

Appendix 11 – Summary of the Response to the Budget Engagement 2024/25

The Council ran a budget engagement exercise from 15th December 2023 to 19th January 2024. The engagement was accessible through the Council’s website and was promoted via the website, local media channels and various social media platforms.

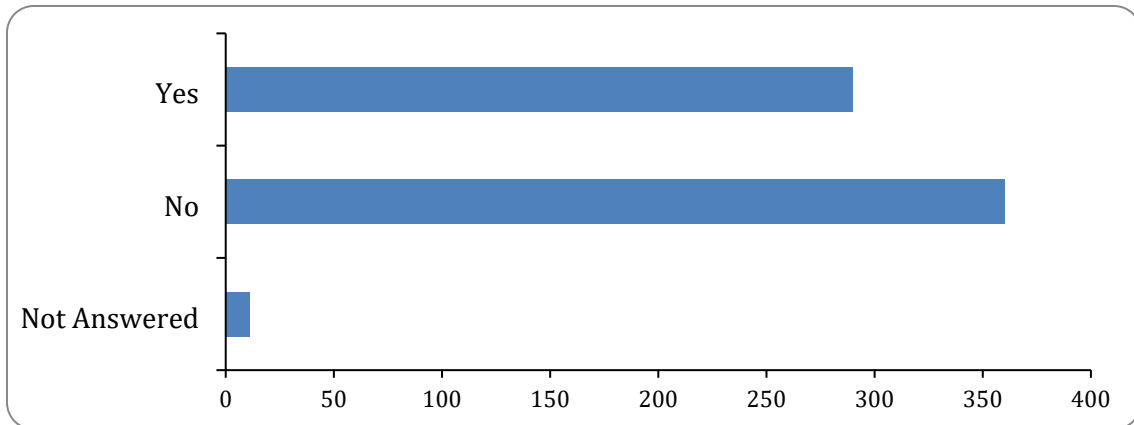
The budget engagement exercise received 661 responses, which is a substantial increase from the 378 responses received last year. Details of the responses are provided below.

The headlines are:

- 43.87% of respondents support the higher level of Council Tax increase proposed in the December 2023 MTFFS Update;
- A clear majority of respondents support the 7.7% proposed increase in housing rents;
- If additional funding becomes available the service areas most supported to receive the benefit of that are Roads Maintenance, and both Children’s and Adult Social Care.

1: In your opinion, should the Council look to increase Council Tax by 2.99% plus 2.00% Adult Social Care precept in order to minimise the financial gap and continue to provide services at current levels?

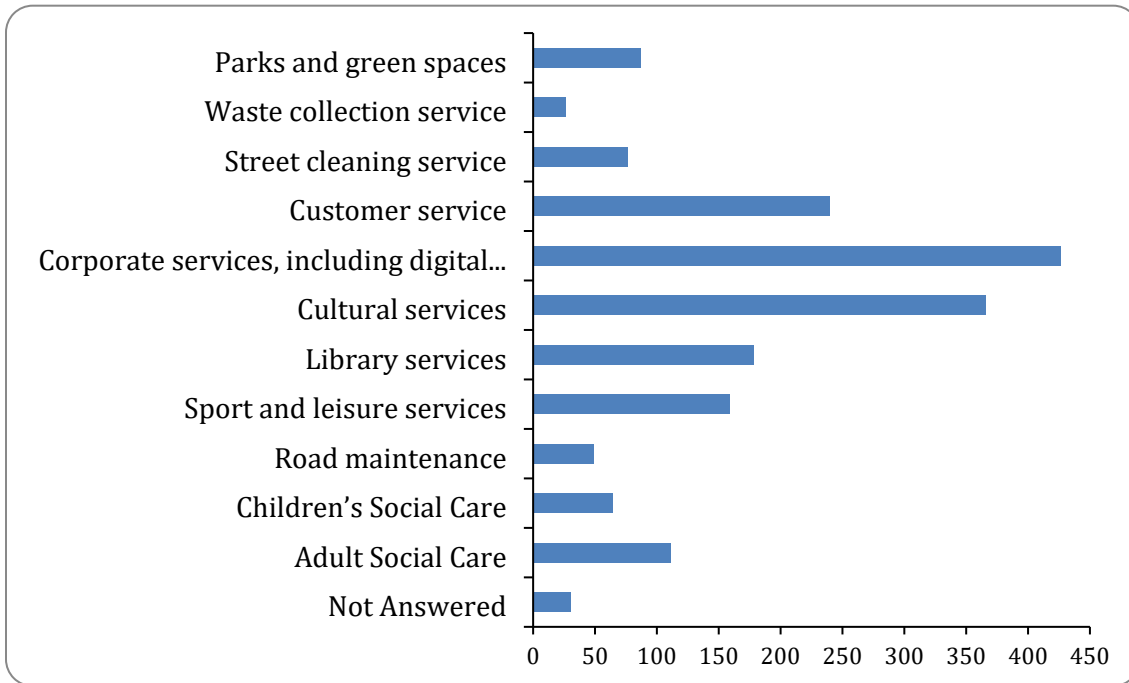
There were 650 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	290	43.87%
No	360	54.46%
Not Answered	11	1.67%

2: Which three service areas, shown in the list below, would you reduce rather than increase Council Tax? (please choose only 3 services)

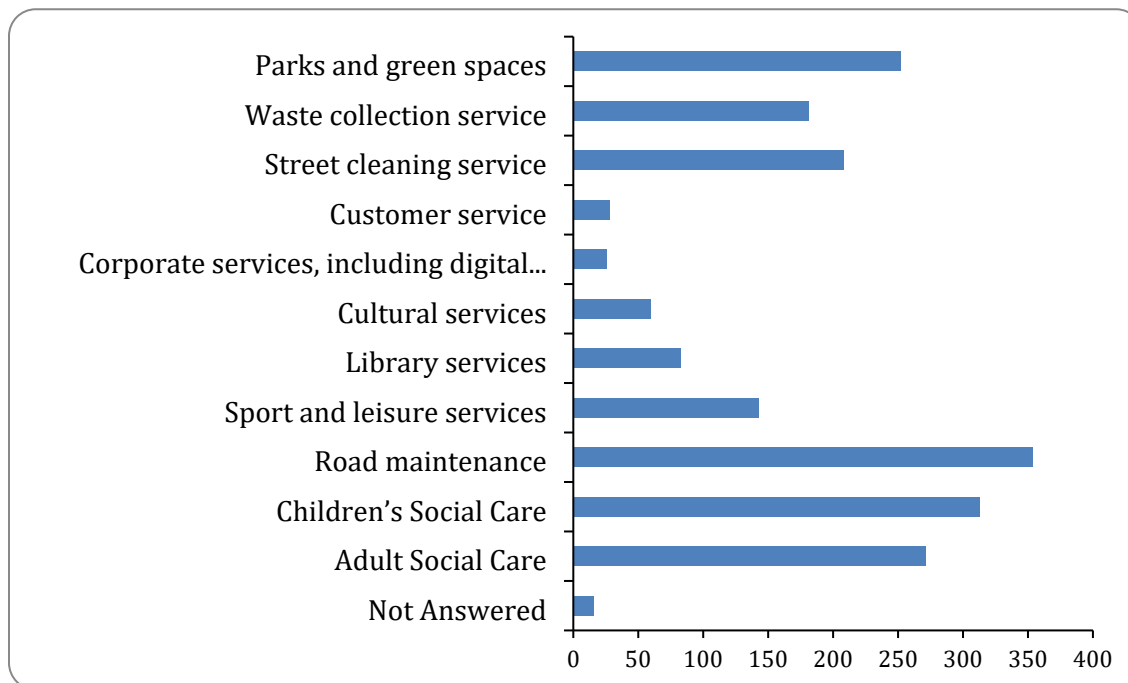
There were 631 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Parks and green spaces	87	13.16%
Waste collection service	26	3.93%
Street cleaning service	76	11.50%
Customer service	240	36.31%
Corporate services, including digital and website, legal, democratic services, communications, human resources	426	64.45%
Cultural services	366	55.37%
Library services	178	26.93%
Sport and leisure services	159	24.05%
Road maintenance	49	7.41%
Children's Social Care	64	9.68%
Adult Social Care	111	16.79%
Not Answered	30	4.54%

3: If the Local Government Settlement is better than currently anticipated, the first action will be to reduce the forecast financial gap. Over and above that, which 3 services, shown in list below, would be your preference for additional investment? (please choose only 3 services).

There were 645 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Parks and green spaces	252	38.12%
Waste collection service	181	27.38%
Street cleaning service	208	31.47%
Customer service	28	4.24%
Corporate services, including digital and website services, legal, democratic services, communications, human resources	26	3.93%
Cultural services	60	9.08%
Library services	83	12.56%
Sport and leisure services	143	21.63%
Road maintenance	354	53.56%
Children's Social Care	313	47.35%
Adult Social Care	271	41.00%
Not Answered	16	2.42%

4: Looking at the draft Capital Programme included with the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy report (see link above), are there any schemes that you would remove, or scale back?

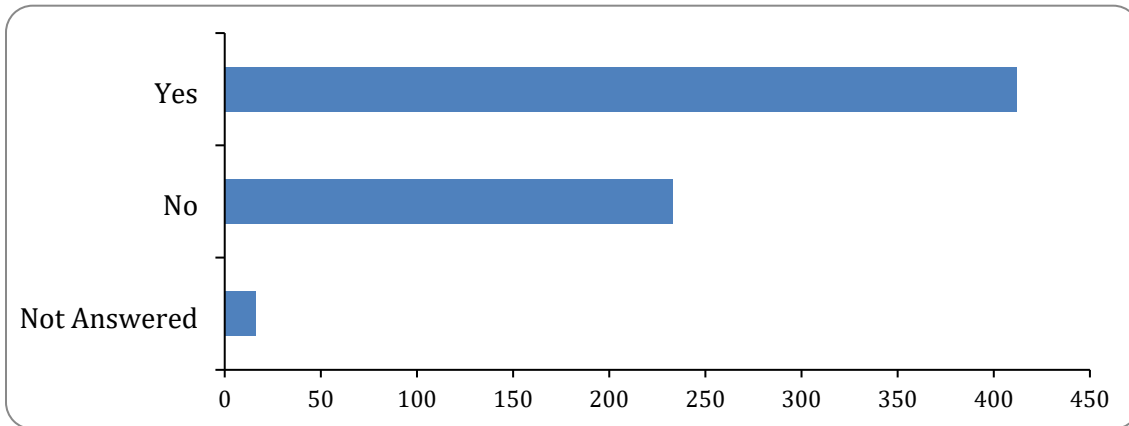
There were 433 responses to this part of the question.

Scheme¹	Count	% total responses
Central library/libraries	83	12.6%
Cycling infrastructure	72	10.9%
Civic centre	57	8.6%
Hexagon	46	7.0%
Housing & development	39	5.9%
Traveller accommodation	37	5.6%
Bus services	35	5.3%
Leisure	26	3.9%
Sustainability & renew energy	19	2.9%
Not enough information	18	2.7%
Minster Quarter /Abbey regeneration	17	2.6%
Road repairs/improvements	16	2.4%
Replacement vehicles	8	1.2%
Reading FC social inclusion unit	8	1.2%
Culture	7	1.1%
Green Park/Reading West stations	7	1.1%
Corporate & community buildings	6	0.9%
Scale back generally	5	0.8%
Oracle	5	0.8%
Active travel schemes	5	0.8%
Environmental & commercial services	4	0.6%
Digital systems	4	0.6%
Reading station	4	0.6%
Caversham court	4	0.6%
Adult social care	4	0.6%
Right balance	3	0.5%
Skate parks	3	0.5%
Heritage Action Zones	3	0.5%
Disabled Facilities Grants	3	0.5%
Green homes	3	0.5%
Car park investment programme	3	0.5%
Air quality	2	0.3%
Private sector renewals	2	0.3%

¹ All schemes included with a count of 2 or more

5: The Government has announced a maximum increase of 7.7% on social housing rents. Do you support rent increases?

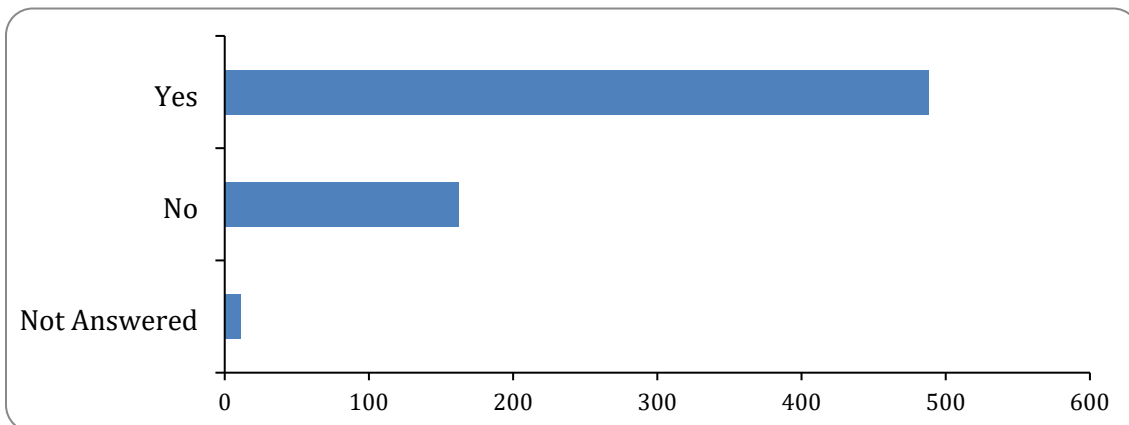
There were 645 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	412	62.33%
No	233	35.25%
Not Answered	16	2.42%

6: Would you support the Council opting for a 7.7% increase if this allowed the Council to continue retrofitting existing homes, thereby investing in energy efficiency measures and in turn, reducing tenants' bills?

There were 650 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	488	73.83%
No	162	24.51%
Not Answered	11	1.66%

7: Are there any other comments you would like to make regarding the Council's draft budget for 2024/25, or the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy?

There were 350 responses to this part of the question.

Issue	Count
Increase flood defences/ unblock drains	55 ²
Reduce/ don't increase Council Tax	19
Increase spend on/ improve quality of road maintenance	16
Concentrate on basics and do them well/ better	13
Increase spend on street cleaning/ reduce rubbish & flytipping	12
Increase spend on affordable/ social housing	12
Increase spend on adult social care	10
Reduce/ remove Central Library scheme	8
Better business planning	7
Council is doing a good job	7
Look at/ reduce staffing levels/ costs	7
Improve waste management	7
Reduce spend on cycle lanes	7
Need to benefit working people more	7
Improve traffic problems	6
Increase spend on green spaces	5
Increase spend on climate change/ sustainability schemes	5
Increase spend on crime/ASB/ drug issues	5
Change central govt funding model/ challenge government	5
Prioritise social housing for local residents (rather than non-local)	5
Increase active travel schemes	4
Budget report needs explaining/ more information required	4
Do accounts on time	4
Increase spend on tree planting	4
Need better general maintenance & cleanliness/ town looks a mess	4
Residents not getting proper say/ being consulted in time	4
Progress 3rd bridge	4
More infrastructure needed for new developments	4
Help pensioners more	4
Increase spend on schools	4
Reduce/don't increase rents	3
Increase Council Tax & improve services	3
Spend on children's social care	3
Reduce spend on road signs (promoting resurfacing)	3
Stop re-wilding	3
Decrease spend on travellers	3
Invest in buses	3

² A significant number of these responses contained the exact same wording and are therefore likely to be the result of a campaign to raise the issue of flooding amongst certain residents.

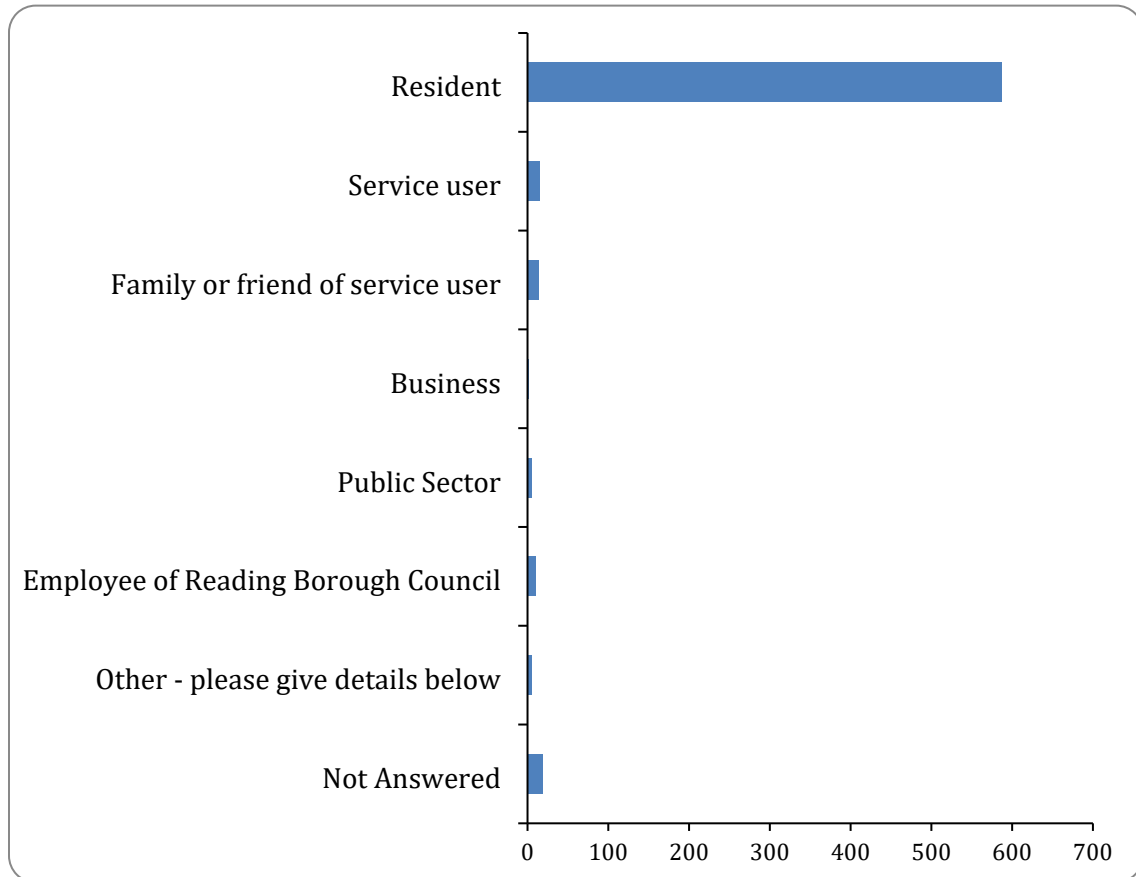
Issue	Count
Increase SEND provision in schools	3
Reduce bus lanes	3
Stop building flats/housing	3
Improve safety of pavements (trim hedges etc)	3
Increase re-wilding	3
Increase spend on leisure	3
Support vulnerable people	3
Reduce councillors' costs	2
Reduce public transport cost	2
Prison as arts centre	2
Reduce spend on libraries	2
Make money from cars parking on pavements etc	2
Reduce spend on culture	2
Use funding from businesses and high income residents	2
Increase spend on public transport	2
Why don't we have more income from new developments and flats?	2
Increase spend on parks	2
Regenerate Town Centre	2
Increase energy efficiency of housing	2
Increase youth provision	2
Improve play areas in Caversham	2
Help small businesses	2
Improve squash provision	2
Decrease car parking charges	1
Spend less on green space	1
Improve air quality	1
Better street lighting	1
Reduce spend on street lighting	1
Increase spend on culture	1
Increase homeless provision	1
Reduce spend on xmas lights	1
Provide bigger bins	1
Keep children's centres	1
Poor contractor for social housing	1
Use bus lanes for cycles	1
Better use of commercial properties	1
Maximise on good travel connections	1
Reduce noise pollution	1
Refurbish rather than new build	1
No ULEZ	1
Rainbow crossing a waste	1
Bill traders for extended shop fronts	1
Reduce abandoned scaffolding	1

Issue	Count
Better parking permits	1
Invest in glass collection	1
Keep vehicles longer	1
Engender local pride	1
Tenants to pay for housing maintenance	1
Increase spend on facilities for disabled people	1
Increase ease of contact with council	1
Reduce leisure charges	1
Too many capital schemes	1
Use reserves	1
Need Town Centre indoor gym	1
Publish value of contracts	1
Southcote needs attention	1
Increase dog bins	1
Reduce corporate service costs	1
More homes to buy not rent	1
Increase mental health provision	1
Don't spend on West Reading station	1
No LGBTQ events	1
Reduce abuse of social housing system	1
Children's social care processes should be re-assessed	1
Get more people into work	1
Reduce spend on refugees	1
Stop foreign aid	1
Make more of the river	1
Support Town Centre businesses	1
Improve Waterloo Meadows allotments	1
Investigate waste PFI	1

Demographic Questions

8: Please indicate whether you are responding to these proposals as:

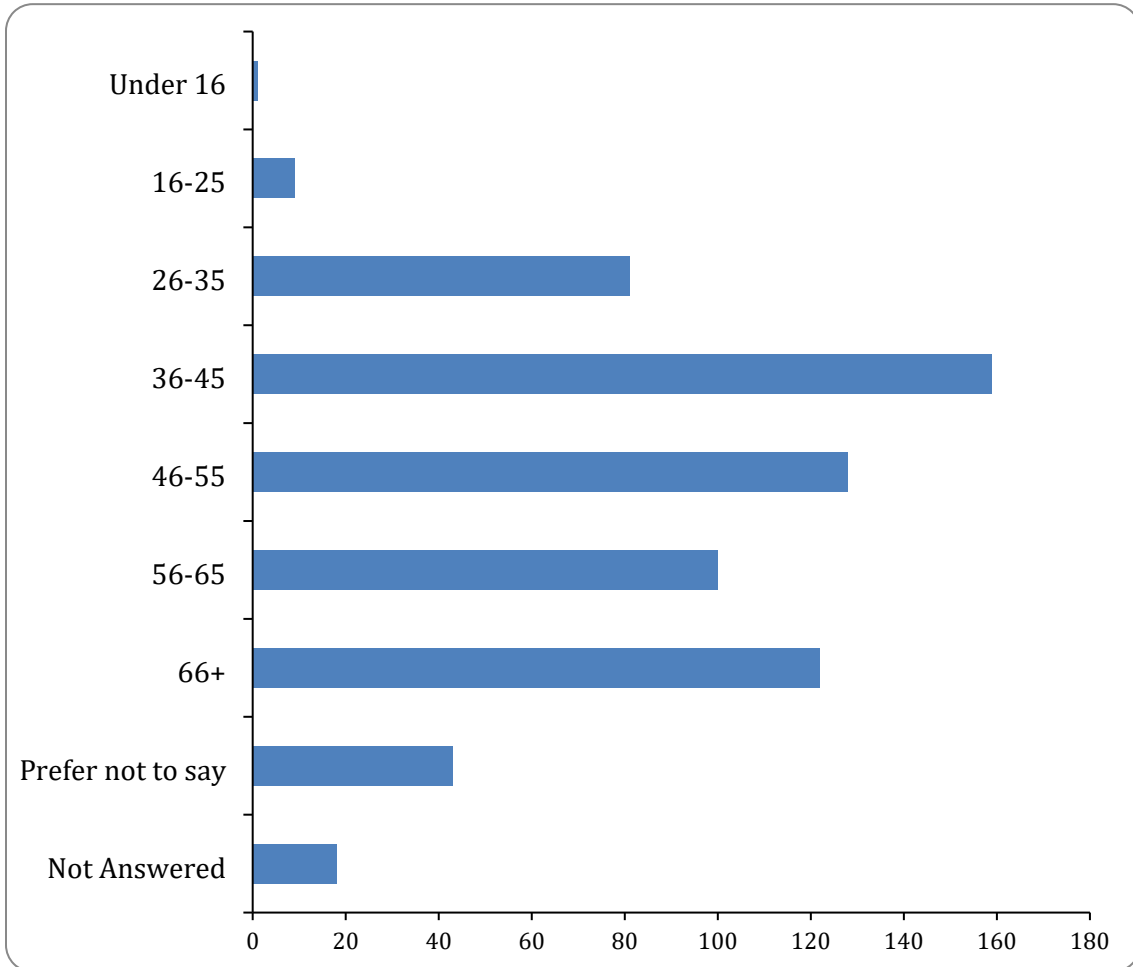
There were 642 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Resident	588	88.96%
Service user	16	2.42%
Family or friend of service user	14	2.12%
Voluntary organisation	0	0.00%
Business	2	0.30%
Public Sector	5	0.76%
Employee of Reading Borough Council	11	1.66%
Other - please give details below	6	0.91%
Not Answered	19	2.87%

9: Which age group do you belong to?

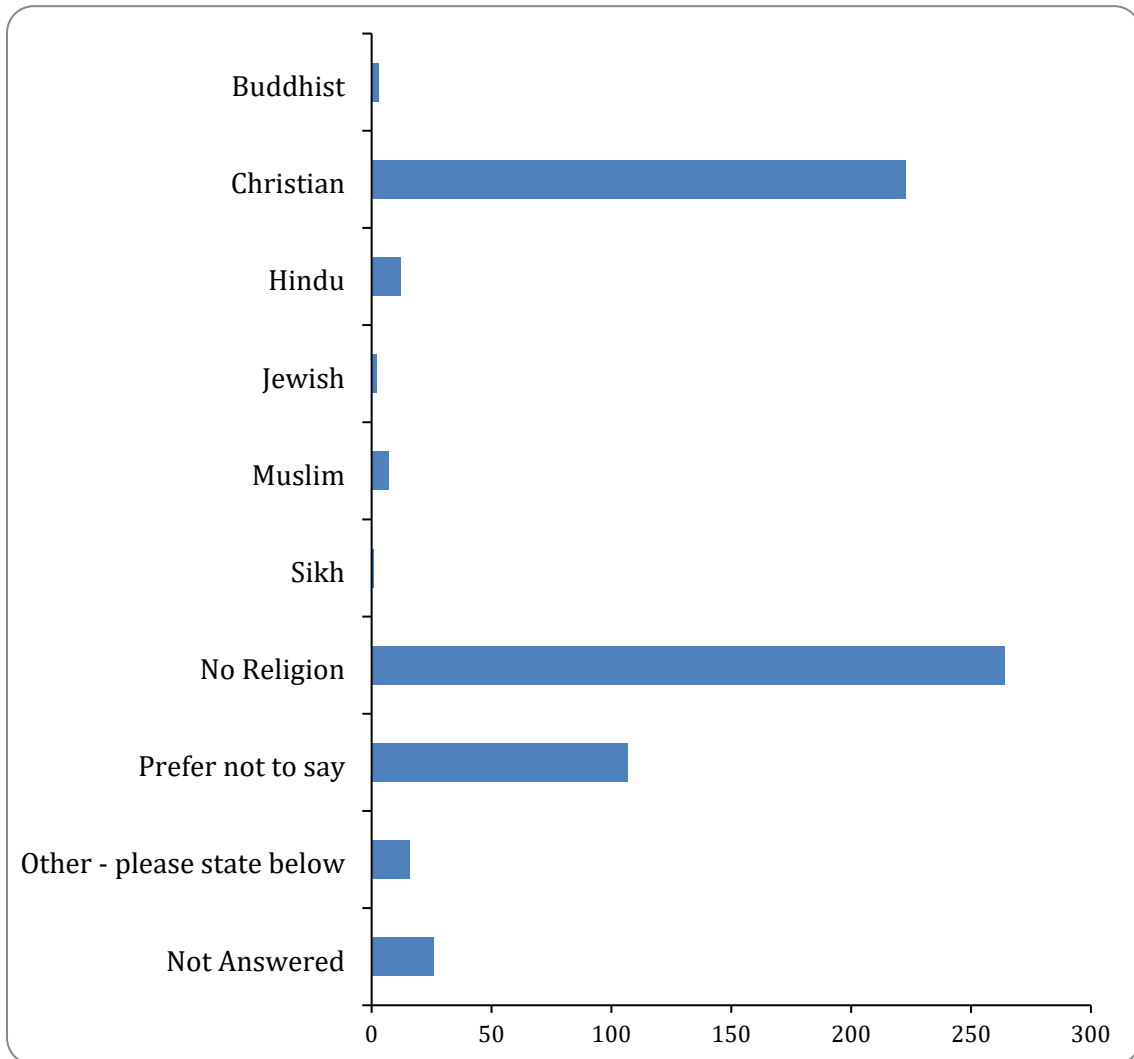
There were 643 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Under 16	1	0.15%
16-25	9	1.36%
26-35	81	12.25%
36-45	159	24.05%
46-55	128	19.36%
56-65	100	15.13%
66+	122	18.46%
Prefer not to say	43	6.51%
Not Answered	18	2.72%

10: What is your religion or belief?

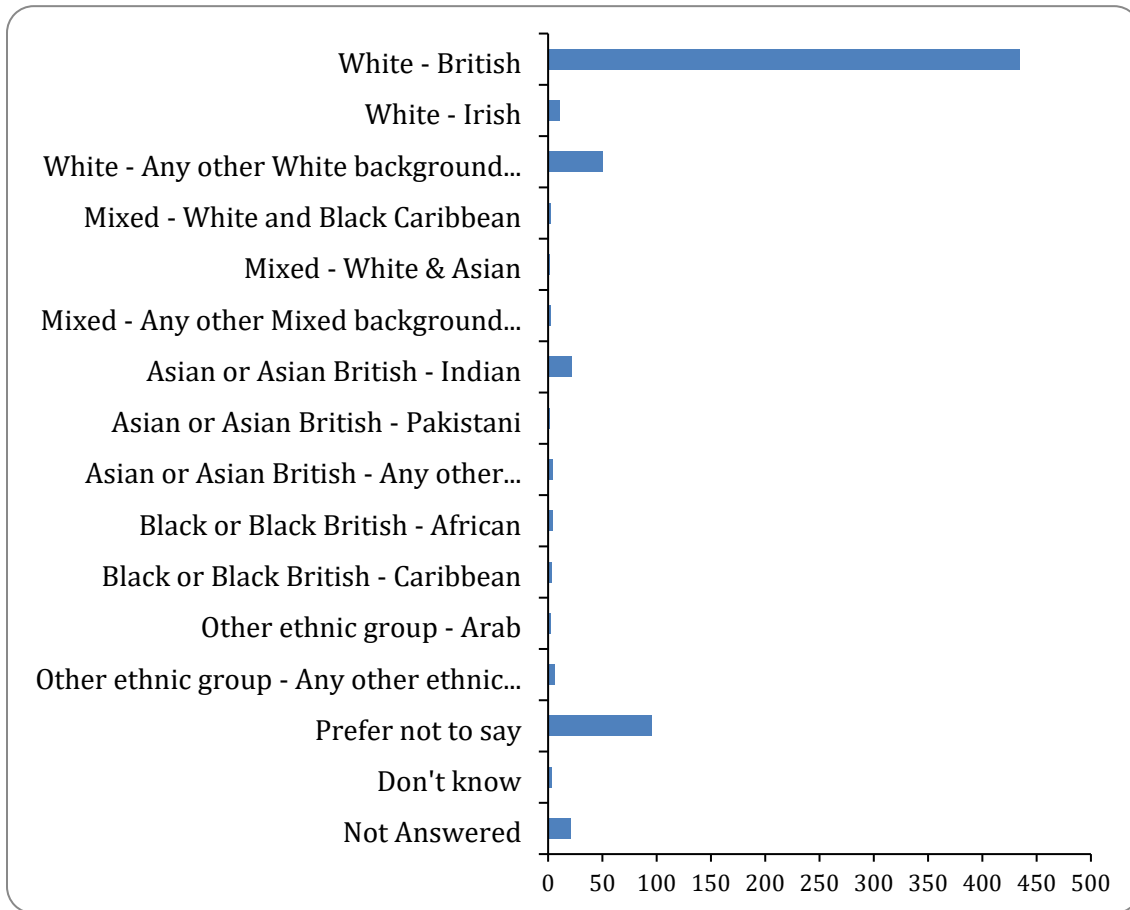
There were 635 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Buddhist	3	0.45%
Christian	223	33.74%
Hindu	12	1.82%
Jewish	2	0.30%
Muslim	7	1.06%
Sikh	1	0.15%
No Religion	264	39.94%
Prefer not to say	107	16.19%
Other - please state below	16	2.42%
Not Answered	26	3.93%

11: To which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?

There were 640 responses to this part of the question.

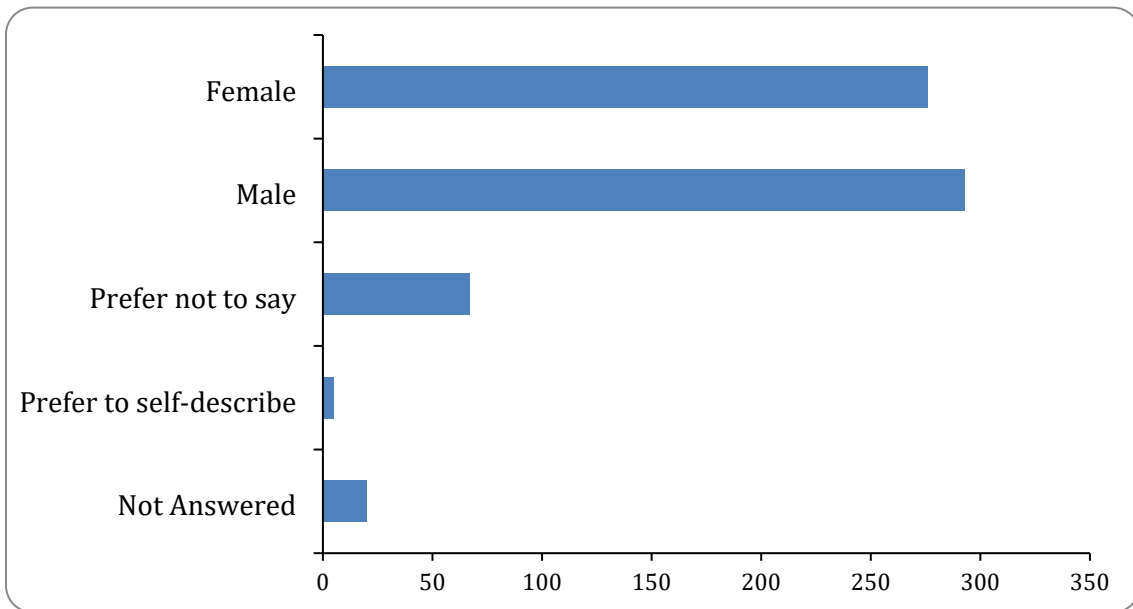


Option	Total	Percent
White - British	434	65.66%
White - Irish	11	1.66%
White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0	0.00%
White - Any other White background (Please specify below)	50	7.56%
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	2	0.30%
Mixed - White & Black African	0	0.00%
Mixed - White & Asian	1	0.15%
Mixed - Any other Mixed background (Please specify below)	2	0.30%
Asian or Asian British - Indian	22	3.33%
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	1	0.15%
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	0	0.00%
Asian or Asian British - Chinese	0	0.00%

Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background (Please specify below)	4	0.61%
Black or Black British - African	4	0.61%
Black or Black British - Caribbean	3	0.45%
Black or Black British - Any other black background (Please specify below)	0	0.00%
Other ethnic group - Arab	2	0.30%
Other ethnic group - Any other ethnic group (Please specify below)	6	0.91%
Prefer not to say	95	14.37%
Don't know	3	0.45%
Not Answered	21	3.18%

12: Are you:

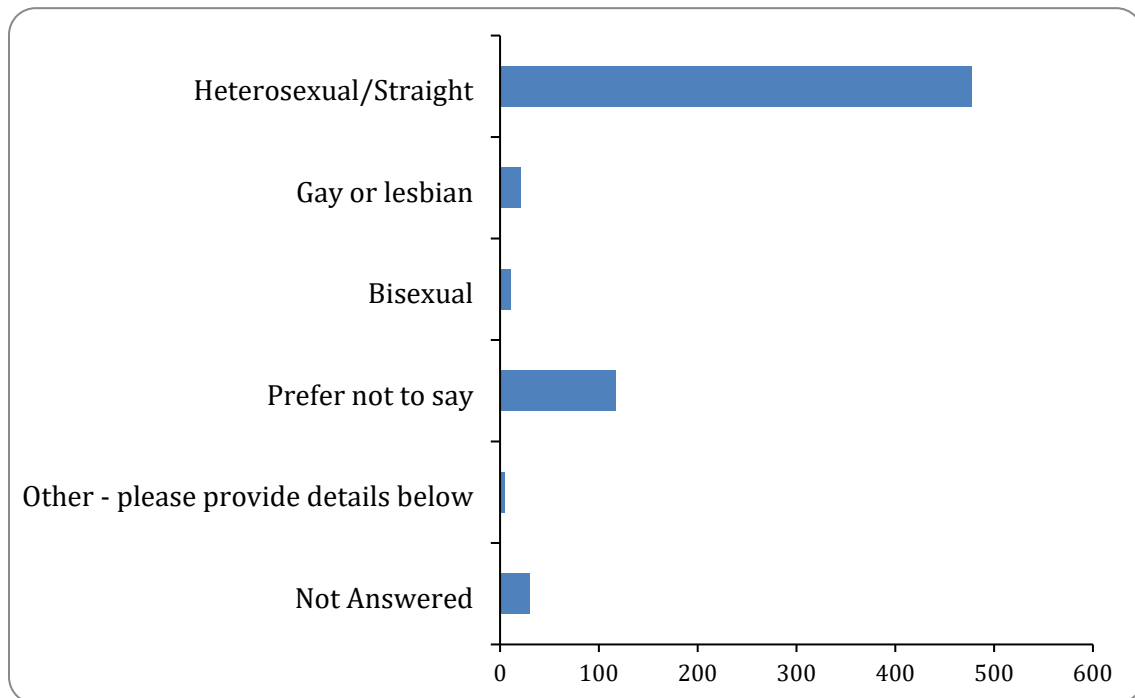
There were 641 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Female	276	41.75%
Male	293	44.33%
Prefer not to say	67	10.14%
Prefer to self-describe	5	0.76%
Not Answered	20	3.03%

13: What is your sexuality?

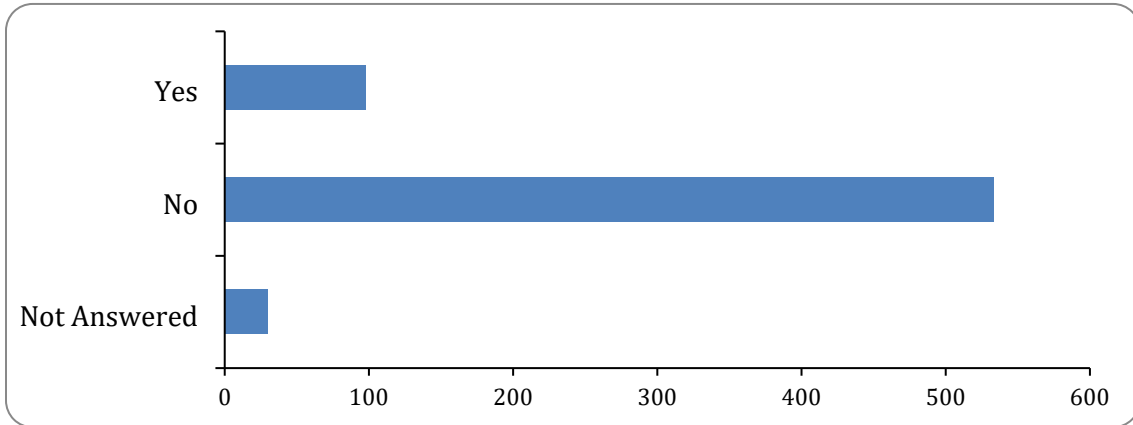
There were 631 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Heterosexual/Straight	477	72.16%
Gay or lesbian	21	3.18%
Bisexual	11	1.66%
Prefer not to say	117	17.70%
Other - please provide details below	5	0.76%
Not Answered	30	4.54%

14: Do you have a disability, long-term illness or health problem (12 months or more) which limits your daily activities or the work you can do?

There were 631 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	98	14.83%
No	533	80.64%
Not Answered	30	4.54%