

Annex H – Consultation and Engagement

1.1 Introduction

1.1 Between August and December 2024, the Council conducted an engagement and consultation exercise with residents, organisations and Members to inform the development of the budget for 2025/26 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). This activity supports one of the Council's priority objectives to have empowered and thriving communities where more people participate, engage and have a say in how things are done on matters that impact them and where they live.

1.2 While this section of the report summarises the insights gathered from consultation and engagement on the draft budget, council services regularly consult and engage with residents and other stakeholders throughout the year and on an ongoing basis to inform their services.

1.3 The objectives of this consultation and engagement activity were to:

- Provide decision-makers with insight from residents and partners to inform budget setting for 2025/26 and beyond.
- Enhance transparency and accountability around budget decisions, including proposals around additional investment and efficiencies.
- Promote inclusive and representative engagement by actively involving marginalised and underrepresented groups.

1.4 This work was split into two phases.

- The first phase of engagement took place in the summer of 2024 with residents and stakeholders asked to share their views on what their most important priority outcomes were, how the budget should be allocated, approaches to balancing the budget, and conditions for supporting a council tax increase. Data was gathered from nearly 1,600 stakeholders using a range of methods:
 - a. An open survey on the Surrey Says platform (28 August – 30 September 2024) with 1,495 respondents.
 - b. Community events and reference groups, engaging nearly 90 residents.
 - c. Promotion via social media, the Surrey Matters newsletter, and local council members.
- The second phase was a consultation on the Council's draft budget after this was approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on 26 November 2024. The purpose of this exercise was to provide residents and other stakeholders with information on the key proposals included, and to seek their views on the financial efficiencies that the Council is pursuing. Data was gathered from 718 stakeholders, of which 689 were residents.

1.5 Across both phases, over 2,200 stakeholders have shared their views including residents, partner organisations from the statutory and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, businesses and elected Members.

2. Methodology

2.1 Mindful of the current financial context, we have taken a prudent approach to our consultation and engagement activity. By using internal survey tools, costs have been limited to the creation of accessible formats of our engagement material. However, this does mean that the results illustrate the views of those who chose to take part but does not provide data representative of Surrey residents.

2.2 Across both exercises, we included targeted promotion of the survey to invite responses from groups that are typically underrepresented in these types of open exercises. Additionally, an information pack, developed in EasyRead and Large Print formats, was published alongside the survey to provide information to stakeholders on the investment proposals and efficiencies in each area of the council's spending.

2.3 Both surveys were promoted through the Surrey Matters E-Newsletter, social media, and through all libraries across Surrey. Surrey County Council Members, Community Link Officers and other Engagement Officers were also encouraged to promote the survey with local residents, businesses and stakeholders in their areas.

2.4 Members were engaged throughout the process via a range of meetings including informal and formal Select Committees and all-Member briefings. These sessions provided updates on the budget position and proposals with investment measures and efficiencies outlined and explained alongside contextual information. Select Committees had the opportunity to scrutinise proposals and undertake deep-dive exploratory exercises on two areas within their remit, making recommendations to Cabinet to inform the developing budget.

Phase 1

2.5 In the first phase, which ran from 28 August to 30 September 2024, data was gathered from nearly 1,600 stakeholders using:

- An open survey on the Surrey Says platform which received 1,495 responses. Respondents were self-selecting, which means the results are not representative of the whole of Surrey's population.
- Community events and reference groups, engaging nearly 90 residents.
- Promotion via social media, the Surrey Matters website, newsletter, and local council Members.

2.6 During this phase, the Council asked for insight from stakeholders on:

- The importance they placed on each of 11 outcomes, based on the Community Vision for Surrey in 2030 and Organisation Strategy 2023-2028:
 - i. Better public transport connections for easier, more predictable journeys
 - ii. Better roads and pavements
 - iii. Enabling people of all ages to access education and skills
 - iv. Making our communities safer
 - v. Promoting better health and wellbeing for all residents
 - vi. Tackling climate change and protecting Surrey's countryside and biodiversity

- vii. Providing care for adults and children who need us most
 - viii. Reducing waste and increasing recycling
 - ix. Reinvigorating town centres and high streets
 - x. Stronger community relations through local community networks and support
 - xi. Supporting local businesses to prosper and grow the economy
- How the budget should be allocated
 - Approaches to balancing the budget
 - Conditions for supporting a Council Tax increase.

Phase 2

2.7 In the second phase consultation, which ran from 26 November to 31 December 2024, data was gathered from 718 stakeholders using:

- An open survey on the Surrey Says platform which began on 26 November, after the Cabinet approved the draft Budget, closing on 31 December. The 718 respondents were self-selecting, which means the results are not representative of the whole of Surrey's population.
- Attendance at the VCSE Alliance Disability Conference.
- Promotion via social media, the Surrey Matters website, newsletter, and local council Members.

2.8 During this phase, the Council asked for insight from stakeholders on:

- Support or opposition of the proposals to balance the budget.
- Anything that should be considered in the implementation of these proposals to deliver better outcomes for Surrey.
- Anything else residents wanted to share with us about the draft budget.

3. Results

Phase 1 results

Priority outcomes

3.1 Respondents to the first phase of engagement prioritised the following four outcomes for Surrey (from the list of 11 outcomes):

- Better roads and pavements (79%)
- Providing care for adults and children who need us most (76%)
- Making our communities safer (74%)
- Better public transport connections for easier, more predictable journeys (70%)

3.2 Younger respondents were less likely to prioritise roads and pavements than older respondents. Community safety was most important in Runnymede, Spelthorne, Tandridge and Mole Valley.

3.3 At community events, the focus was on:

- Providing care for adults and children who need us most
- Promoting better health and wellbeing for all residents
- Enabling people of all ages to access education and skills (especially SEN provision)

- Better public transport connections for easier, more predictable journeys
- Making our communities safer

3.4 Respondents were asked for their views on how the Council should allocate its resources. The choices offered to them were to allocate resources to:

- Services that benefit the majority of residents or services that benefit those with the greatest needs, such as residents with disabilities and additional needs.
- Local areas with the highest number of people with poor health or across all local areas in Surrey.
- Meet the needs of residents today or meet the long-term future needs of residents.

Use of resources

3.5 Open survey respondents preferred resources for the majority (54%) and across all areas (64%). Community event respondents favoured resources for those with the greatest needs and areas with poor health.

3.6 Open survey respondents prioritised current needs (50%), with older respondents favouring this more than younger ones, who preferred prioritising future needs. A significant minority (44%) wanted the focus to be on the future long-term needs of residents.

Balancing the budget

3.7 Open survey respondents were asked about approaches to balancing the budget. These included:

- Introducing charges for services which are currently free or subsidised
- Reducing or stopping some services to protect others
- Providing local people and communities with the tools to support others and set and deliver local priorities
- Equipping Surrey County Council staff with the skills to work together with communities and partners to deliver services across the county
- Working with partner organisations to provide services

3.8 Most respondents supported increased partnership working (80%), equipping staff to work with partners and communities (70%) and providing local communities with tools to support themselves more (63%). Most residents opposed the idea of reducing or stopping services to protect others (80%) and introducing charges for free or subsidised services (64%).

Council Tax increase – scenario

3.9 Open survey respondents were asked to indicate the circumstances under which they would support or oppose a Council Tax increase. The scenarios residents had to respond to were:

- as an alternative to imposing/increasing fees and charges for services
- if the additional funds will be used to finance long-term investment plans
- only when opportunities to streamline services have been exhausted
- to protect services for the most vulnerable and those without choices
- when the only alternative is to stop delivering some services
- under no circumstances

3.10 The most supported scenarios were to protect services for the vulnerable (67%) and after exhausting streamlining opportunities (66%).

3.11 The most opposed scenario was increasing Council Tax for long-term investment (52% opposed). There was also less support for an increase as an alternative to fees and charges (52% opposed).

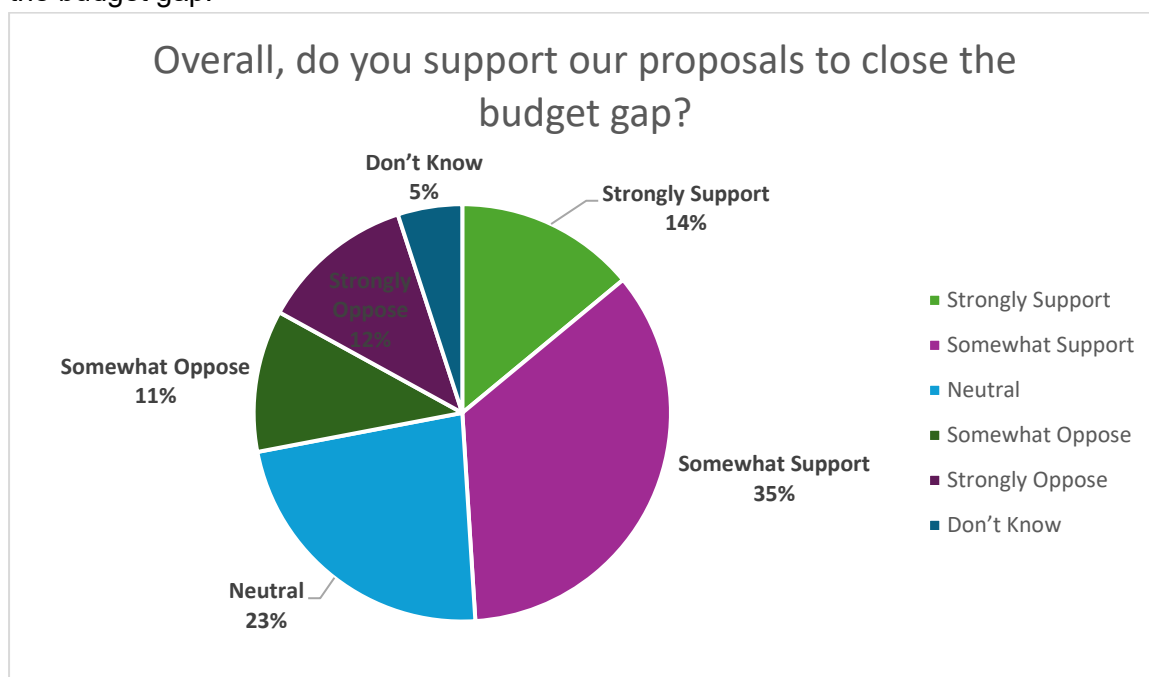
3.12 38% of respondents opposed any Council Tax increase under any circumstances, while 45% recognised legitimate circumstances for a rise.

Phase 2 results

Support for proposals to balance the budget

3.13 Respondents were asked to select one answer to this question to indicate whether or not they supported our proposals to close the budget gap for 2025/26. Overall, 350 (49%) of respondents either 'strongly support' or 'somewhat support' the Council's proposals to close the budget gap. Conversely, 161 respondents (23%) either 'strongly oppose' or 'somewhat oppose' the Council's proposals. A further 163 respondents (23%) selected 'neutral' and the remaining 37 respondents (5%) selected 'don't know'.

3.14 The chart below illustrates the level of support and opposition for proposals to close the budget gap.



3.15 Further analysis of the data shows that support for the proposals increase with age.¹ 41% of those aged 34 and under support the proposals compared to 58% of those aged

¹ The term 'support' describes those who selected either 'strongly support' or 'somewhat support' in their response.

65 and over. Conversely, opposition to the proposals decreases with age. 29% of those aged 34 and under opposed the proposals compared to 13% of those aged 65 and over.²

3.16 Support for the proposals is highest (62%) from those with a household income of more than £30,000 and less than £80,000. 43% of those with a household income of £30,000 and less support the proposals. 49% of those with a household income of more than £80,000 support the proposals, which is in line with the overall results.

3.17 Respondents with a long-standing illness or disability have slightly lower levels of support for the proposals (42%) compared to the overall results (49%).

3.18 Support was slightly higher among female respondents (53%) compared to male respondents (48%).

Considerations for implementation

3.19 After responding to the first question, 401 respondents (56%) provided a comment to explain why they supported or opposed the budget. Stakeholders were concerned about:

- The nature of proposed efficiencies
 - *"The proposals are an ambition and not a plan."*
 - *"Not sure 'transformation programmes' and 'management restructuring' actually happen and work."*
- Council Tax
 - *"Council tax is already too high so increasing that won't increase revenue as you will have an increasing amount of people not being able to afford to pay it"*
- Social Care
 - *"We need more money for essentials like adult social care."*
 - *"I'm concerned by further 'efficiencies' in social care that will impact the most vulnerable people, families and unpaid carers in our communities."*
- Trust in the Council
 - *"I have little faith in the council to address issues within the council."*
 - *"Why should I trust anything the council says or does?"*
- Support for Vulnerable Groups
 - *"THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES!!!"*
 - *"Children, families and lifelong learning needs to be the top priority."*

3.20 Respondents were then asked to share anything that they believed should be considered in the implementation of these budget proposals to deliver better outcomes for Surrey. 439 (61%) respondents provided comments to this question and shared their views on different services such as:

² The base for respondents aged 34 and under was particularly small. Only 44 of 718 respondents were in this group.

- Highways and infrastructure
 - *"Reduce spend in all service areas and only spend on maintaining the existing Highways assets."*
 - *"Road surfaces are appalling with damage caused to vehicles due to poor maintenance and management."*
- Social care and health
 - *"Cutting costs in adult social care/wellbeing and health is counter-intuitive since if people's health is improved, the cost of health reduces."*
- Environmental concerns
 - *"The countryside - protecting our rural spaces and biodiversity is the number one priority for me."*
- Education and lifelong learning
 - *"Children with special needs should be given enough support. Students who struggle in class should be evaluated to see which type of support can be given."*
 - *"Schools! There is no money and no support! It's getting ridiculous and teachers are leaving the profession in droves."*
- Community and Voluntary Sector
 - *"The voluntary sector plugs the gaps which are growing bigger as councils withdraw their funding and effectively provides services for less."*

Other comments

3.21 The final question of the survey invited any other comments from respondents on the draft budget. 363 respondents (51%) shared their views on:

- Budget allocation and cuts
 - *"Costs can be saved by looking at the management structure in the council - there seem to be multiple layers of management, which is completely unnecessary and not cost effective."*
- Highways and grass verges
 - *"Please sort out potholes as a priority. Also please clean up fallen leaves which get wet then freeze and become treacherous."*
- Social care and SEND
 - *"We need more money for essentials like adult social care."*
 - *"SEND must be the top priority."*
- Transparency and communication
 - *"This seems like a box ticking exercise as only people with a financial background could possibly understand the budget."*
 - *"Will we get feedback about the eventual outcome about this?"*
- Environmental concerns
 - *"I am unclear about how, for example, Surrey Fire and Rescue are intending to deal with the changing nature of fire threats due to climate change (heathland fires for example) and technology."*

3.22 A more detailed analysis of responses is currently being undertaken with the results being shared with services for implementation in 2025/26 and to inform the development of proposals to be brought forward for 2026/27.

4. Stakeholder Profile (Demographics, Types of Respondents etc.)

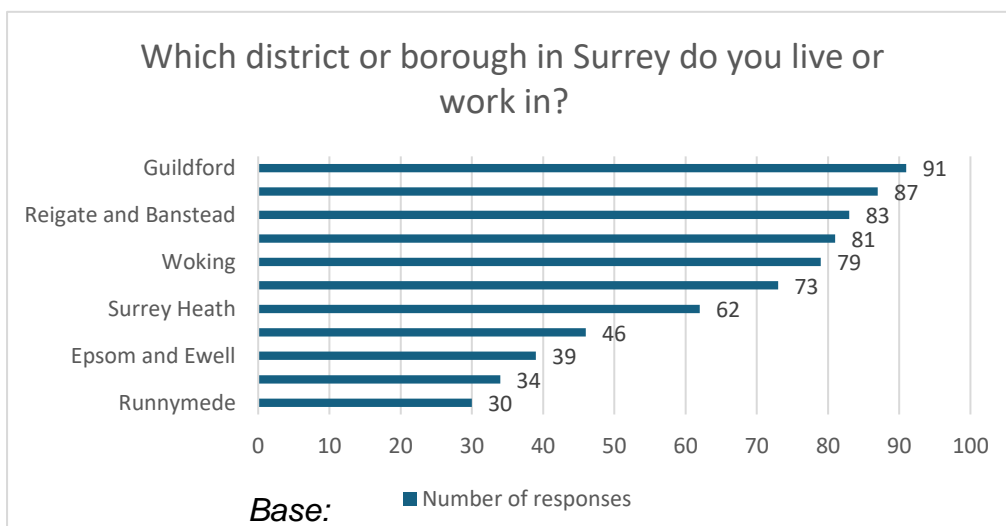
4.1 Between 26 November and 31 December 2024, there were 718 responses to the draft budget consultation for 2025/26.

4.2 Of the 718 responses, 97% respondents were Surrey residents. Other stakeholders included local businesses, public sector partners, voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations, and elected Members. The data presented below excludes respondents or did not answer the questions.

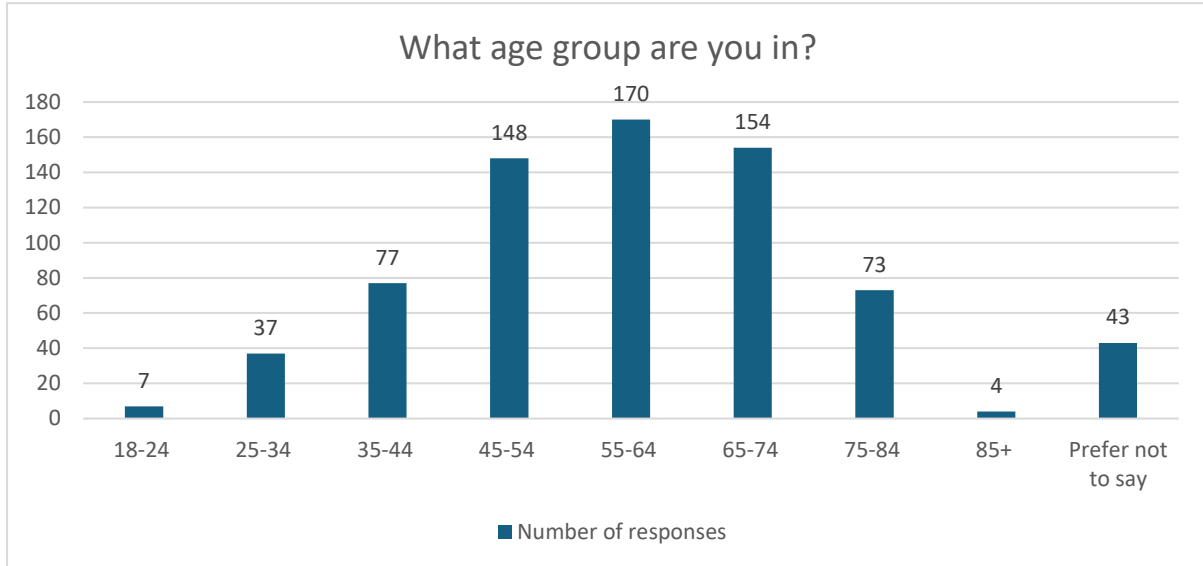
Respondent type	Number of respondents	Percentage (%) of all consultation respondents
I am a Surrey resident	689	97%
I am a Surrey County Council employee	49	7%
I represent or own a local business	27	4%
I work in Surrey but live elsewhere	16	2%
I am responding on behalf of a voluntary, community or faith organisation (please specify below)	10	1%
I am a councillor	8	1%
I am responding on behalf of a public sector partner (e.g. NHS, police, District or Borough Council) (please specify below)	2	0.3%
I am an MP	0	0%
Other (please specify below)	25	4%

Base: 713. NB Respondents were able to select more than one option, so percentages add up to more than 100.

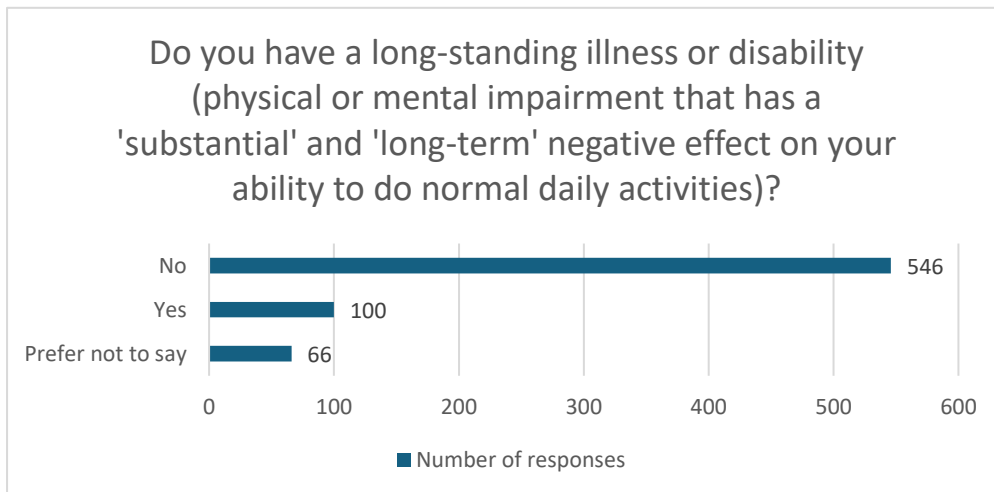
4.3 Of those who responded to the consultation, the greatest number of responses came from Guildford borough (91). The lowest number of responses came from residents living or working in Runnymede (30).



4.4 Residents aged between 55 and 64 (170 or 24%) were most likely to respond to the draft budget consultation survey. The lowest response rate was from residents aged between 18 and 24 (7 or 1%).



4.5 46 (77%) respondents did not have a long-standing illness or disability (physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities). 100 (14%) respondents said they did have a long-standing illness or disability. This means people with a disability are well represented in the responses against the Surrey disabled population of 13.8%.³



4.6 There were slightly more female respondents (338 or 48%), than male (294 or 41%). 78 (11%) respondents preferred not to declare the sex they were assigned at birth. Of those that responded, only 3 residents declared that their current gender identity was not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

³ [2021 Census: Disability | Surrey-i](#) – Disabled under the Equality Act

4.7 In terms of ethnicity, 81% of respondents said they were from a White ethnic background, which is slightly more than, but not statistically representative of, Surrey's wider population.⁴ People of mixed ethnicity and Asian or Asian British backgrounds were the next most represented at just over 3% for each ethnicity – those of Asian or Asian British backgrounds were underrepresented compared to the wider population. 13% of respondents said they would prefer not to disclose their ethnic identity.

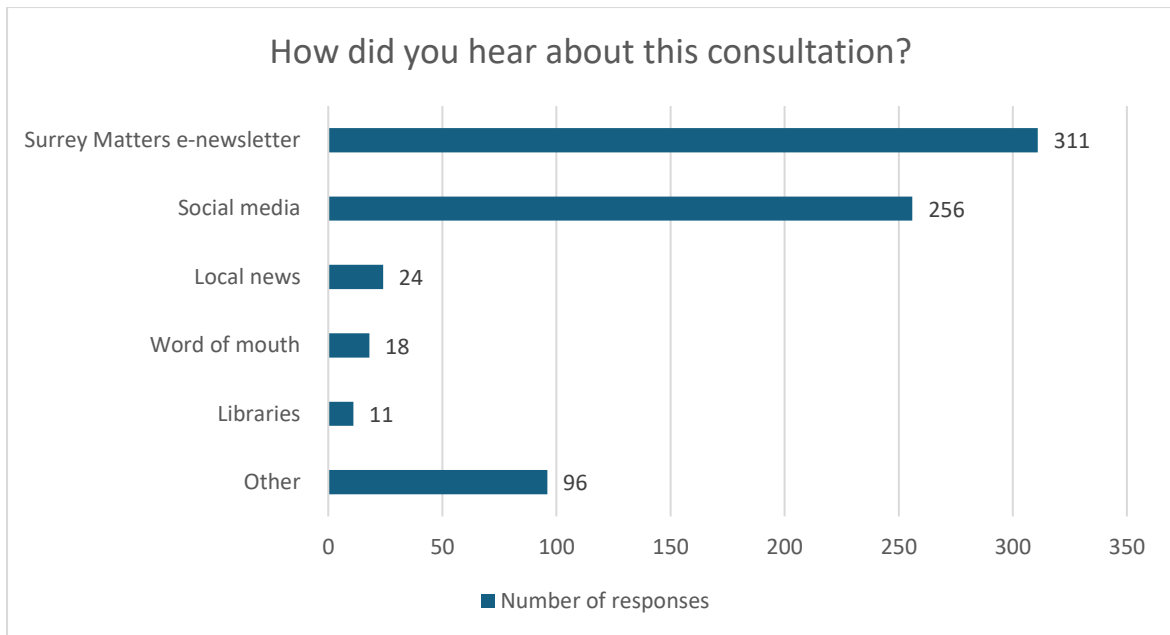
Ethnic background	Number of respondents	Percentage (%) of respondents
White – British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Other	572	81%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups – White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, Other	19	3%
Asian/Asian British – Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Other	21	3%
Other ethnic group – Arab, Other	4	1%
Black/African/Black British – African, Caribbean, Other	3	0.4%
Prefer not to say	91	13%

Base: 710

4.8 When asked how they had heard about the consultation, most respondents were prompted to participate through the Surrey Matters e-newsletter (311 or 44%). 256 (36%) respondents had heard about the consultation through social media, while others heard about it through more traditional methods, such as word of mouth (18 or 3%) or local news (24 or 3%).

4.9 97 respondents said they had learned of the consultation through other channels. For example, some via email and others through promotion by local voluntary, community and faith organisations.

⁴ [Census 2021: Ethnic Group | Surrey-i](#)



Base: 706. NB Respondents were able to select more than one option, so percentages add up to more than 100.

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