Transparent Property Allocation and Communication: Strong agreement on the need for fair, transparent allocation of Council property with consistent rent and lease terms, clear service standards, and essential transparency and communication between Council and tenants regarding responsibilities, costs, expectations, and tenant rights to ensure fairness, operational efficiency, and reduce confusion.	13
Tenant Responsibilities and Property Maintenance: Consensus that tenants should share responsibility for property upkeep, with concerns about the impact of repair obligations on community standards, while emphasising tenancy security and stable residency for organisations holding them responsible for their occupied spaces.	9
Neutral Feedback and Misconceptions: Includes neutral comments, expressions of thanks, and highlights misconceptions about Council premises and mention of residential accommodation.	9
Criticism and Concerns about Current Property Arrangements: Concerns about poor property conditions, inadequate communication, lack of independent assessments, and proposals perceived as irrelevant to residents' priorities.	7
Support, Flexible Funding, and Collaboration for Voluntary Sector: Support for collaboration among community groups, tailored assistance based on impact and need, and exploration of flexible funding models to sustain voluntary sector operations and resource efficiency.	7

Voluntary and Community Sector Property Policy

“This level of cuts is large. It has to be shared across the whole VCS sector as fairly as possible. Therefore clarity of provision and the agreed service standards and expectations for both tenants and Council is essential and an opportunity to raise perceived difficulties by either party.”

Fair and Transparent Property Allocation and Communication

“Tenants should not solely rely on the landlord (i.e. RBKC) to maintain a property but should also make their own contribution in looking after a property to maintain it at the standard it is when they first move in.”

Tenant Responsibilities and Property Maintenance



“I’m not sure what the difference would be between 1st and 3rd options above. My choice comes from the assumption that this does not take place at the moment.”

Neutral Feedback and Misconceptions

“Tenants being responsible for repairs is a ridiculous idea where standards in the community will dissipate.”

Tenant Responsibilities and Property Maintenance

“Why are these ‘ideas’ being listed now surely they should already be being implemented? For instance how can you not already have clear and consistent rent and lease terms?”

Criticism and Concerns about Current Property Arrangements

“Matched funding - say 50% of costs - or first £X only. Also operate a “pop-up” shop agreement to keep vacant commercial space in some kind of use.”

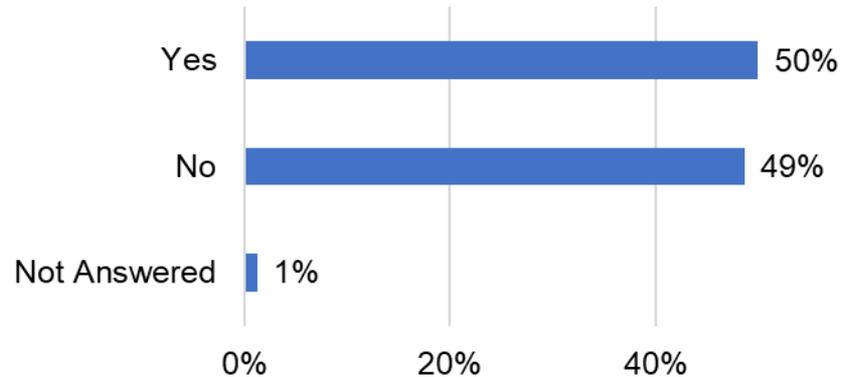
Support, Flexible Funding, and Collaboration for Voluntary Sector

VCS Property Responsibilities

Responses were almost evenly split on whether it is fair for voluntary and community sector organisations using Council property to pay all bills, utilities, and business rates without financial support from the Council.

Half of respondents (50 per cent) agreed that this is fair, while 49 per cent thought not.

Do you think it is fair for voluntary and community sector organisations using Council property to be responsible for paying all bills, utilities, and business rates themselves, without any financial support from the Council?

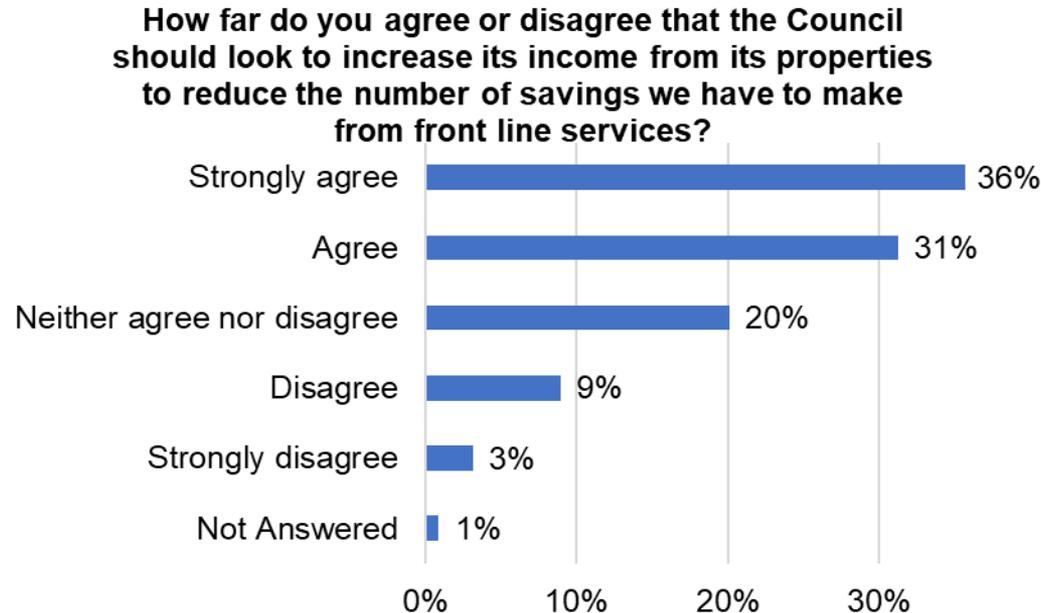


Base: 224 (all responses)

Increasing income from Council owned properties

The majority (67 per cent) of Panel members supported the idea that the Council should seek to increase income from its properties to reduce savings required from frontline services. Thirty-six per cent strongly agreed with this approach, and 31 per cent agreed.

Meanwhile, 20 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed, and a smaller proportion (12 per cent) disagree, with three per cent strongly disagreeing and nine per cent disagreeing.



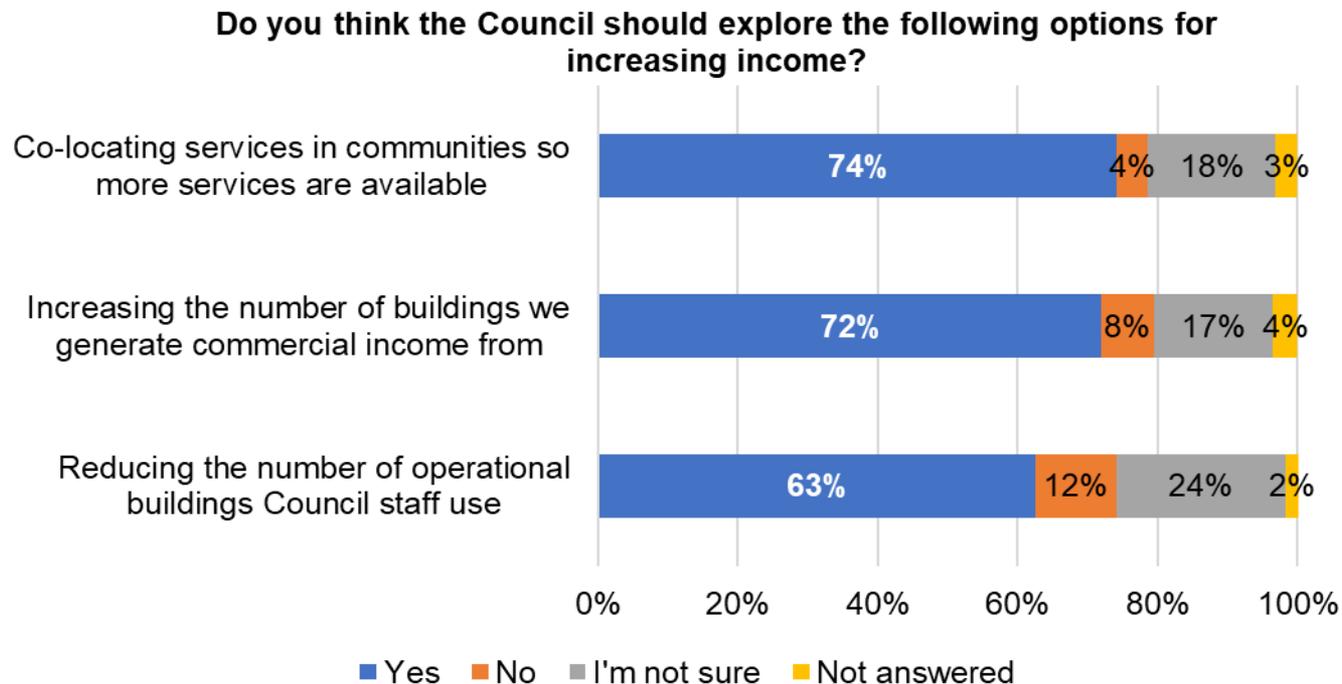
Base: 224 (all responses)

Options for increasing income

Overall Panel members show support for exploring options to increase Council income. The most popular option (74 per cent) was co-locating services in communities so more services are available. Increasing the number of buildings generating commercial income was supported by 72 per cent, while reducing the number of operational buildings used by Council staff was chosen by 63 per cent.

Opposition was relatively low, with 12 per cent against reducing operational buildings, eight per cent against increasing commercial income, and four per cent against co-locating services.

Uncertainty was noted among 24 per cent for reducing operational buildings, 18 per cent for co-locating services, and 17 per cent for increasing commercial income.



Base: 224 (all responses)

Generating additional income from buildings

Panel members, were asked if they had any thoughts on other ways the Council could generate income from its non-residential buildings. A total of 93 people gave an answer, the comments made have been themed and summarised in the table below. Examples of the comments made for themes with seven or more comments can be found on the next page whilst the full list of comments is available in the appendix report.

Theme	Count
Maximising Income and Community Use of Council Buildings: Combines proposals for using council buildings for commercial and community services, forming private sector partnerships, selling or repurposing surplus properties, and applying ethical use policies to boost revenue.	53
Improving Building Maintenance, Operational Efficiency, and Cost Reduction: Focuses on maintaining buildings, enhancing energy efficiency, encouraging volunteer help, relocating staff to cheaper areas, and conducting asset audits to reduce costs and optimise space use.	19
Providing Affordable Access and Support for Voluntary and Community Sector: Supports affordable leasing, reduced charges, and flexible terms for charities and community groups to balance income generation with sector support.	15
Implementing Innovative and Diverse Income Generation Activities: Suggests creative income streams such as pop-up markets, maker fairs, film location licensing, community energy generation, and exploring financial mechanisms like royalties and commissions.	10
Promoting Community Involvement and Environmental Enforcement Measures: Emphasises community participation in decisions and suggests environmental enforcement actions reflecting broader community concerns.	7
Converting Council Buildings to Housing and Addressing Housing Development Opposition: Covers proposals for converting buildings to housing alongside opposition to new housing development, reflecting diverse views on housing use of council properties.	5
Addressing Survey and Information Limitations and Opposition in Public Consultation: Highlights challenges due to lack of background information, need for better survey design, absence of suggestions, disagreement with proposals, and opposition to beautification projects.	4
Nothing further to add	4

Generating additional income from buildings

“Provide Post Office and Banking facilities. I understand that a church in West Hampstead has a Post Office open on the premises during the week.”

Maximising Income and Community Use of Council Buildings

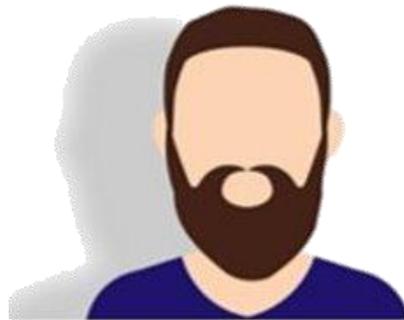
“With hybrid or remote working the number of buildings used for council staff should be reduced to a minimum so there is no wasted capacity like there is today. Alternatively, get your staff back in the office. There is nothing worse than seeing expensive properties at 10-20% utilisation.”

Improving Building Maintenance, Operational Efficiency, and Cost Reduction

“Have volunteers help with or carry out certain repairs where it is safe e.g. painting.

*Open up spaces for rent as meeting rooms etc
Encourage occupation by small businesses e.g. cafe stands, gift kiosks
Invest in building improvements that reduce energy costs e.g. insulation.”*

Providing Affordable Access and Support for Voluntary and Community Sector



“Social enterprise incubators: Provide medium-term leases with mentorship for mission-aligned ventures (childcare, health equity, repairs, circular economy), combining rent with measurable community outcomes.”

Implementing Innovative and Diverse Income Generation Activities

“If the organising of this is properly thought out, it could have benefits for the community, but in interesting and surprising ways: e.g. a service that assists the elderly co-sharing with an organisation for younger people. Experiments abroad have shown that cross-sector projects that focus on bringing different age groups together (like nursery school play dates in an old people's home) strongly benefit both groups.”

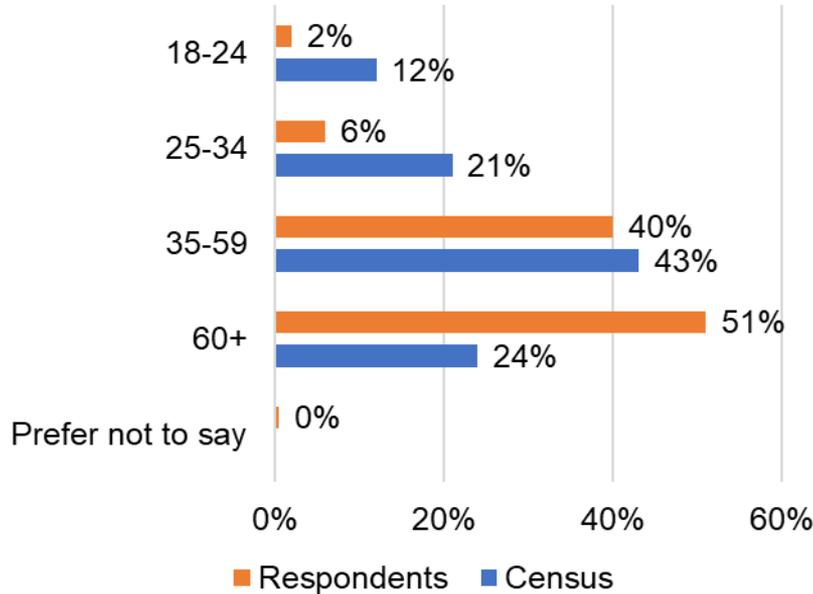
Promoting Community Involvement and Environmental Enforcement Measures



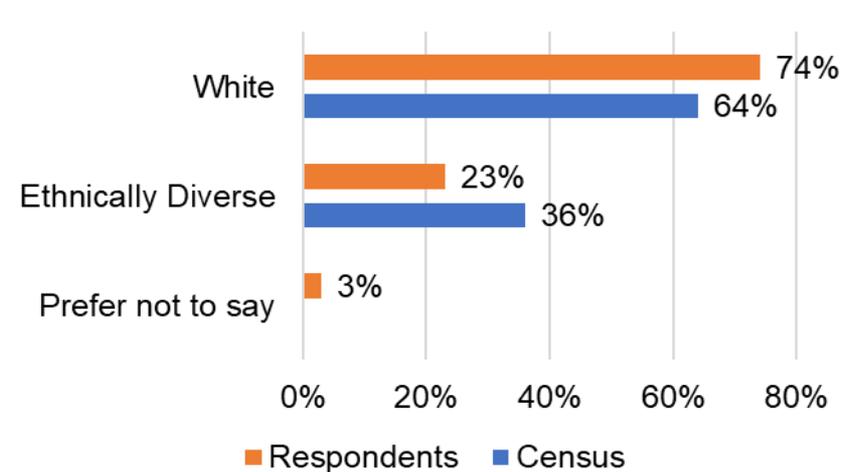
About respondents: Demographic Breakdown

The membership of the Citizens' Panel is broadly representative of the borough in terms of sex, age and ethnicity. It is also broadly representative across the 18 wards of the borough. The following charts show the demographic breakdown of the Panel respondents to this survey compared to the Census data for 2021.

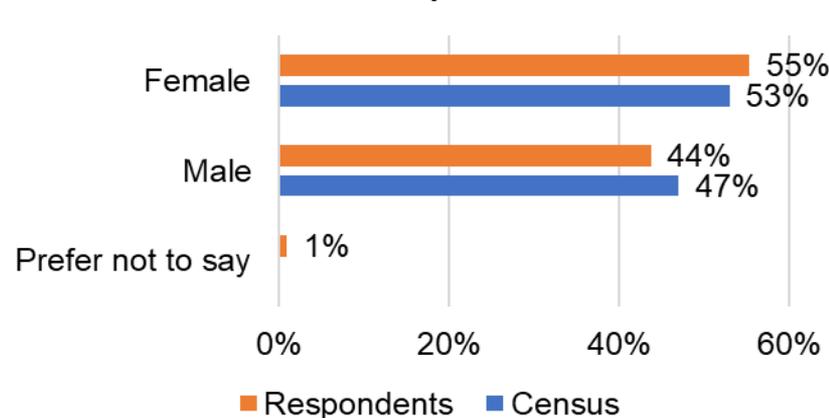
Age range of respondents



Ethnicity of respondents

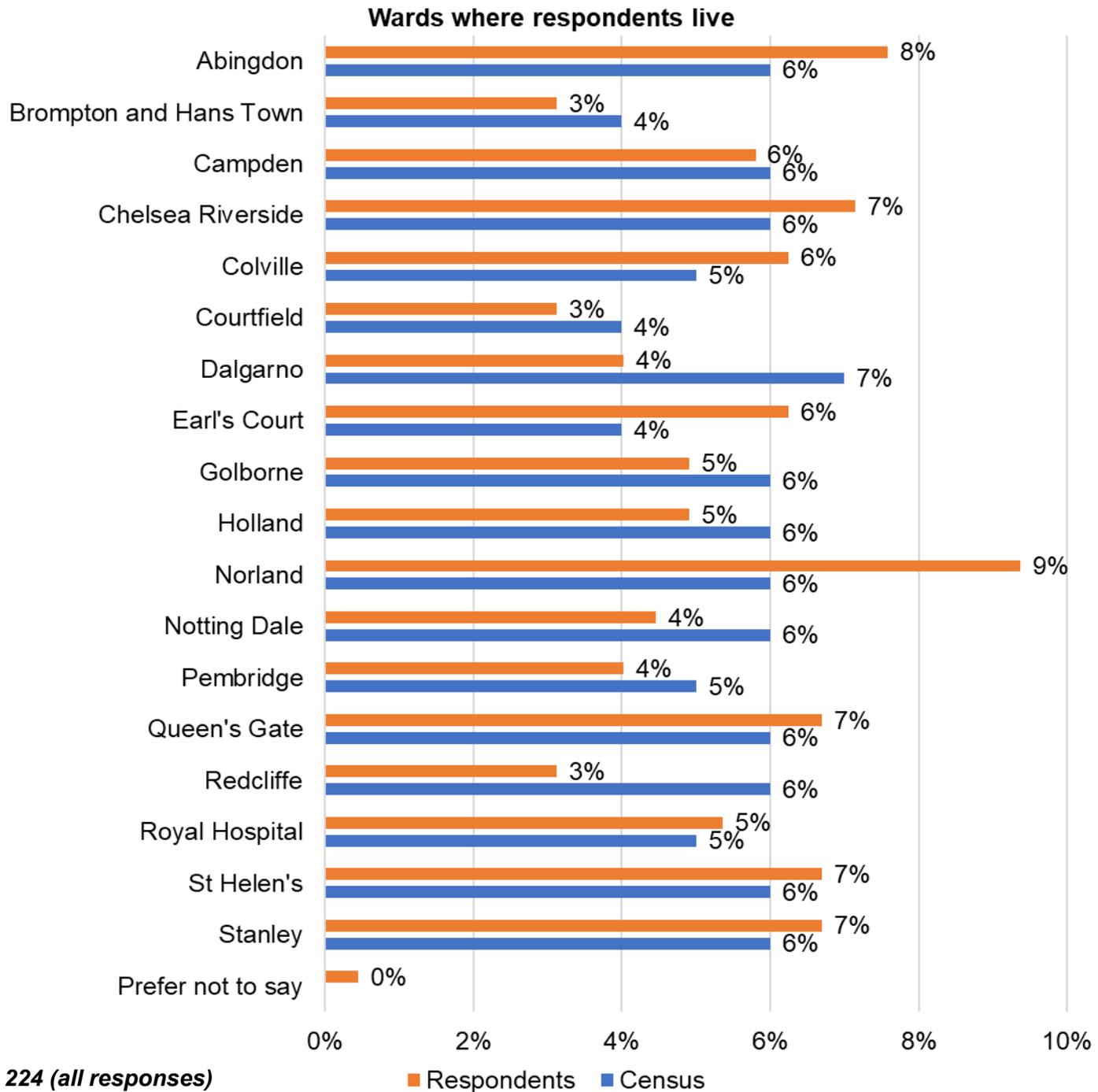


Sex of respondents



Base: 224 (all responses)

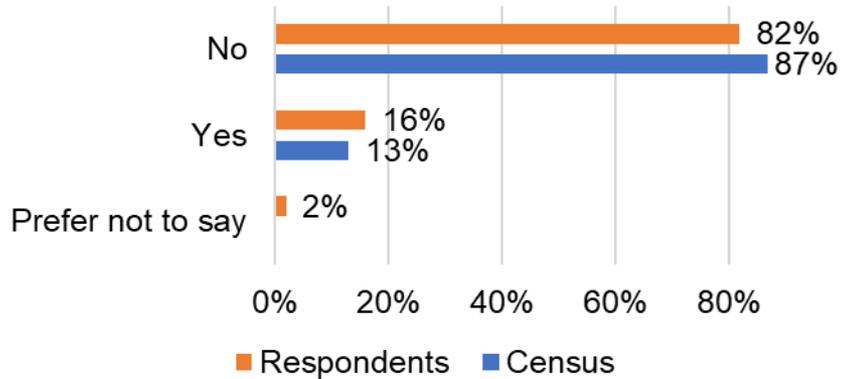
About respondents: Ward breakdown



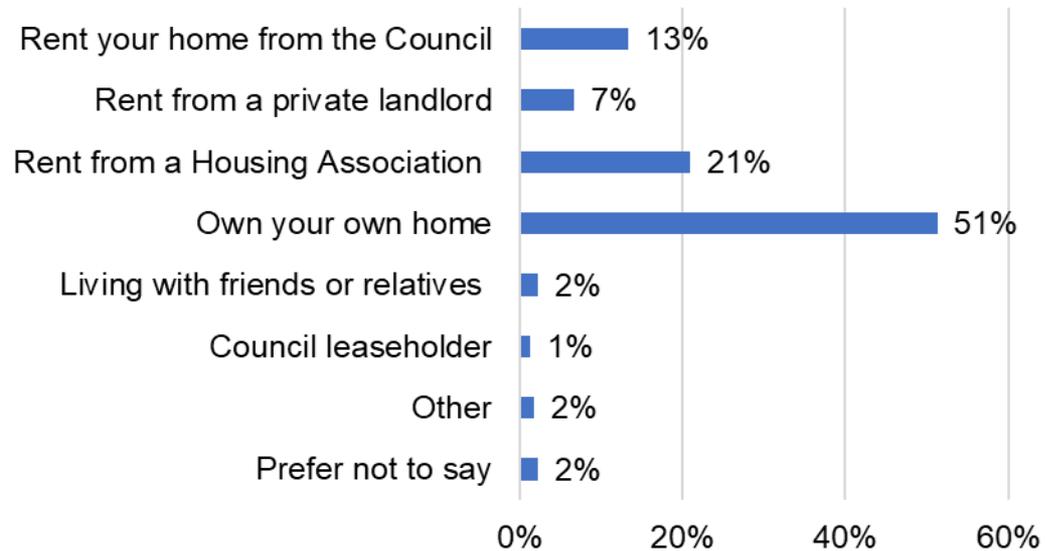
Base: 224 (all responses)

About respondents: Demographic breakdown

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health issue or disability?



Housing tenure of respondents



Base: 224 (all responses)