

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.

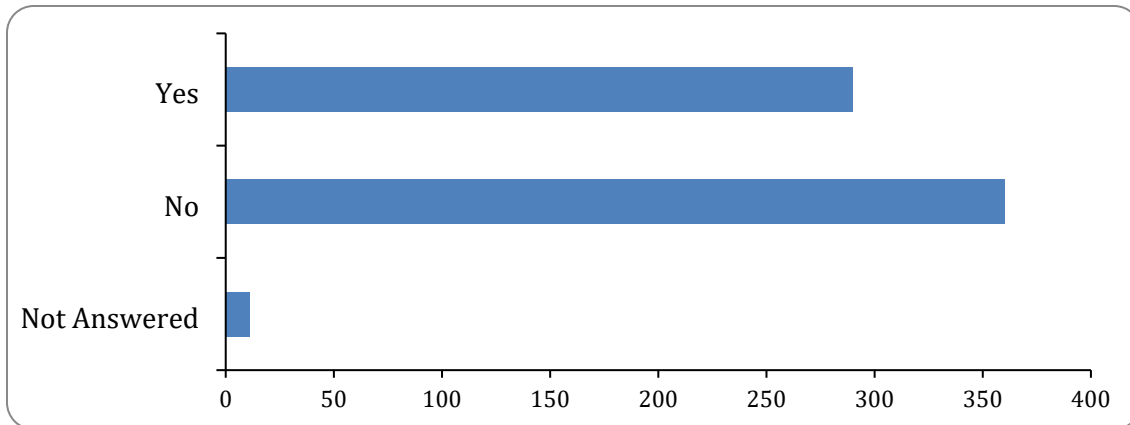
The budget engagement exercise received 661 responses, which is a substantial increase from the 378 responses received last year. Details of the responses are provided below.

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?

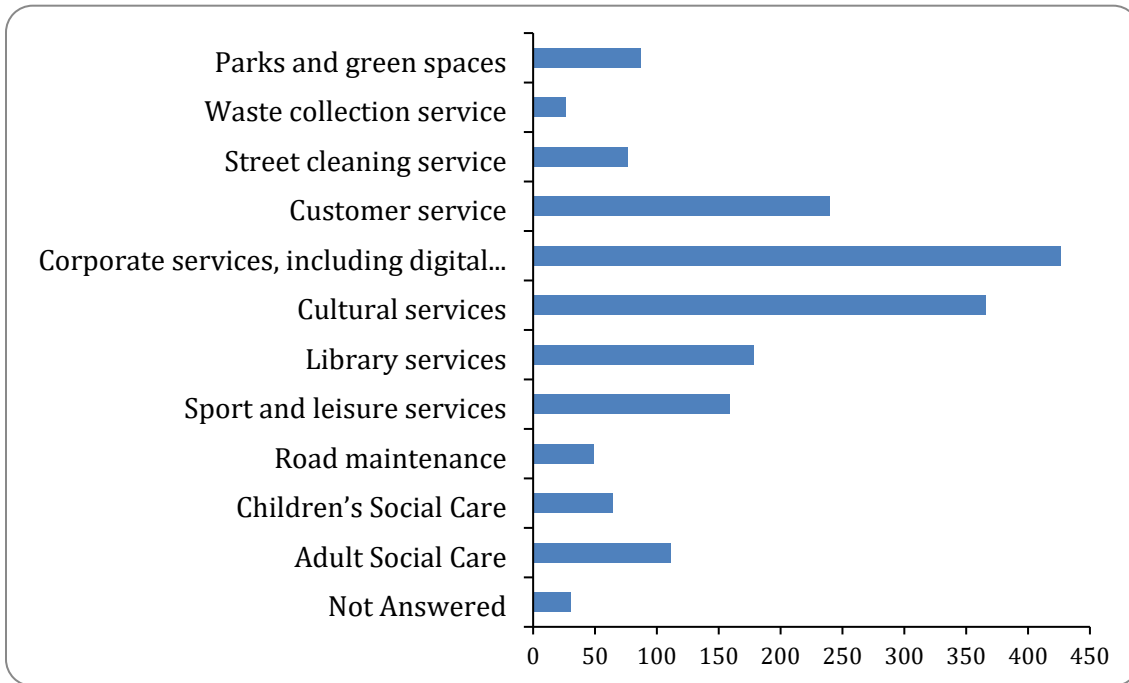
There were 650 responses to this part of the question.



| 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)

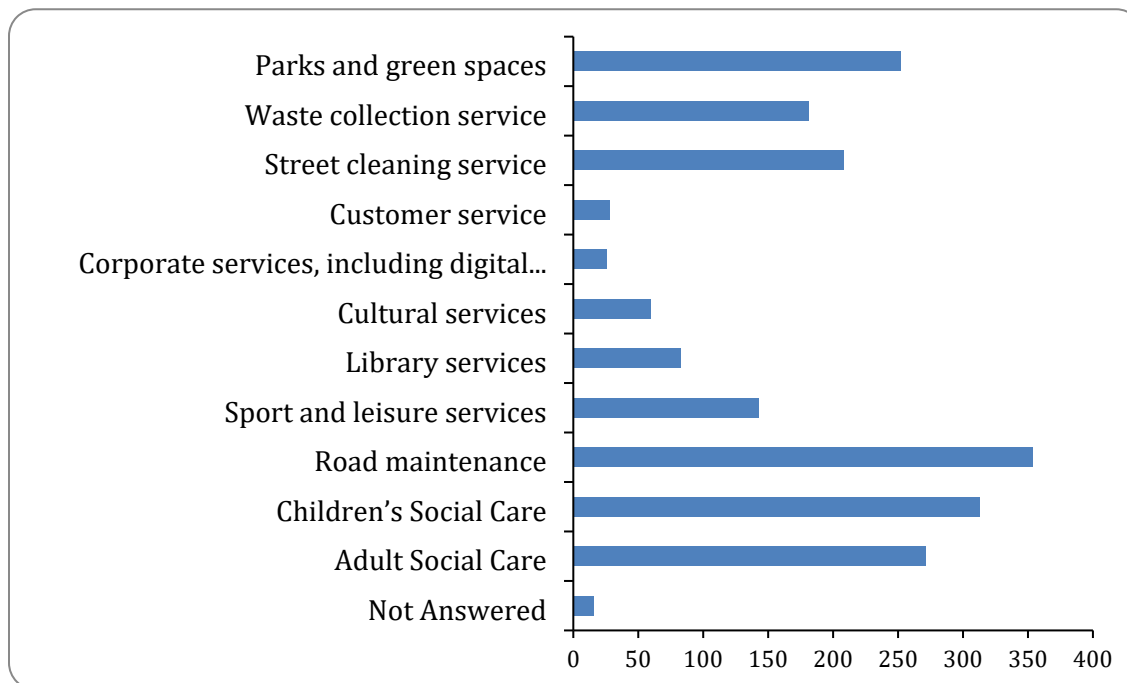
There were 631 responses to this part of the question.



| 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?

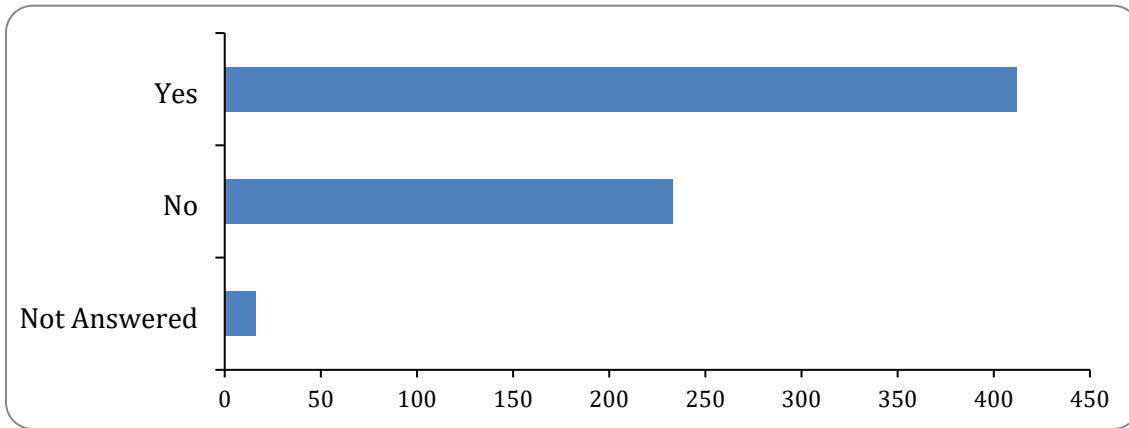
There were 433 responses to this part of the question.

| 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?

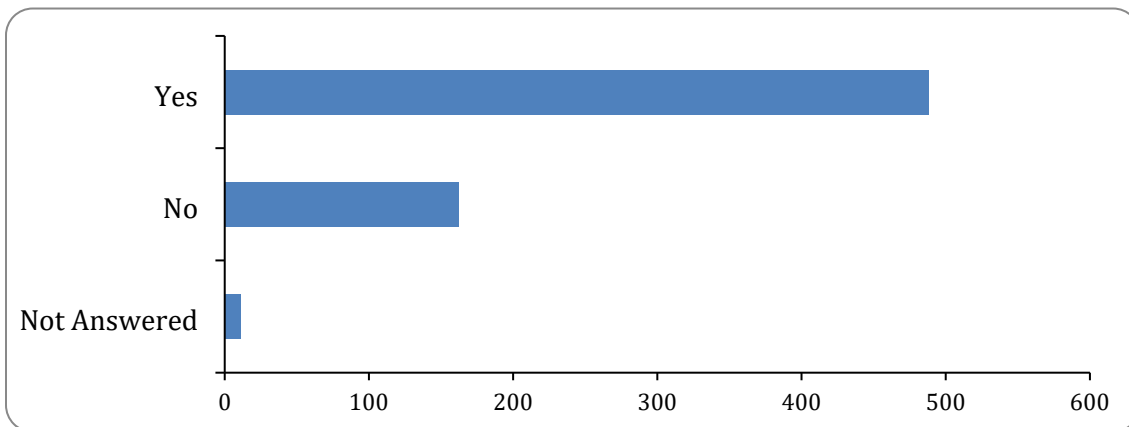
There were 645 responses to this part of the question.



| 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.

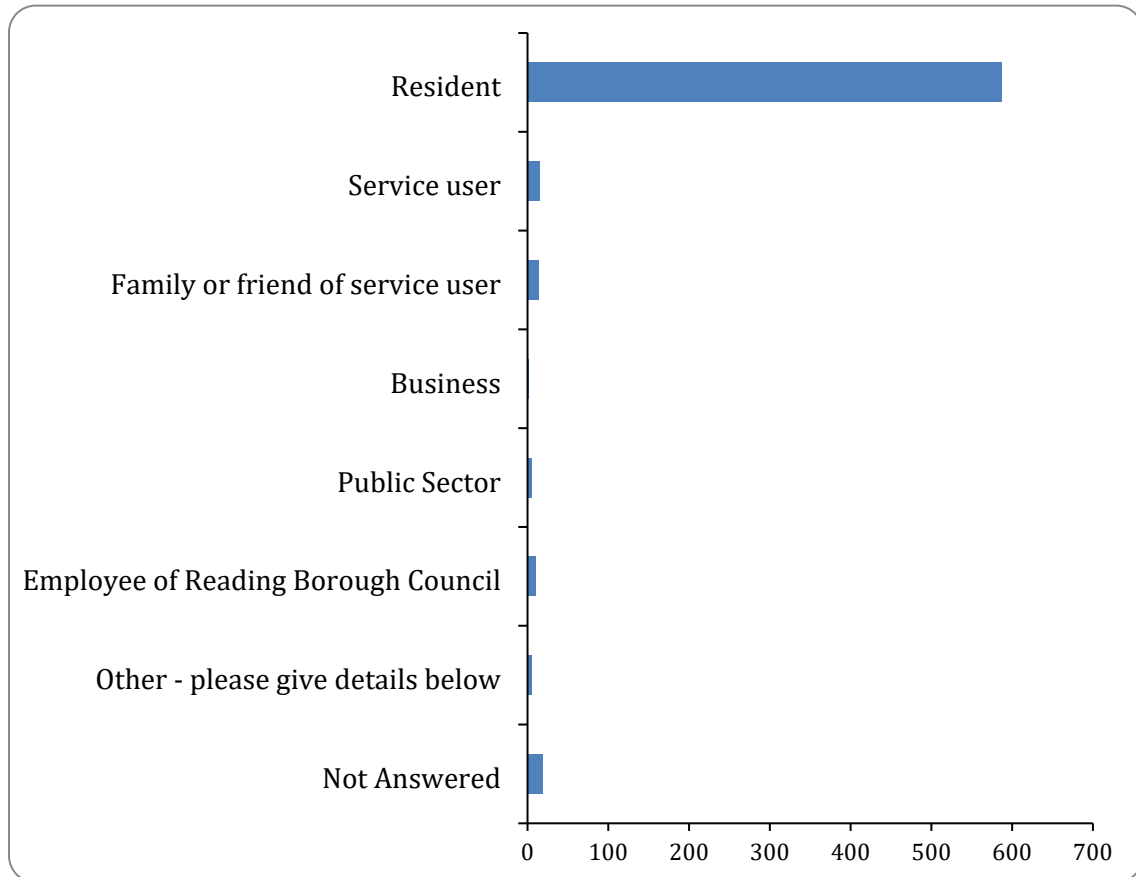
| Issue | Count |
|--|--------------|
| Increase SEND provision in schools | 3 |
| Reduce bus lanes | 3 |
| Stop building flats/housing | 3 |
| Improve safety of pavements (trim hedges etc) | 3 |
| Increase re-wilding | 3 |
| Increase spend on leisure | 3 |
| Support vulnerable people | 3 |
| Reduce 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:

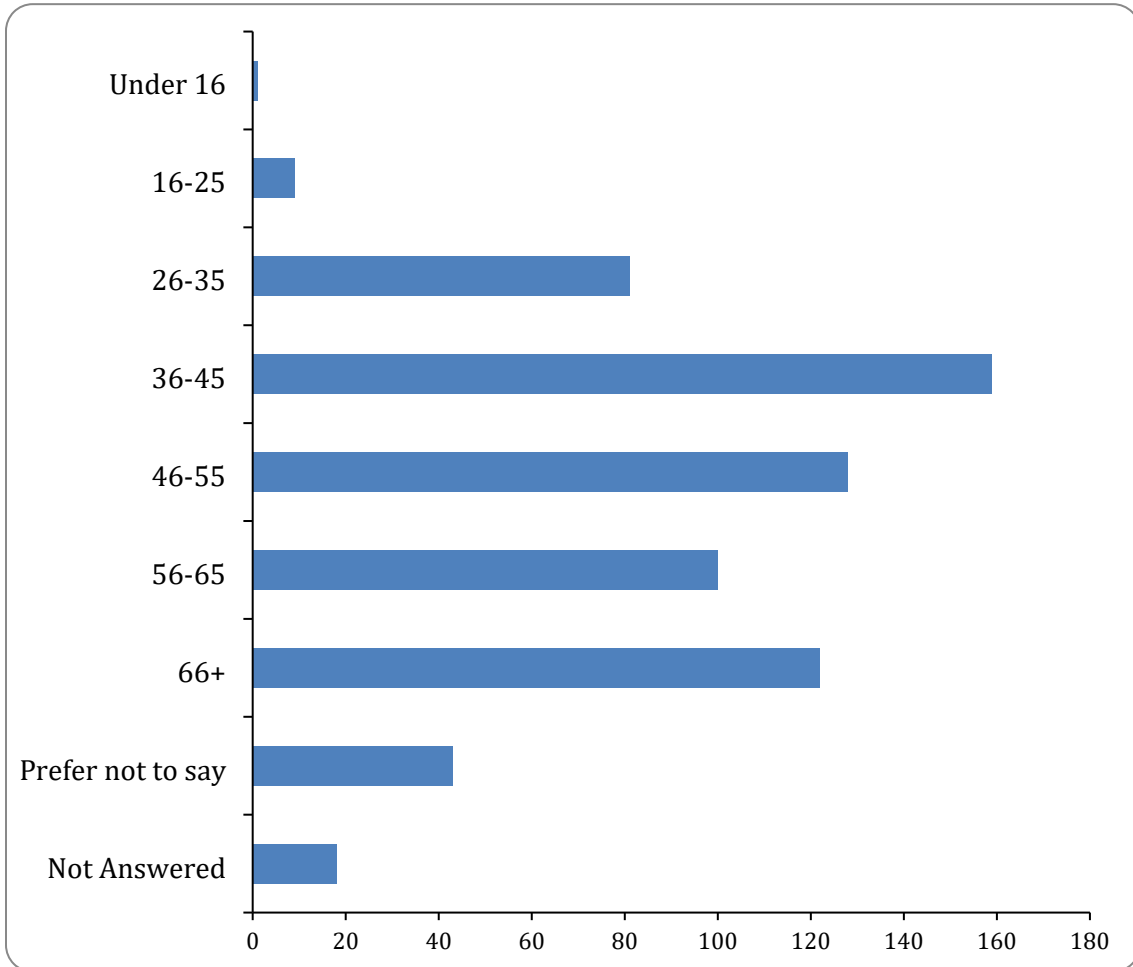
There were 642 responses to this part of the question.



| 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?

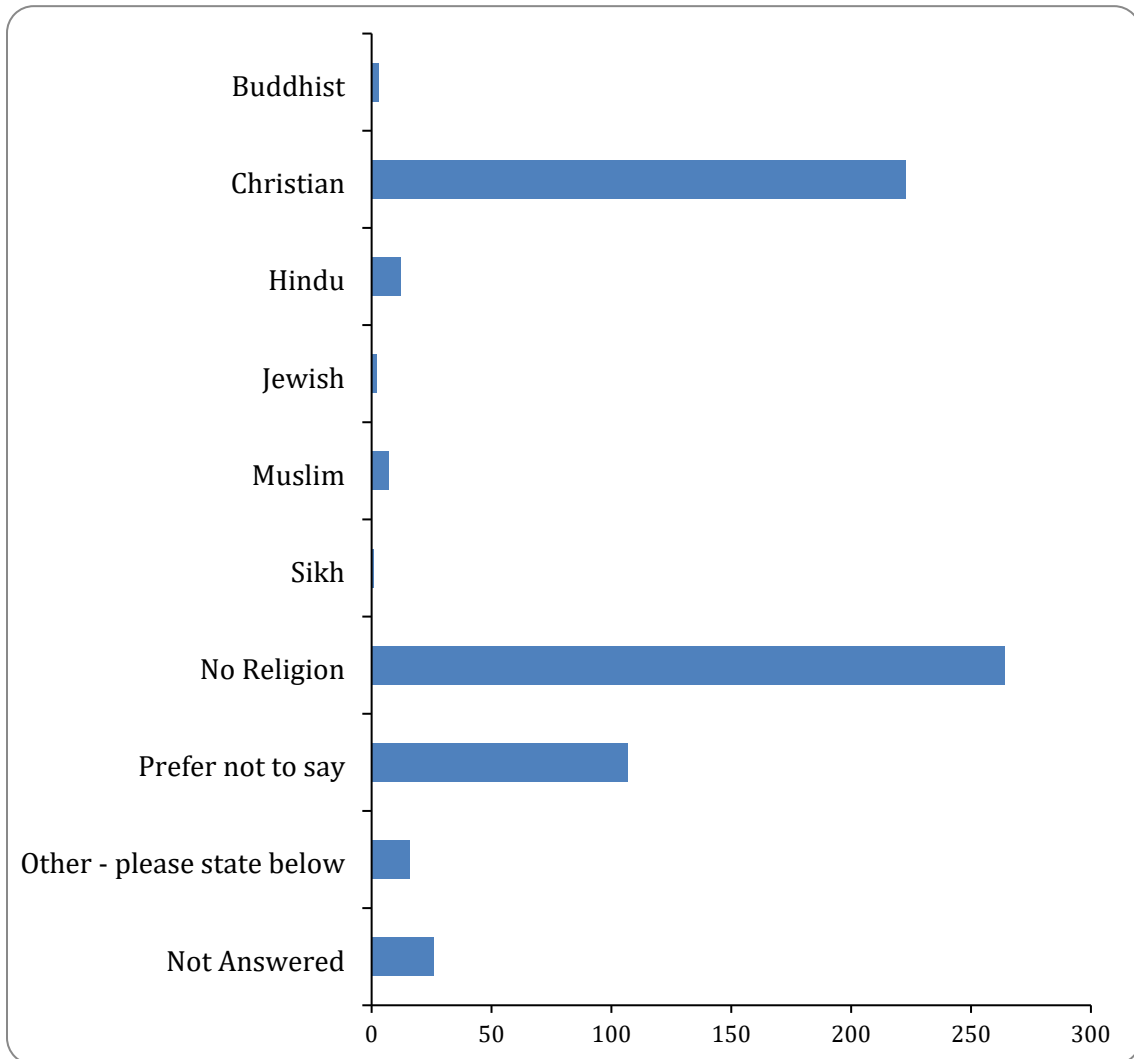
There were 643 responses to this part of the question.



| 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?

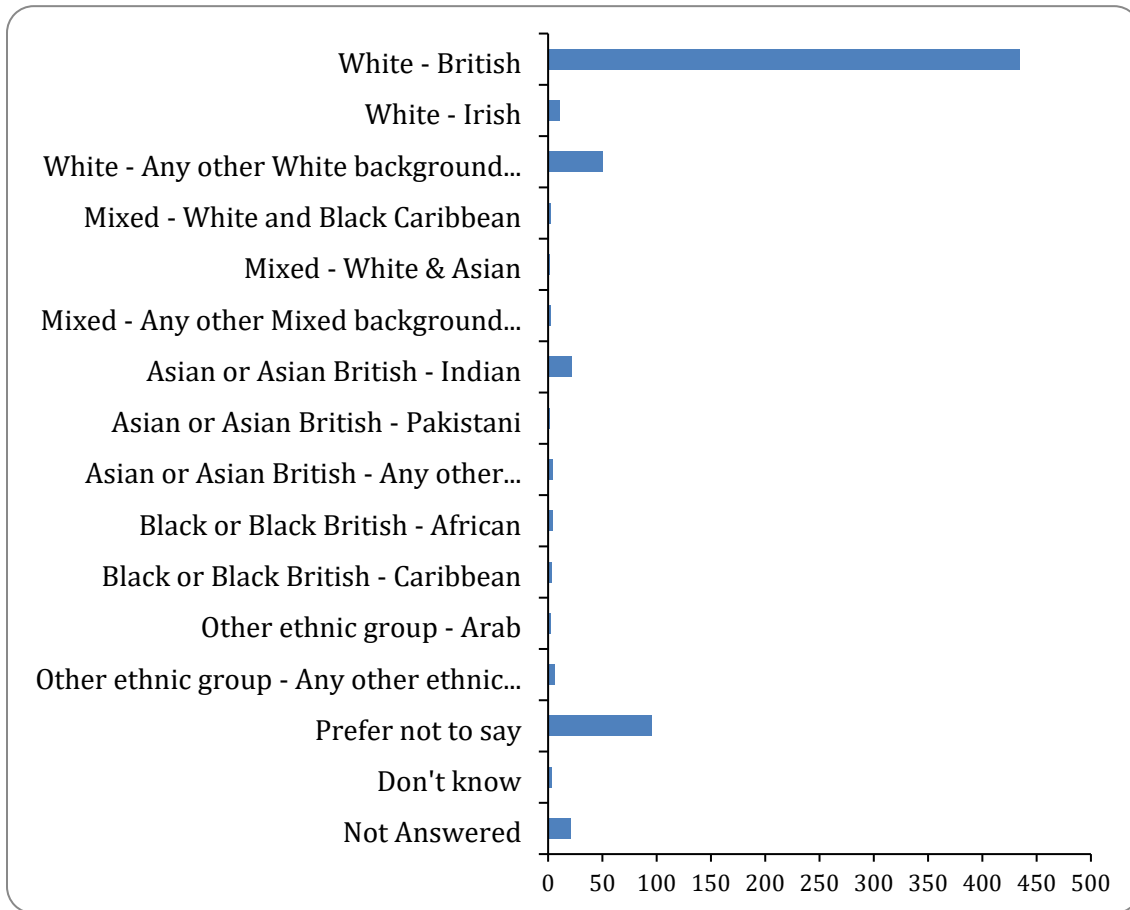
There were 635 responses to this part of the question.



| 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.

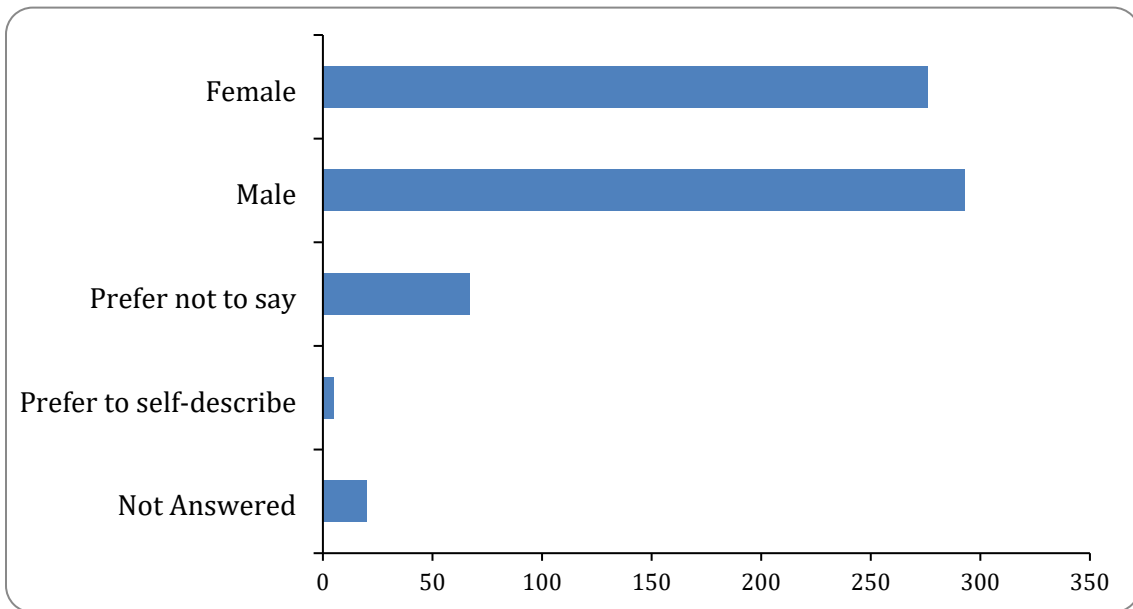


| Option | Total | Percent |
|--|-------|---------|
| White - British | 434 | 65.66% |
| White - Irish | 11 | 1.66% |
| White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller | 0 | 0.00% |
| White - Any other White background (Please specify below) | 50 | 7.56% |
| Mixed - White and Black Caribbean | 2 | 0.30% |
| Mixed - 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:

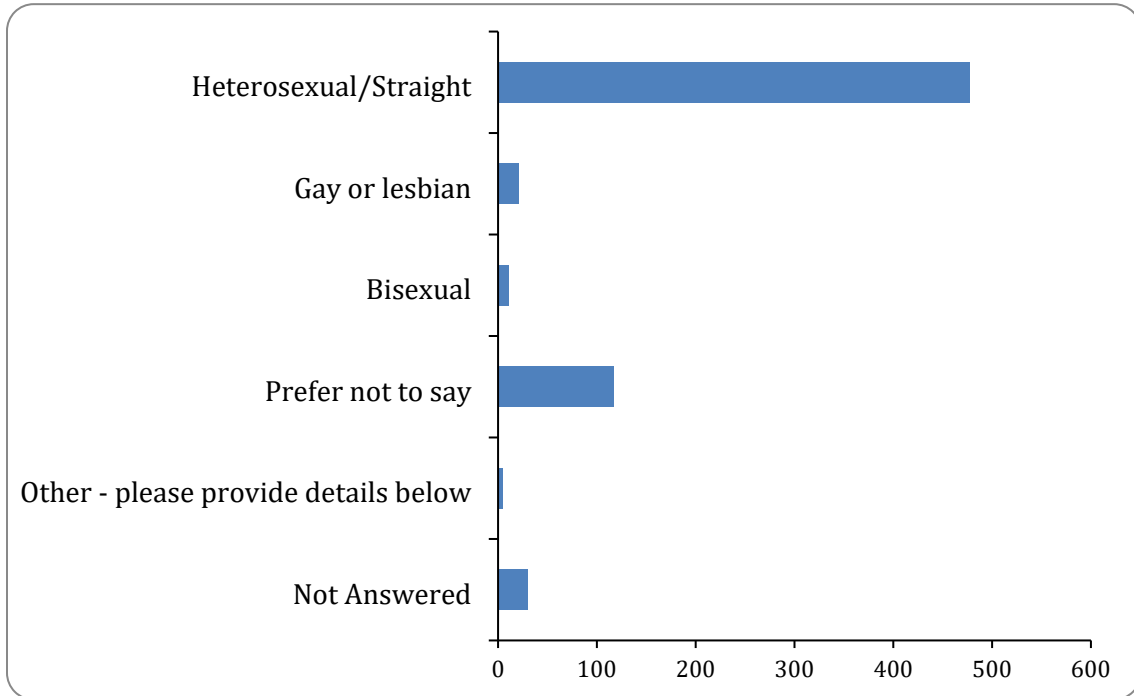
There were 641 responses to this part of the question.



| 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?

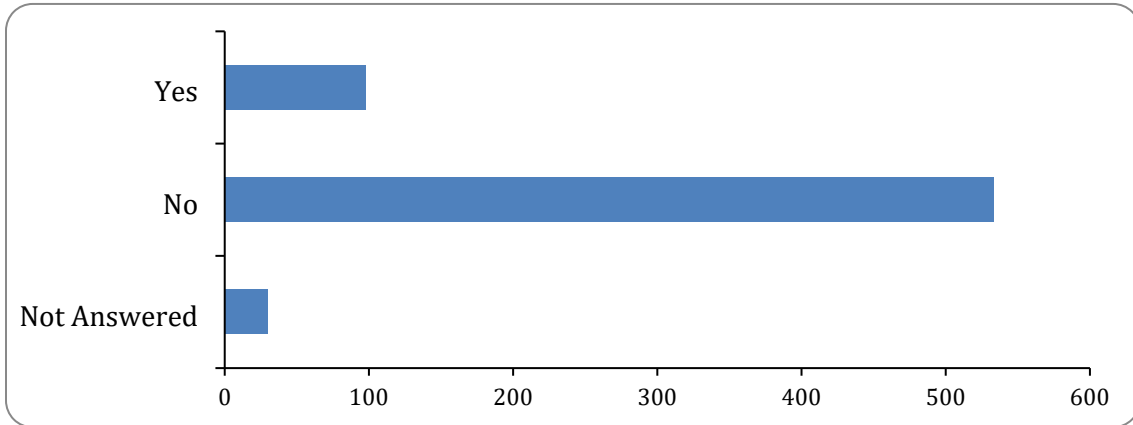
There were 631 responses to this part of the question.



| 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% |