



# Budget Consultation 2023/24

## Full results summary

**southampton**  
**dataobservatory** 

Data, Intelligence & Insight, *January 2023*



# Introduction & methodology



- Southampton City Council undertook public consultation on to seek views on the new budget proposals for 2023/24. This included asking for feedback on the following proposals:
  - - Removal of the one-month council tax exemption for empty and unfurnished properties.
  - - Energy cost efficiency through the reduction of street lighting and switching to LED lighting.
  - - Increase in service charges, rent, and landlord controlled heating costs in council owned homes.
- This consultation took place between **09 November 2022 to 10 January 2023**.
- The aim of this consultation was to
  - Communicate clearly to residents and stakeholders the budget proposals for 2023/24;
  - Ensure any resident, business or stakeholder who wished to comment on the proposals had the opportunity to do so, enabling them to raise any impacts the proposals may have, and;
  - Allow participants to propose alternative suggestions for consideration which they feel could achieve the objectives in a different way.
- This report summarises the aims, principles, methodology and results of the public consultation; it provides a summary of the consultation responses both for the consideration of decision makers and any interested individuals and stakeholders
- It is important to be mindful that a consultation is not a vote – it is an opportunity for stakeholders to express their views, concerns and alternatives to a proposal; equally, responses from the consultation should be considered in full before any final decisions are made
- This report outlines in detail the representations made during the consultation period so that decision makers can consider what has been said alongside other information



Southampton City Council is committed to consultations of the highest standard, which are meaningful and comply with the *Gunning Principles* (considered to be the legal standard for consultations):

1. Proposals are still at a formative stage (a final decision has not yet been made)
2. There is sufficient information put forward in the proposals to allow 'intelligent consideration'
3. There is adequate time for consideration and response
4. Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made



New Conversations 2.0  
LGA guide to engagement



## Rules: The Gunning Principles

They were coined by Stephen Sedley QC in a court case in 1985 relating to a school closure consultation (R v London Borough of Brent ex parte Gunning). Prior to this, very little consideration had been given to the laws of consultation. Sedley defined that a consultation is only legitimate when these four principles are met:

- 1. proposals are still at a formative stage**  
A final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by the decision makers
- 2. there is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration'**  
The information provided must relate to the consultation and must be available, accessible, and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response
- 3. there is adequate time for consideration and response**  
There must be sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate in the consultation. There is no set timeframe for consultation,<sup>1</sup> despite the widely accepted twelve-week consultation period, as the length of time given for consultee to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation
- 4. 'conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made**  
Decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account

These principles were reinforced in 2001 in the 'Coughlan Case (R v North and East Devon Health Authority ex parte Coughlan<sup>2</sup>), which involved a health authority closure and confirmed that they applied to all consultations, and then in a Supreme Court case in 2014 (R ex parte Moseley v LB Haringey<sup>3</sup>), which endorsed the legal standing of the four principles. Since then, the Gunning Principles have formed a strong legal foundation from which the legitimacy of public consultations is assessed, and are frequently referred to as a legal basis for judicial review decisions.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In some local authorities, their local voluntary Compact agreement with the third sector may specify the length of time they are required to consult for. However, in many cases, the Compact is either inactive or has been cancelled so the consultation timeframe is open to debate

<sup>2</sup> BAILII, [England and Wales Court of Appeal \(Civil Decision\) Decisions](#), Accessed: 13 December 2016.

<sup>3</sup> BAILII, [United Kingdom Supreme Court](#), Accessed: 13 December 2016

<sup>4</sup> The information used to produce this document has been taken from the Law of Consultation training course provided by The Consultation Institute



- The agreed approach for this consultation was to use an online questionnaire as the main route for feedback; questionnaires enable an appropriate amount of explanatory and supporting information to be included in a structured way, helping to ensure respondents are aware of the background and detail of the proposals.
- Respondents could also write letters or emails to provide feedback on the proposals: emails or letters from stakeholders that contained consultation feedback were collated and analysed as a part of the overall consultation.
- The consultation was promoted in the following ways:
  - Press release;
  - Council e-bulletins;
  - Social media channels;
  - Southampton City Council website;
  - The link was also shared with organisations directly impacted by the proposals, including local letting agents.
- All questionnaire results have been analysed and presented in graphs within this report. Respondents were also given opportunities throughout the questionnaire to provide written feedback on the proposals. All written responses and questionnaire comments have been read and then assigned to categories based upon sentiment or theme.



# Who are the respondents?

## Total respondents

673

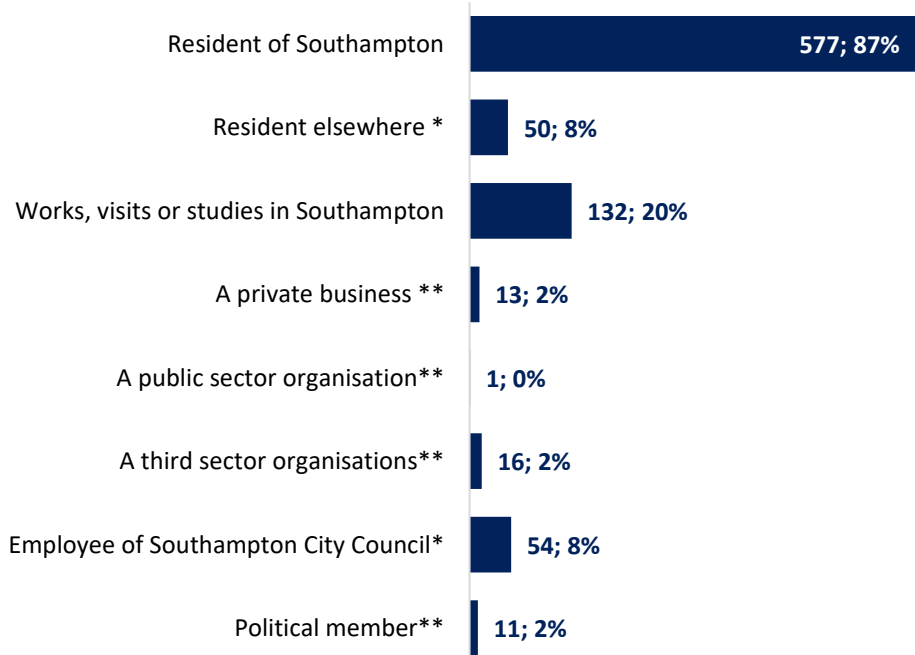
\*Fewer than 100 respondents. \*\*Fewer than 50 respondents.  
All graphs on this page are by count; percentage.

	No. of responses
Questionnaire	671
Emails / letters	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>673</b>

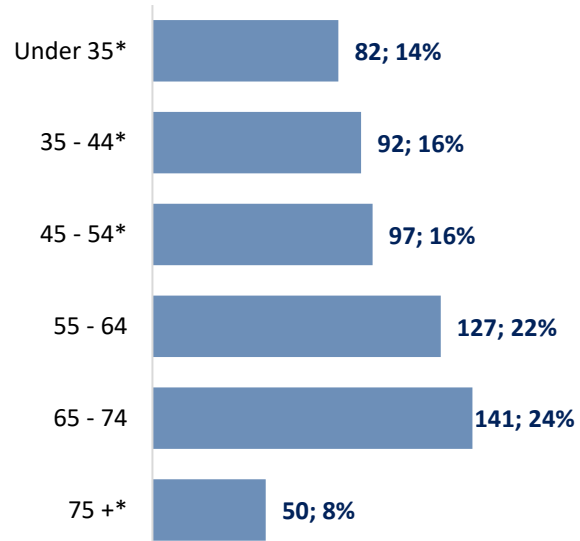
## Gender



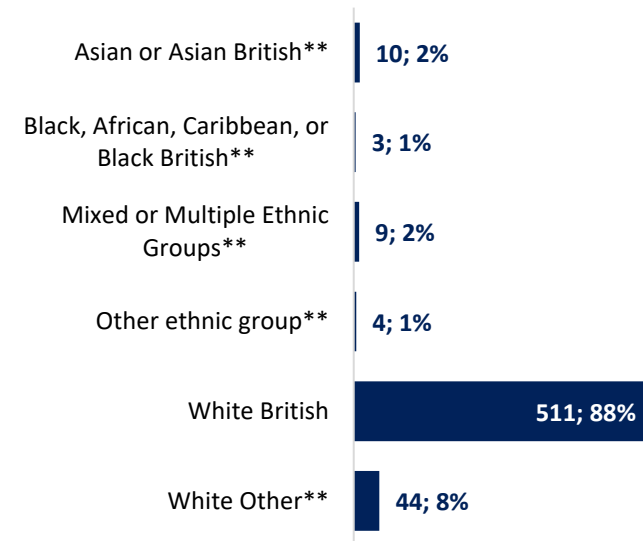
## Reason for interest in consultation



## Age



## Ethnic group



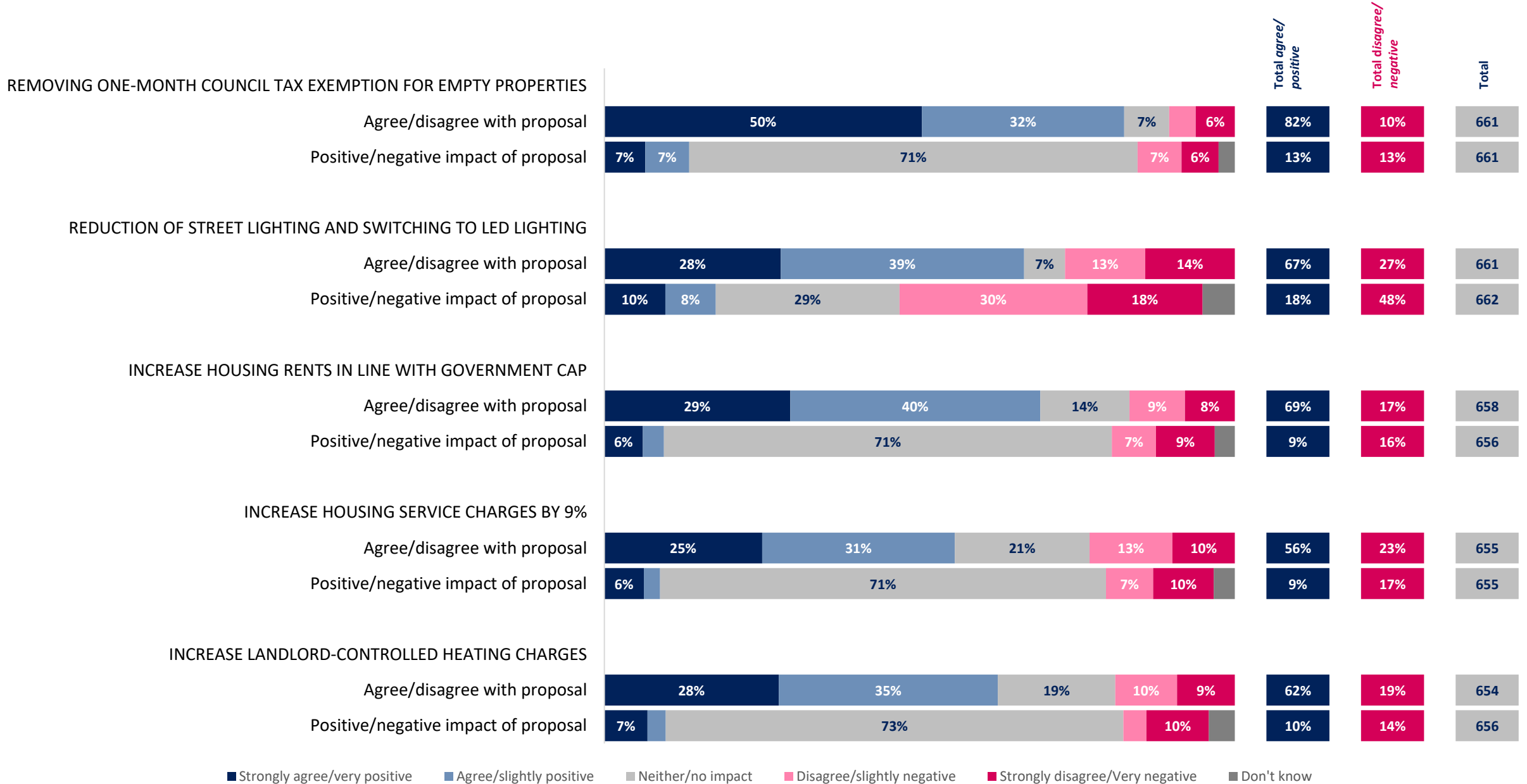


# Responses & analysis

Summary of key findings



# Summary of key findings







- **82%** of respondents **agreed** with the proposal to **remove the one-month Council Tax exemption for empty and unfurnished properties**, with 71% saying that this would have no impact on them
- **67% agreed** with the proposed **reductions in street lighting**, however **48%** said that this would have a **negative impact**
- Respondents **agreed** with **all three housing charges-related proposals** between 56% and 69%, with between 71% and 73% saying that these proposals would have no impact on them
- However, responses to the housing charges-related proposals among **tenants of Council-owned homes**, and respondents with **landlord-controlled heating**, were mixed – for example, while both groups agreed with the **proposal to increase rents** (50% and 59% *agree* respectively), both also said that this proposal would have a **negative impact** (68% and 59% *negative impact*)



## Responses & analysis

Removal of the one-month Council Tax exemption  
for empty and unfurnished properties



## Removal of the one-month Council Tax exemption for empty and unfurnished properties

Respondents were asked about the following proposal:

*“Currently, anyone who has an empty and unfurnished property does not have to pay council tax for their first month. We are proposing to remove this exemption from April 2023 which would mean that council tax would be payable from their first month.*

*We estimate this would generate approximately £600,000 of additional income per year and would incentivise owners to bring empty properties back into use quickly and help with the housing shortage.”*

Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal, and if they thought the proposal would have a positive or negative impact on them or their families or businesses.

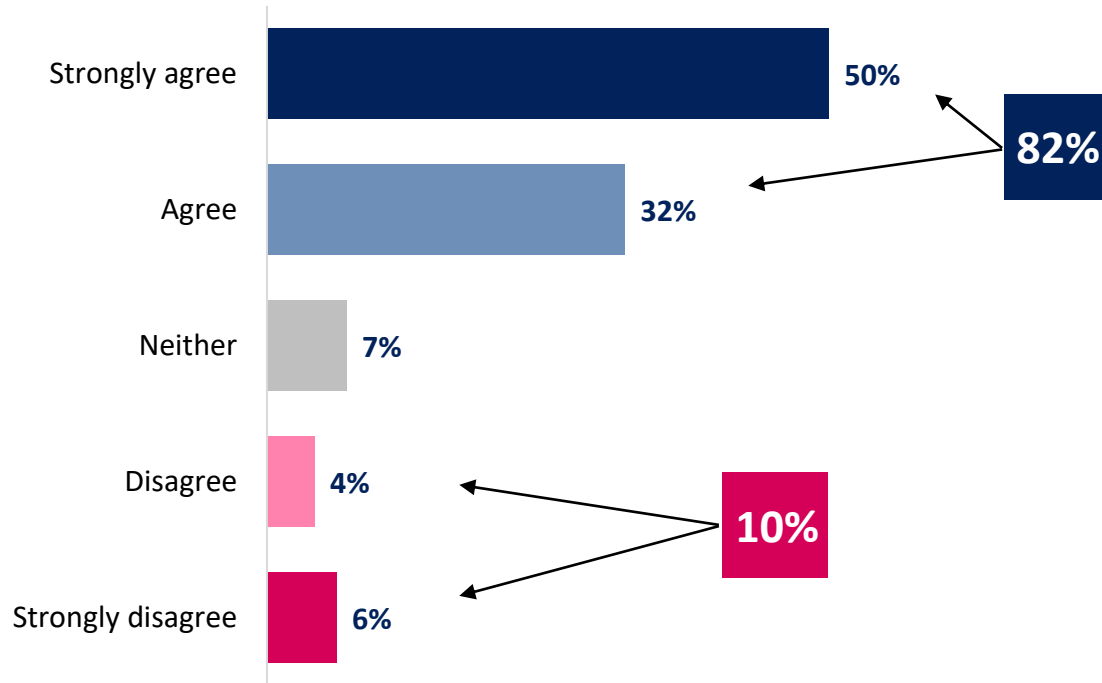


## Key findings

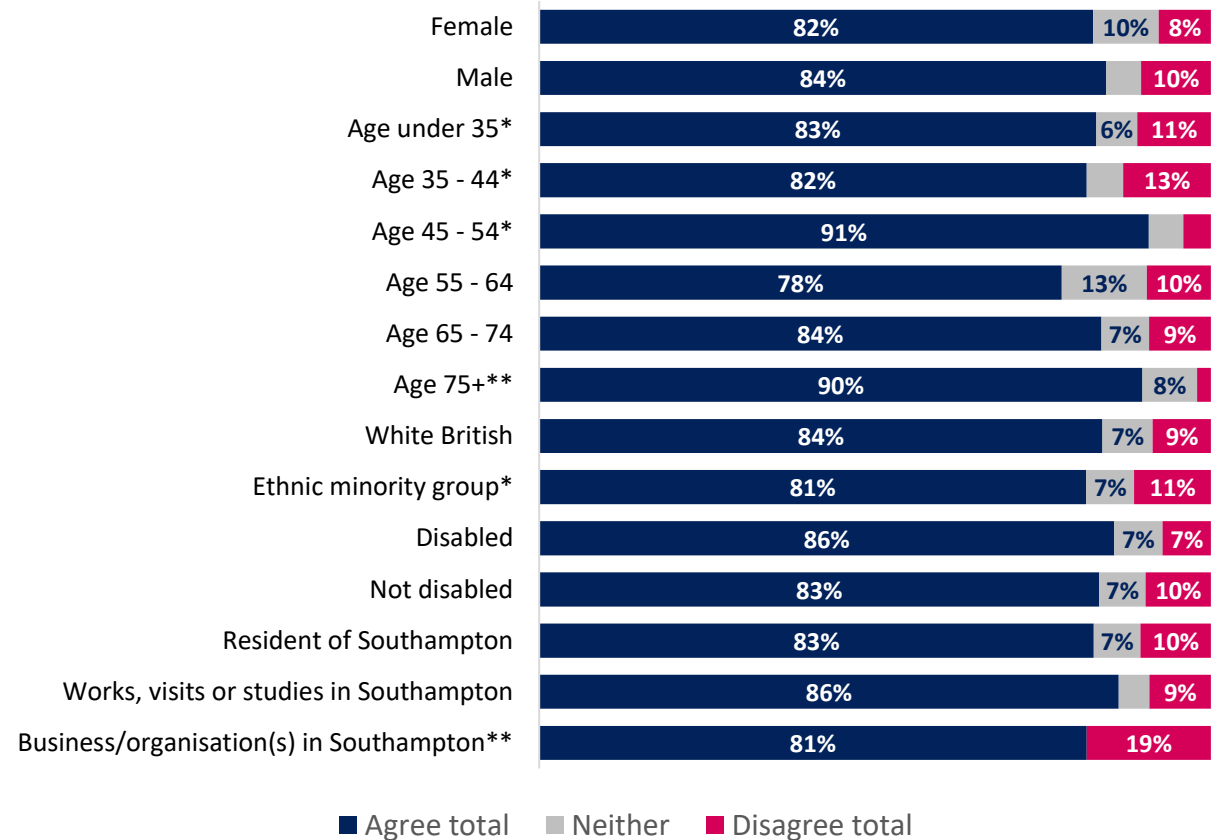
- 82% of respondents *agree* with this proposal, including 50% who *strongly agree*
- All breakdowns *agree* with the proposal by more than 78%

**Question** To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposal? “Removal of the one-month council tax exemption for empty and unfurnished properties”

## Overall



## Broken down by demographics



\* Small sample size – fewer than 100 respondents

\*\* Small sample size – fewer than 50 respondents



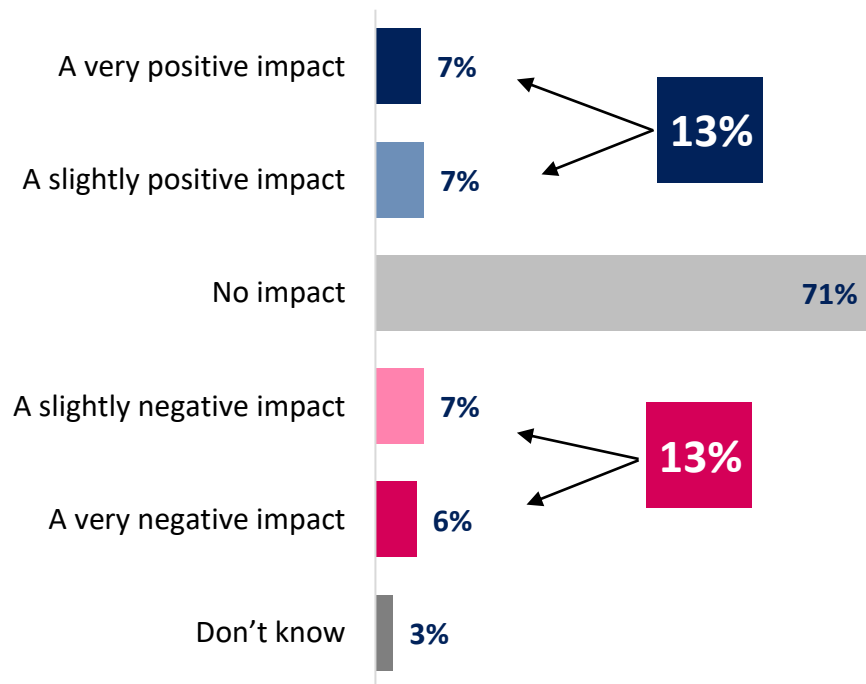
# Impact levels of removing the one-month Council Tax exemption

## Key findings

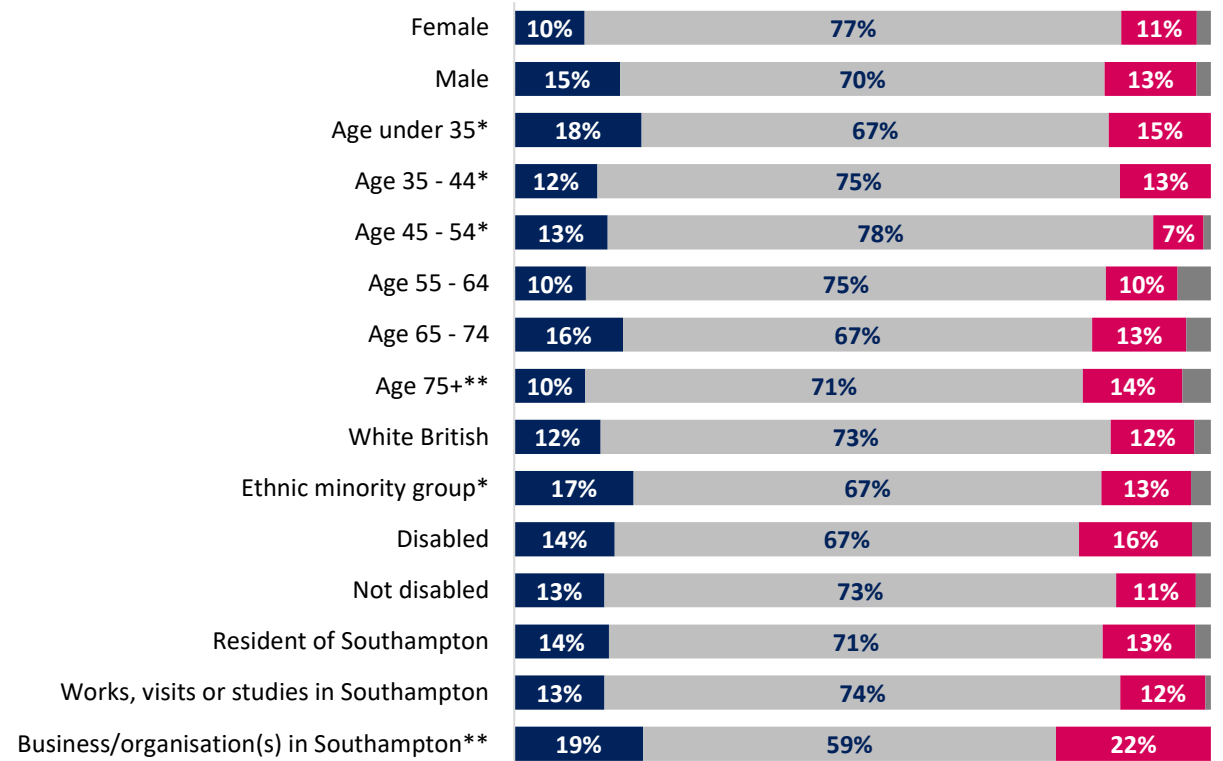
- 71% of respondents said that this proposal would have *no impact* on them
- All breakdowns said that this proposal would have *no impact* by more than 59%

**Question** If this was to be implemented, what impact do you feel this may have on you, your family or your business? *“Removal of the one-month Council Tax exemption for empty and unfurnished properties”*

## Overall



## Broken down by demographics



■ Positive impact total ■ No impact ■ Negative impact total ■ Don't know

\* Small sample size – fewer than 100 respondents

\*\* Small sample size – fewer than 50 respondents

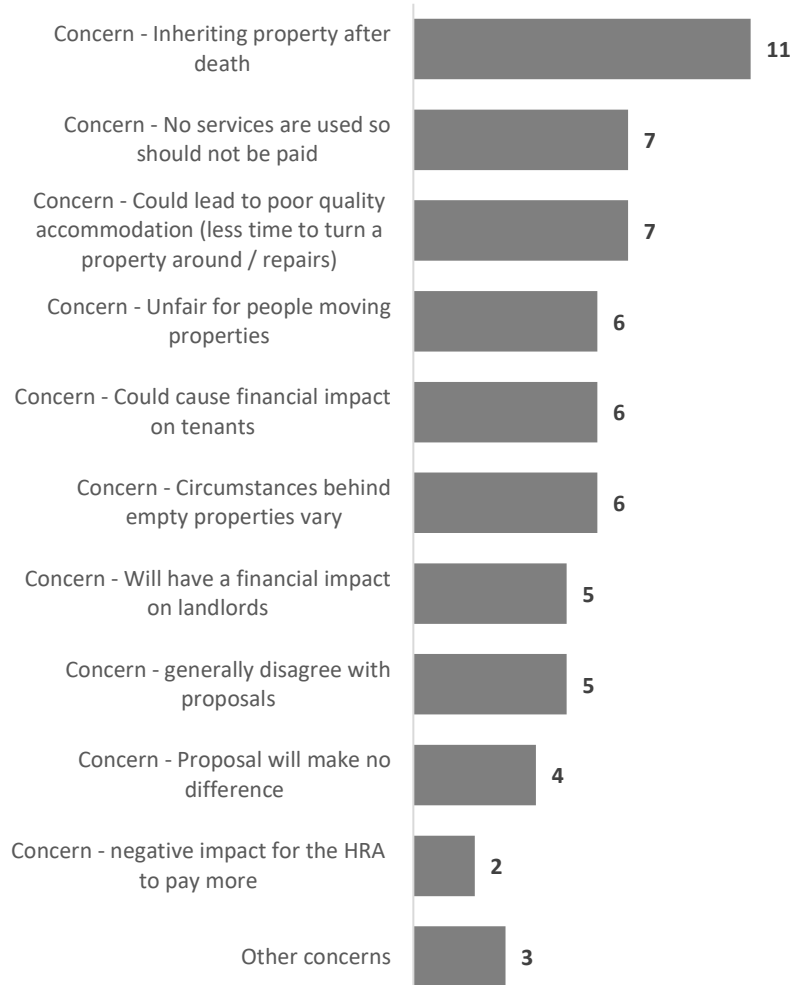


# Removal of council tax exemption – Free text responses

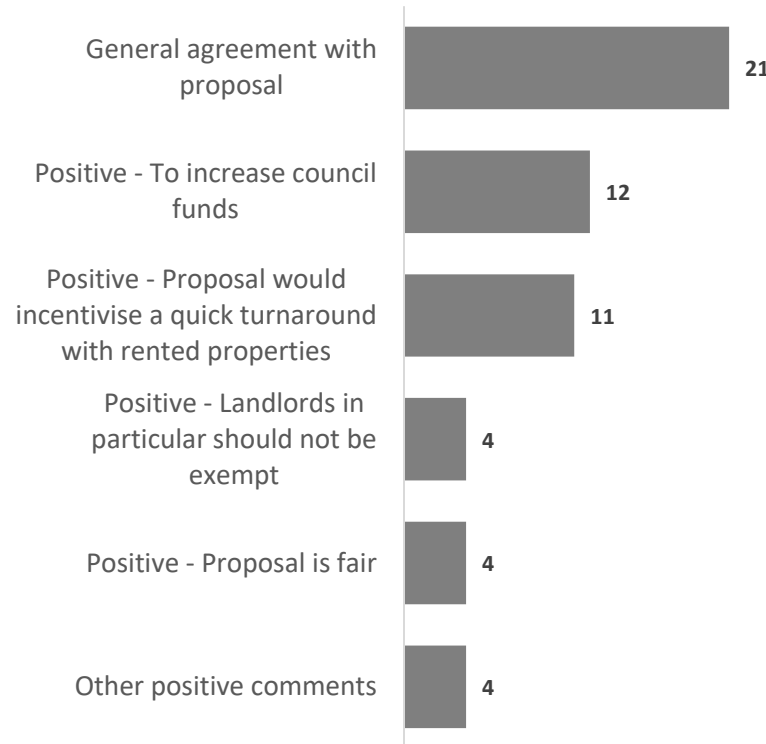
## Removal of the one-month council tax exemption for empty and unfurnished properties – any comments, impacts, suggestions or alternatives you feel we should consider

The following graphs are presented in respondent count

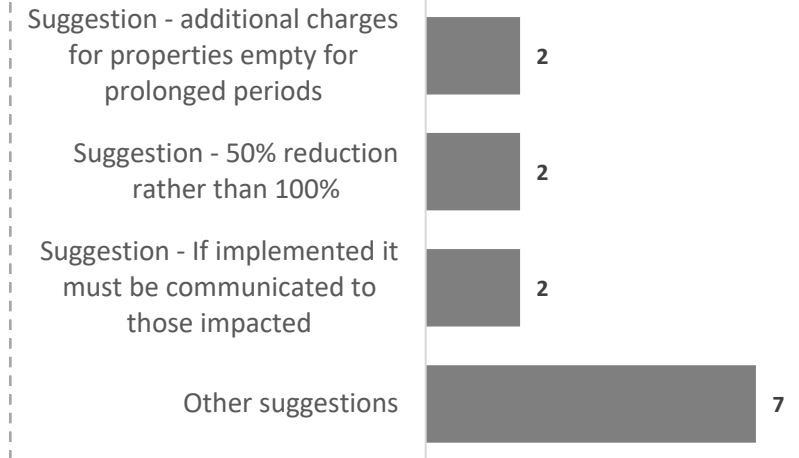
### Concerns / negative comments



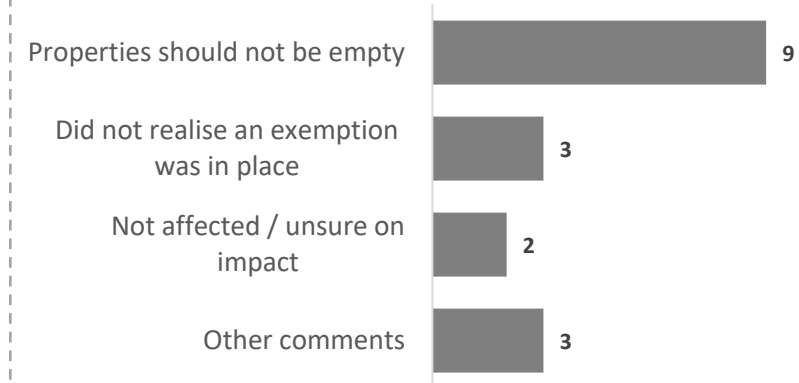
### Positive comments



### Suggestions



### Other comments





## Responses & analysis

Reduction of street lighting



Respondents were asked about the following proposal:

*“We are proposing to look at options for energy cost efficiency and environmental benefit through the reduction of street lighting in some locations and switching to LED lighting.*

*We estimate that providing street lighting at current levels will cost around an additional £2 million next year and similar or more each year in the future. We do not think this is good value for money for local taxpayers. Switching off some lights for a period of time each night could result in a saving of around £450,000 next year.*

*Non-residential roads, illuminated bollards and illuminated signs would not be within the scope of this proposal and their lighting would be unaltered. In addition, we would introduce an exemption policy where particular locations would not have their lighting reduced. For example, this could include: city and district centres; parks and open spaces; main traffic routes; and where pedestrian safety may be a concern.*

*A reduction in street lighting is something that many other local authorities within the country have done or are now considering to help tackle a rise in energy costs.*

*Research and studies from other areas of the country have shown reasonable evidence that, with a comprehensive exemptions scheme, the city should not be subject to an increase in crime as a result of this proposal.”*

Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposal, and if they thought the proposal would have a positive or negative impact on them or their families or businesses.





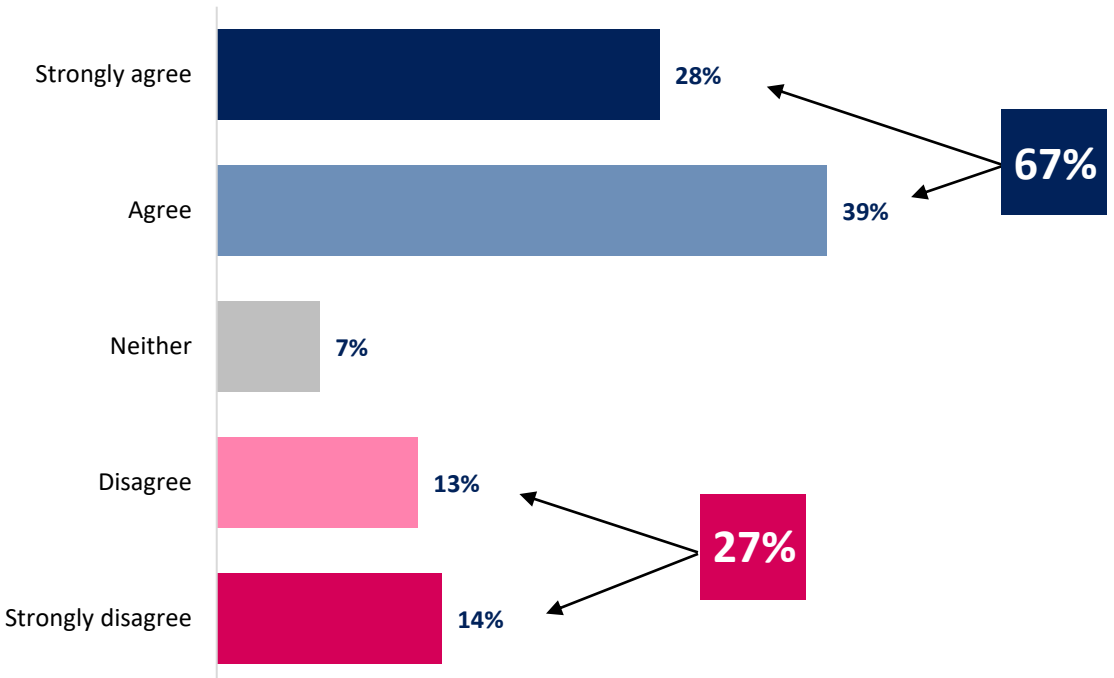
# Agreement levels with reductions in street lighting

## Key findings

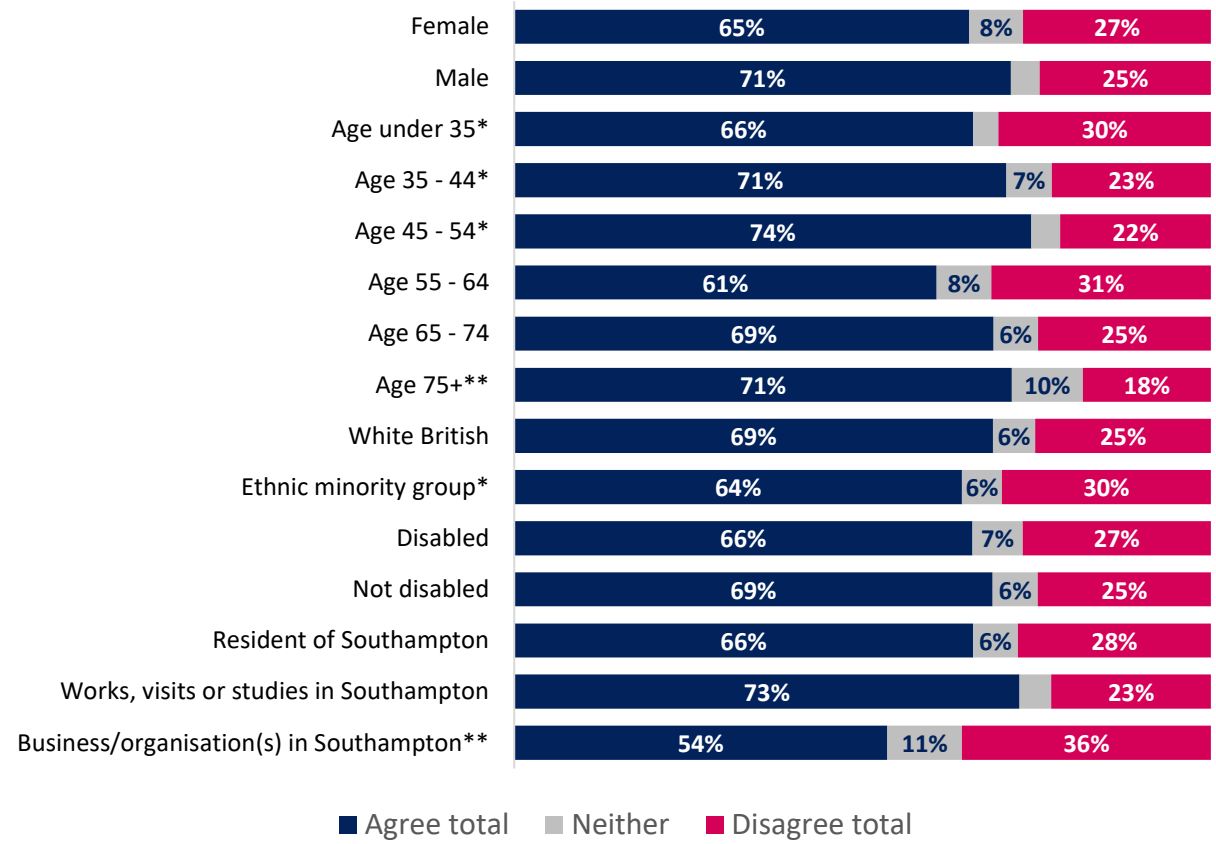
- 67% of respondents *agreed* with this proposal, compared to 27% that *disagreed*
- Female respondents responded *agree* (65%) to a lesser extent than male (71%)
- Similarly, those aged between 55 and 64 responded *agree* (61%) to a lesser extent than those aged between 65 and 74 (68%)
- All breakdowns responded *agree* by more than 54%

**Question** To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposal? “Energy cost efficiency through the reduction of street lighting and switching to LED lighting”

## Overall



## Broken down by demographics



\* Small sample size – fewer than 100 respondents  
 \*\* Small sample size – fewer than 50 respondents



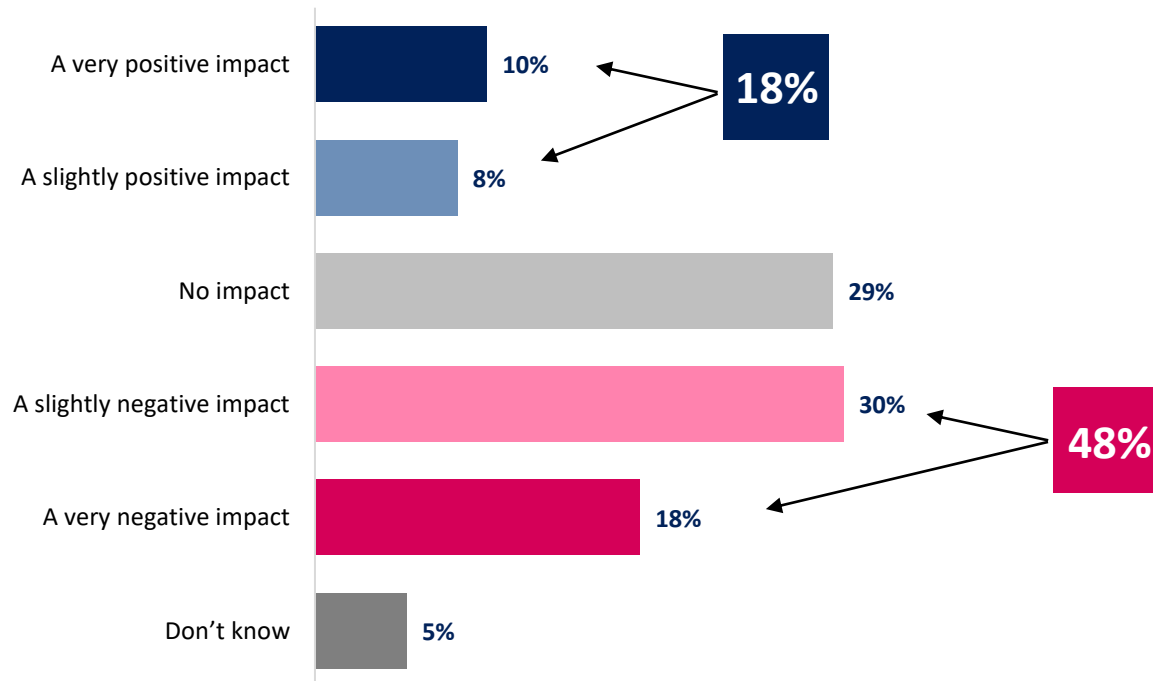
# Impact levels of reductions in street lighting

## Key findings

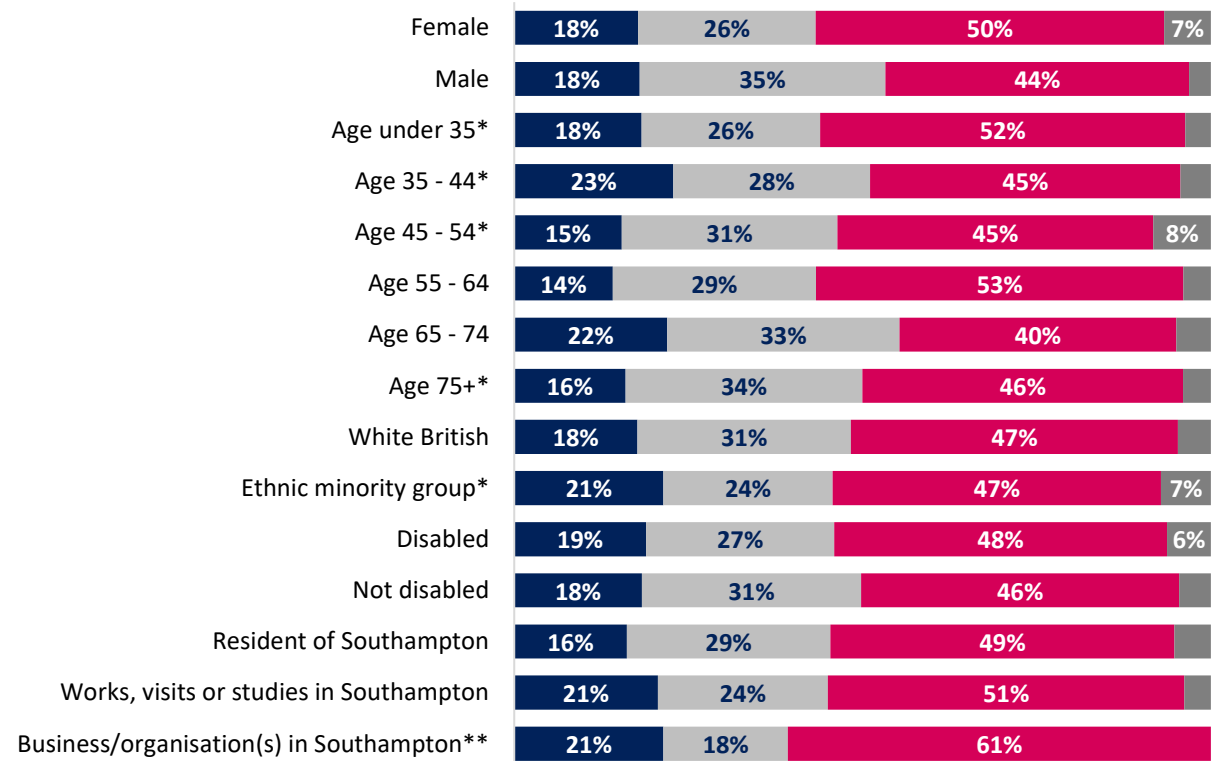
- Almost half (48%) of respondents said that this proposal would have a *negative* impact
- This includes 50% of women, 53% of those aged between 55 and 64, and 51% of those that work, visit, or study in Southampton

**Question** If this was to be implemented, what impact do you feel this may have on you, your family or your business? *“Energy cost efficiency through the reduction of street lighting and switching to LED lighting”*

## Overall



## Broken down by demographics



■ Positive impact total ■ No impact ■ Negative impact total ■ Don't know

\* Small sample size – fewer than 100 respondents

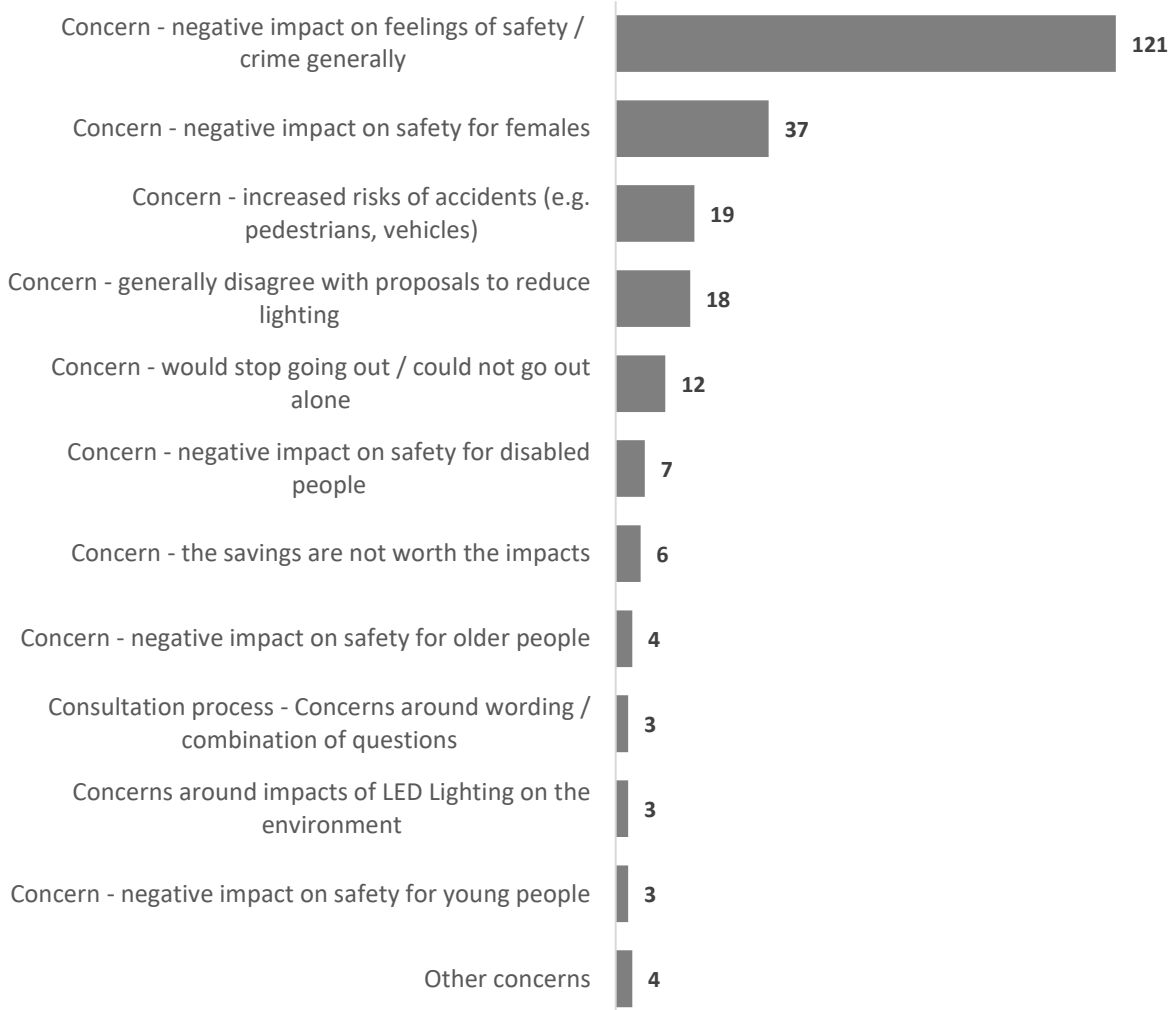
\*\* Small sample size – fewer than 50 respondents



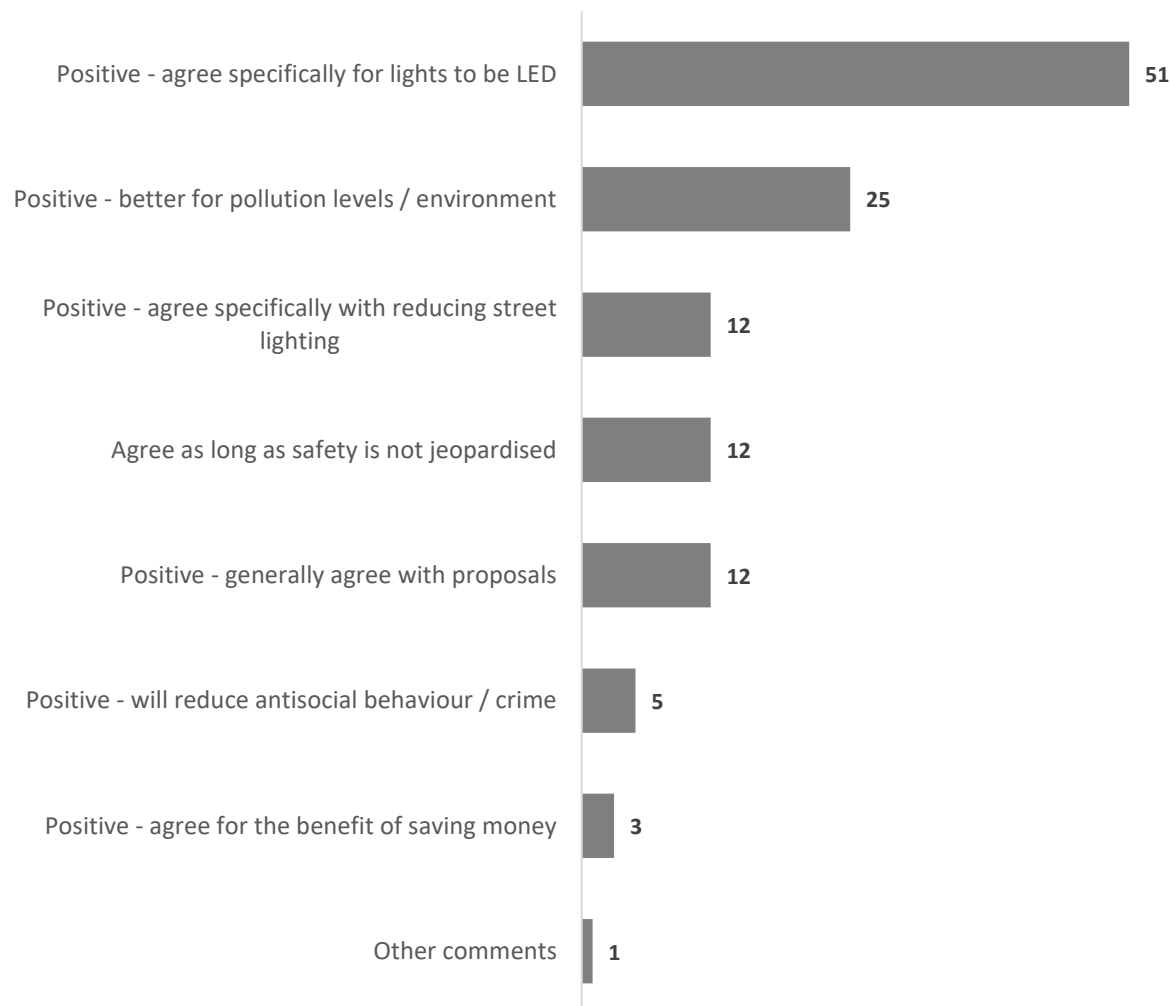
## Energy cost efficiency through the reduction of street lighting and switching to LED lighting – any comments, impacts, suggestions or alternatives you feel we should consider

The following graphs are presented in respondent count

### Concerns / negative comments



### Positive and other comments

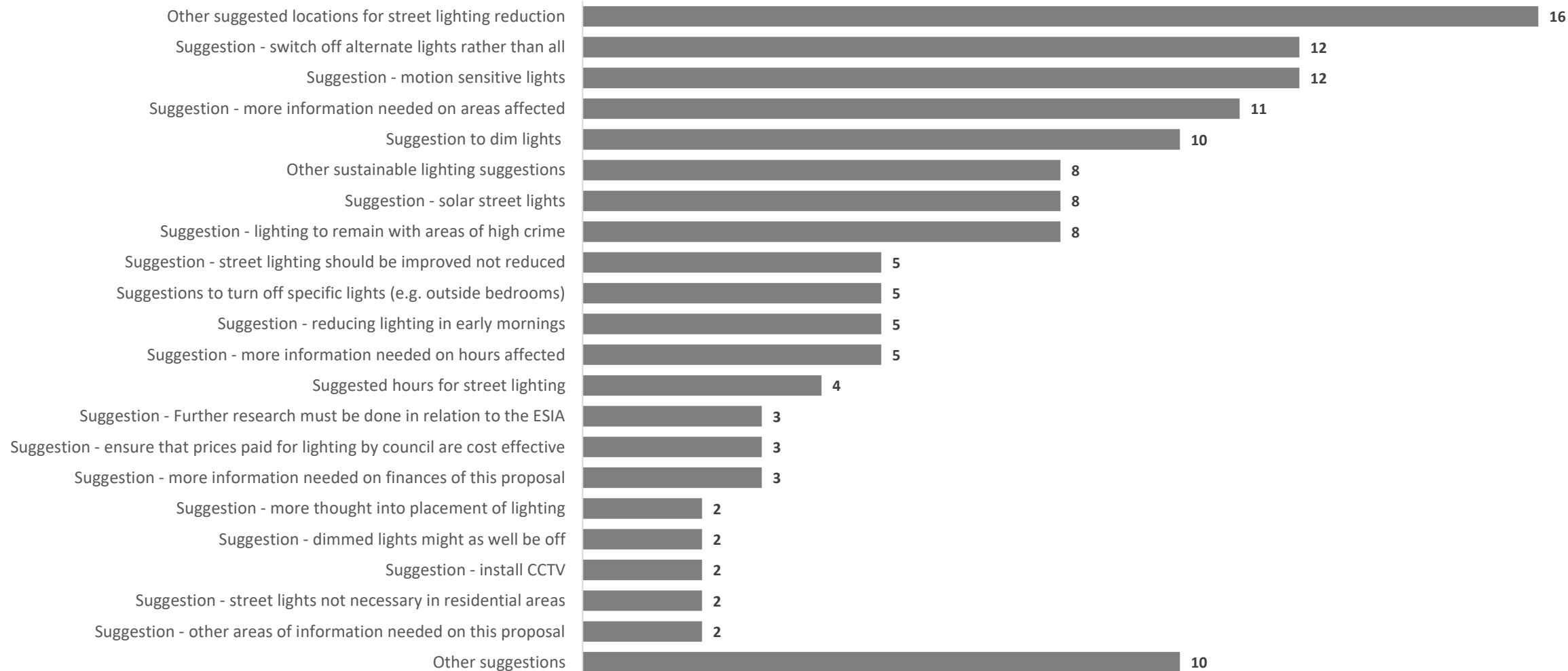




## Energy cost efficiency through the reduction of street lighting and switching to LED lighting – any comments, impacts, suggestions or alternatives you feel we should consider

The following graphs are presented in respondent count

### Suggestions





# Responses & analysis

Changes to housing charges



Respondents were asked about the following proposals:

***“Increase Housing Rents in line with the Government Cap***

*We propose to increase rent from April 2023 in line with the Government Cap on social housing rent increases. We do not know what increase this will be yet. The Government recently ran a consultation on putting a cap in place on rent increases for the next financial year, within options at 3%, 5% or 7% being considered. We are waiting for their final decision. However, we do not propose to increase it any higher than the Government cap.*

*For those who receive Universal Credit and Housing Benefit payments, increases to rent and service charges would be covered within those payments. We estimate this is to be the case for around 3 in 4 tenants.*

*Depending on the final decision by Government on the cap, we estimate this might generate approximately £1,301,000 of additional income per annum.*

***Increase Housing Service Charges by 9%***

*Some tenants and leaseholders of council owned homes are required to pay a service charge towards the cost of services such as cleaning, maintaining communal areas or grounds and door entry. We propose to increase the Housing Service Charges by 9% from April 2023 in order to pay for the services that these charges cover. This is as a result of the cost increases experienced and expected for 2023/24.*

*We estimate this would generate approximately £169,000 of additional income per annum.”*



## ***“Increase Landlord Controlled Heating charges***

*Some tenants and leaseholders of council-owned homes are part of a Landlord Controlled Heating scheme. The council pays for this energy and then charges the tenants and leaseholders who use it. The cost of providing this energy in the current year will be around £7.7 million and, as charges to tenants have not increased as prices have risen, we are forecasting a deficit on this energy provision of £3.7 million this year. At current prices we estimate that the cost of providing energy next year will be £9.9 million and so we need to increase the amount we charge for the energy to help cover our costs. Even with the proposed increases we will not cover all our costs and the current deficit.*

*Energy costs have increased for every household and business in the country and the Government have recognised this with payments going directly to people to help with their rising energy bills. The proposed increase is in line with the increases faced by everyone and only helps cover the additional cost that the council is paying for the energy.*

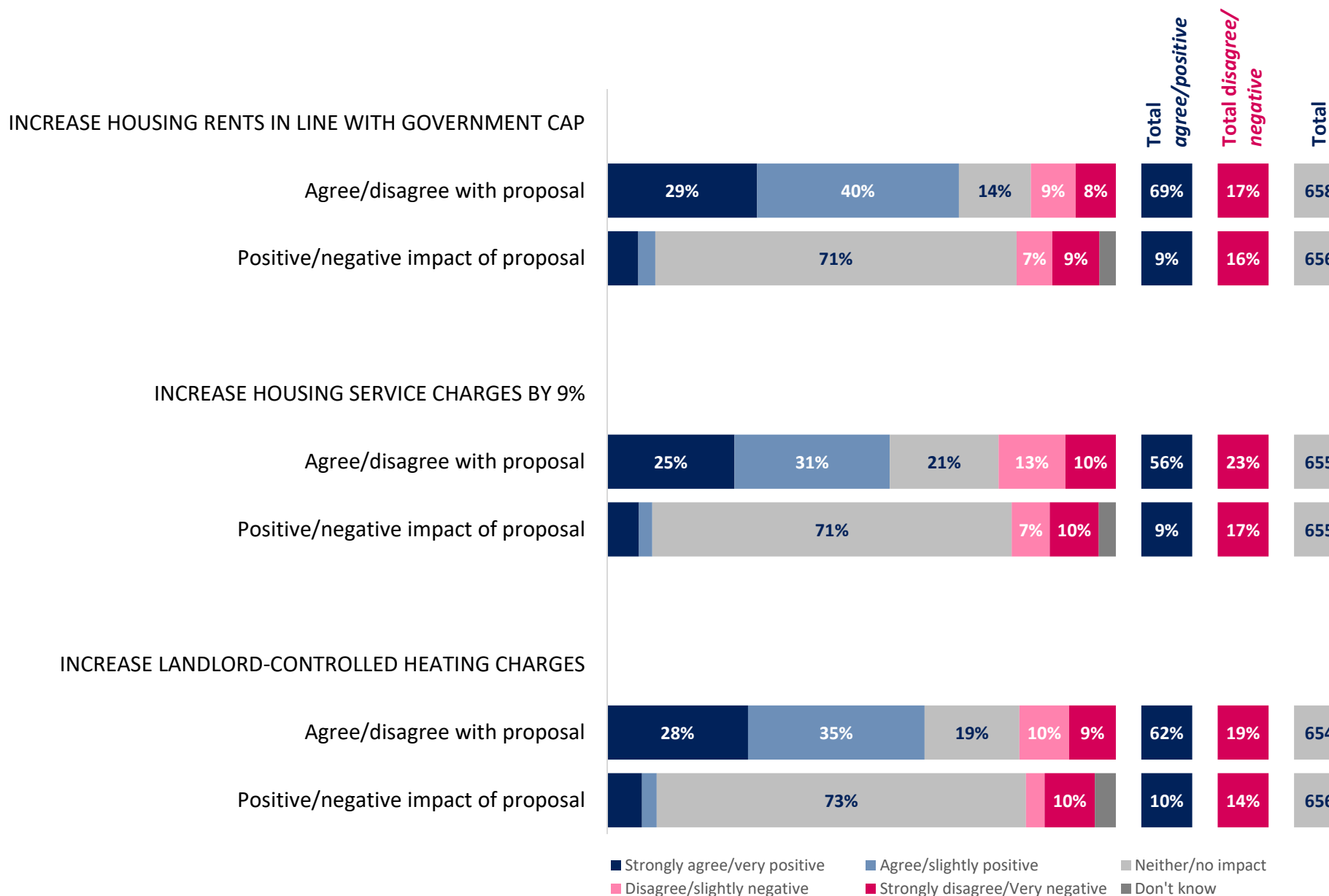
*There are different charging bands for heating which are linked to the floor area of each property. The proposal for increasing Landlord Controlled Heating charges has been developed to ensure that any resident in receipt of Landlord Controlled Heating should not have to pay more than the average costs under the Government’s energy cap, when their Landlord Controlled Heating and their energy provider costs are combined.*

*We estimate this proposal would generate approximately £4.4 million towards covering energy costs.”*

Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposals, and if they thought the proposals would have positive or negative impacts on them or their families or businesses.



# Responses to proposals related to housing charges



## Key findings

- Respondents *agreed* with all three proposals related to changes to housing charges, between 56% and 69%
- Similarly, respondents said that each of these proposals would have *no impact* between 71% and 73%





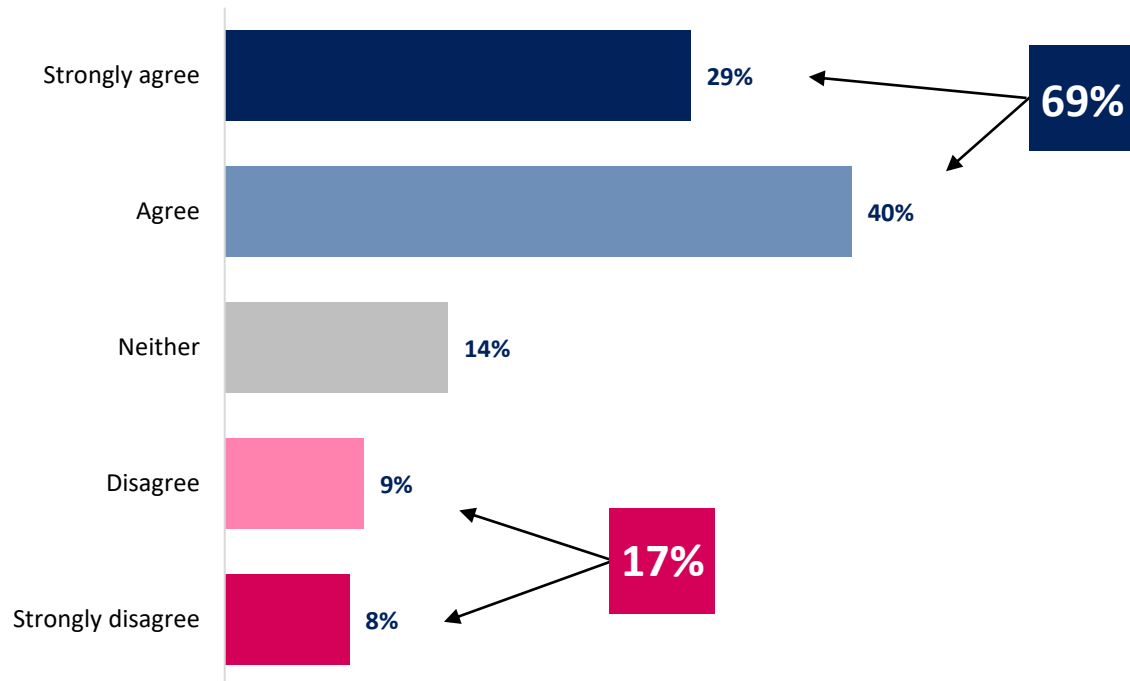
# Agreement levels with increasing housing rents

## Key findings

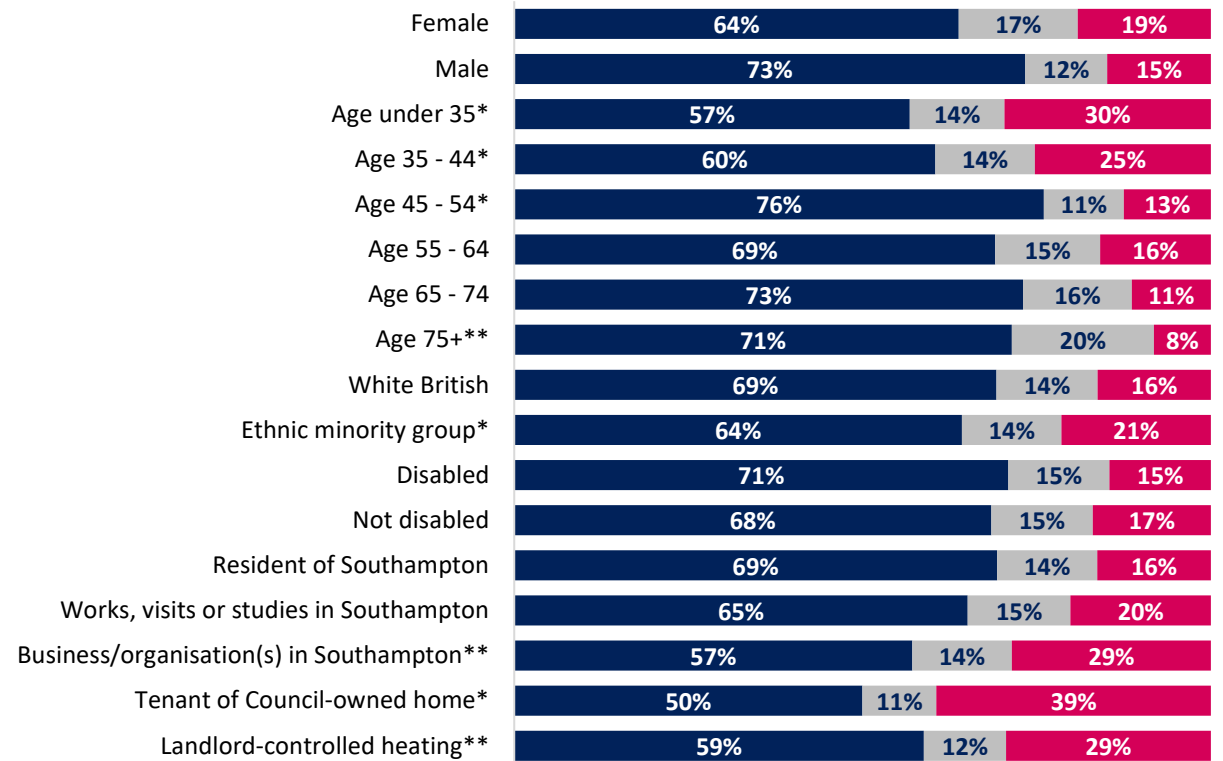
- 69% of respondents *agree* with this proposal, including all breakdowns between 50% and 76%
- Female respondents responded *agree* (64%) to a lesser extent than male (73%) by -9% points
- Tenants of Council-owned homes responded *agree* to the least extent at 50%, with 39% saying they *disagree*

**Question** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following proposals? *Increase Housing Rents in line with the Government cap*

## Overall



## Broken down by demographics



■ Agree total ■ Neither ■ Disagree total

\* Small sample size – fewer than 100 respondents

\*\* Small sample size – fewer than 50 respondents



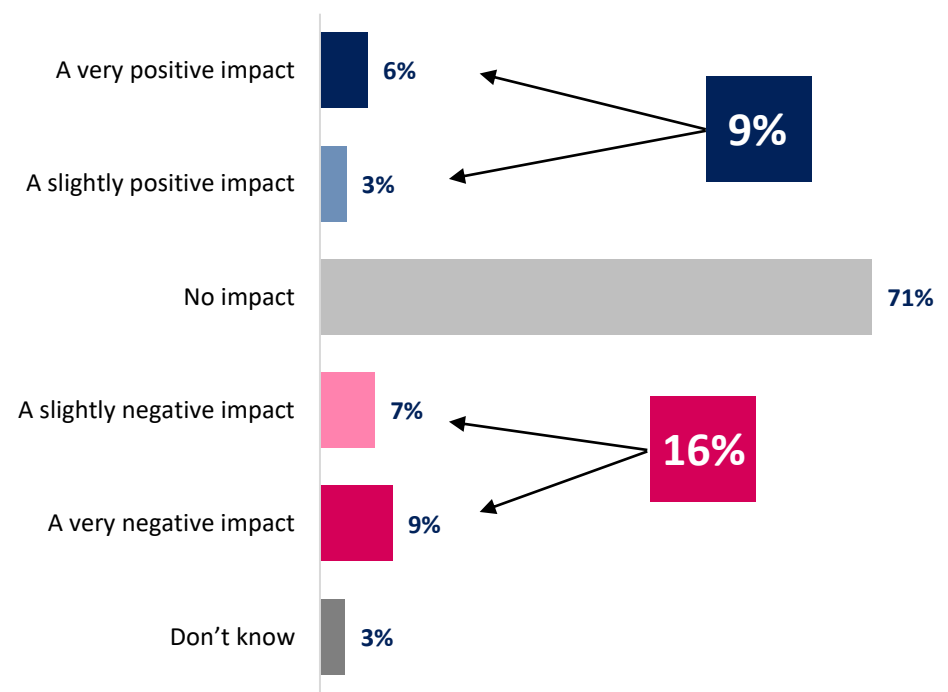
# Impact levels of increasing housing rents

## Key findings

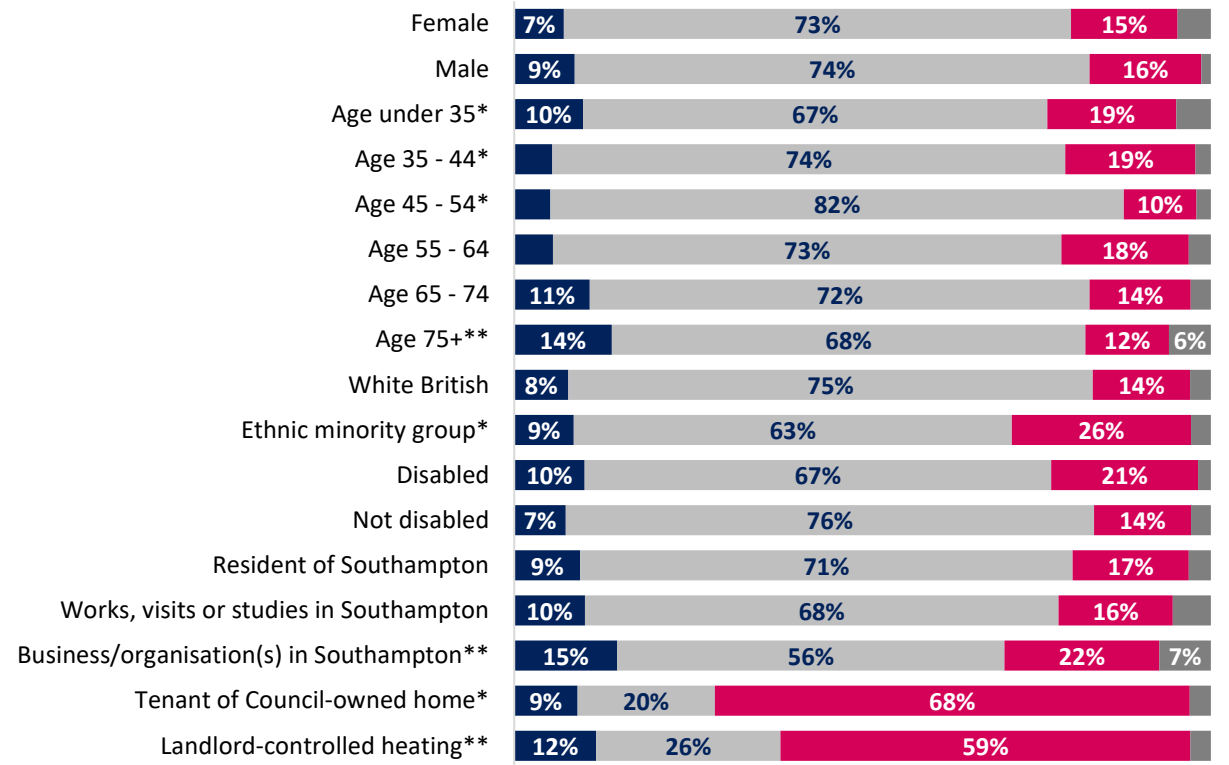
- 71% of respondents said that this proposal would have *no impact*, including between 56% and 82% of a majority of breakdowns
- However, 68% of tenants in Council-owned homes, and 59% of those with landlord-controlled heating, said that this proposal would have a *negative impact*

**Question** If the following proposals were implemented, what impact do you feel this may have on you or your family? *Increase Housing Rents in line with the Government Cap*

## Overall



## Broken down by demographics



■ Positive impact total   ■ No impact   ■ Negative impact total   ■ Don't know

\* Small sample size – fewer than 100 respondents  
 \*\* Small sample size – fewer than 50 respondents



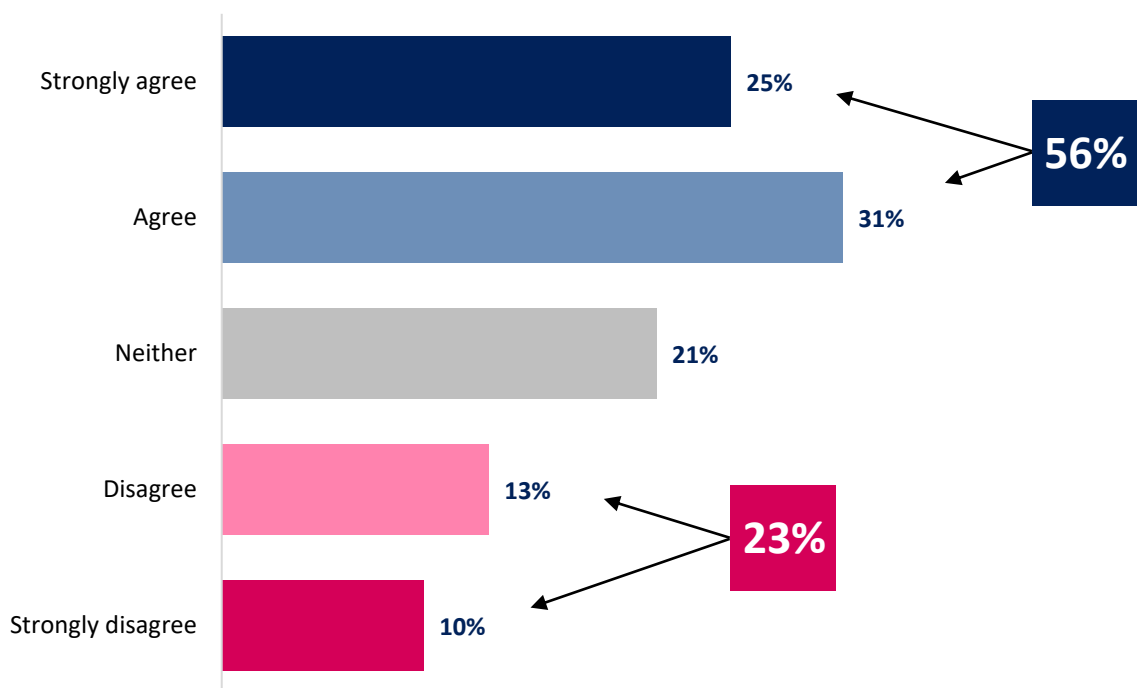
# Agreement levels with increasing Housing Service Charges

## Key findings

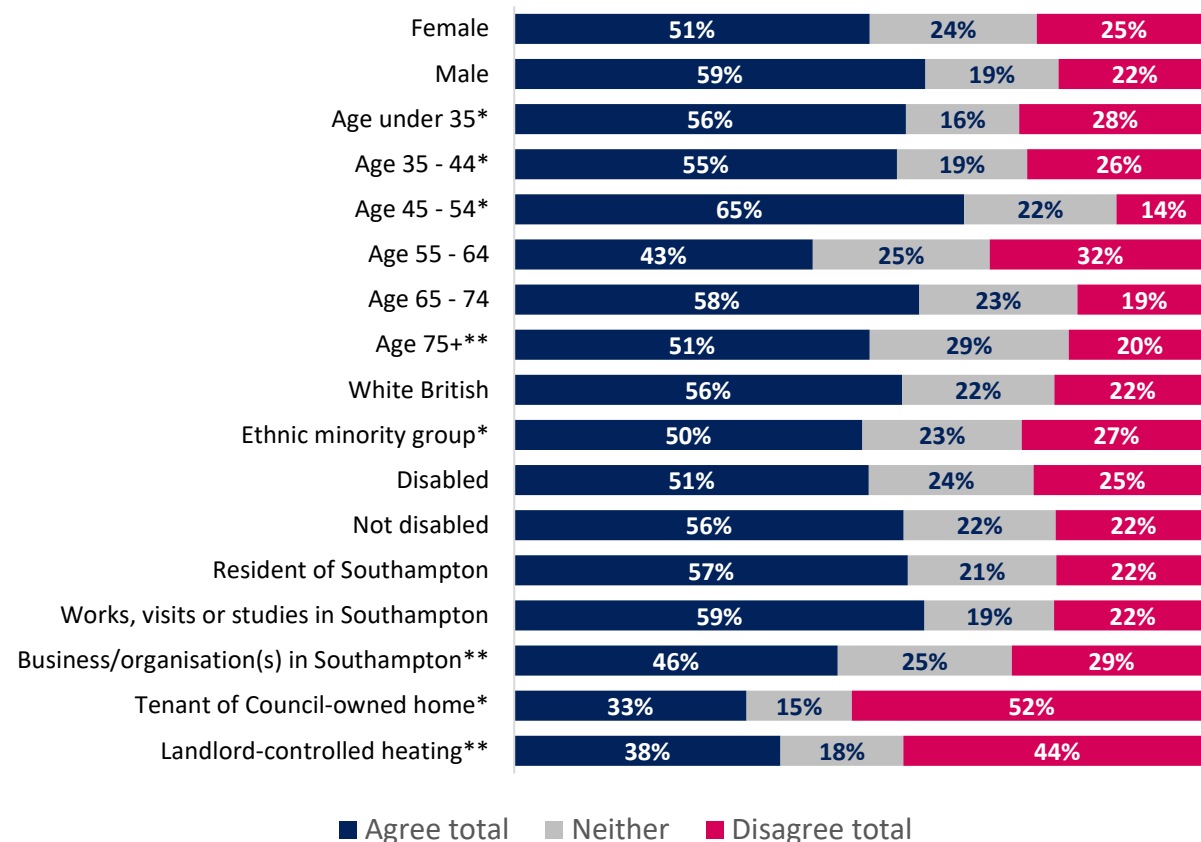
- 56% of respondents *agree* with this proposal
- Similar numbers of respondents responded *neither* and *disagree* overall (21% and 23% respectively)
- Female respondents *agree* (51%) to a lesser extent than male (59%)
- Respondents aged between 55 and 64 responded *agree* in the minority (43% agree, 32% disagree), -15% points less than those aged between 65 and 74 (58% agree)

**Question** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following proposals? *Increase Housing Service Charges by 9%*

## Overall



## Broken down by demographics



\* Small sample size – fewer than 100 respondents  
 \*\* Small sample size – fewer than 50 respondents



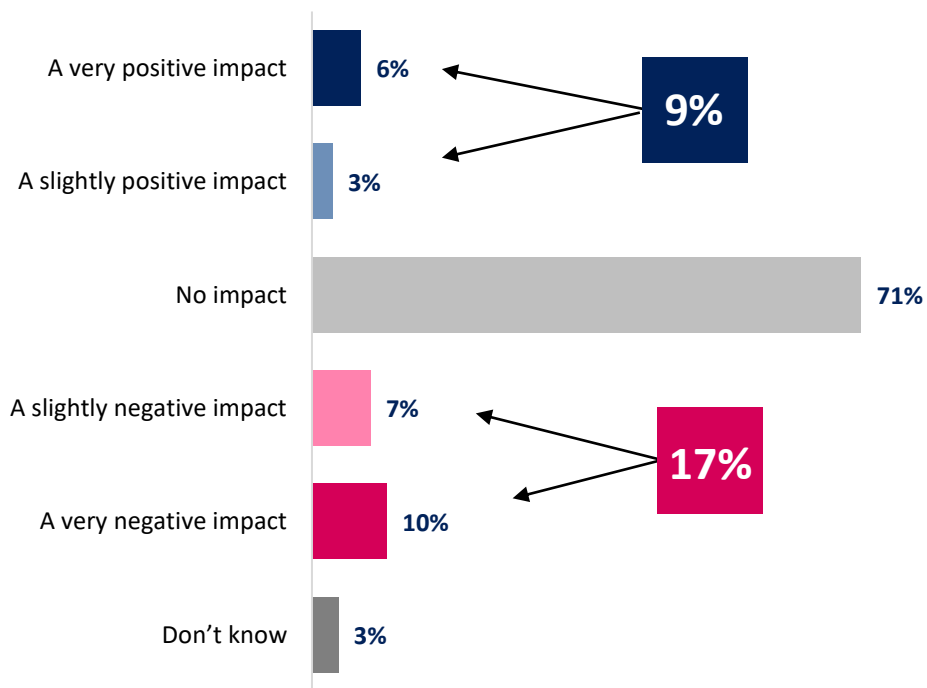
# Impact levels of increasing Housing Service Charges

## Key findings

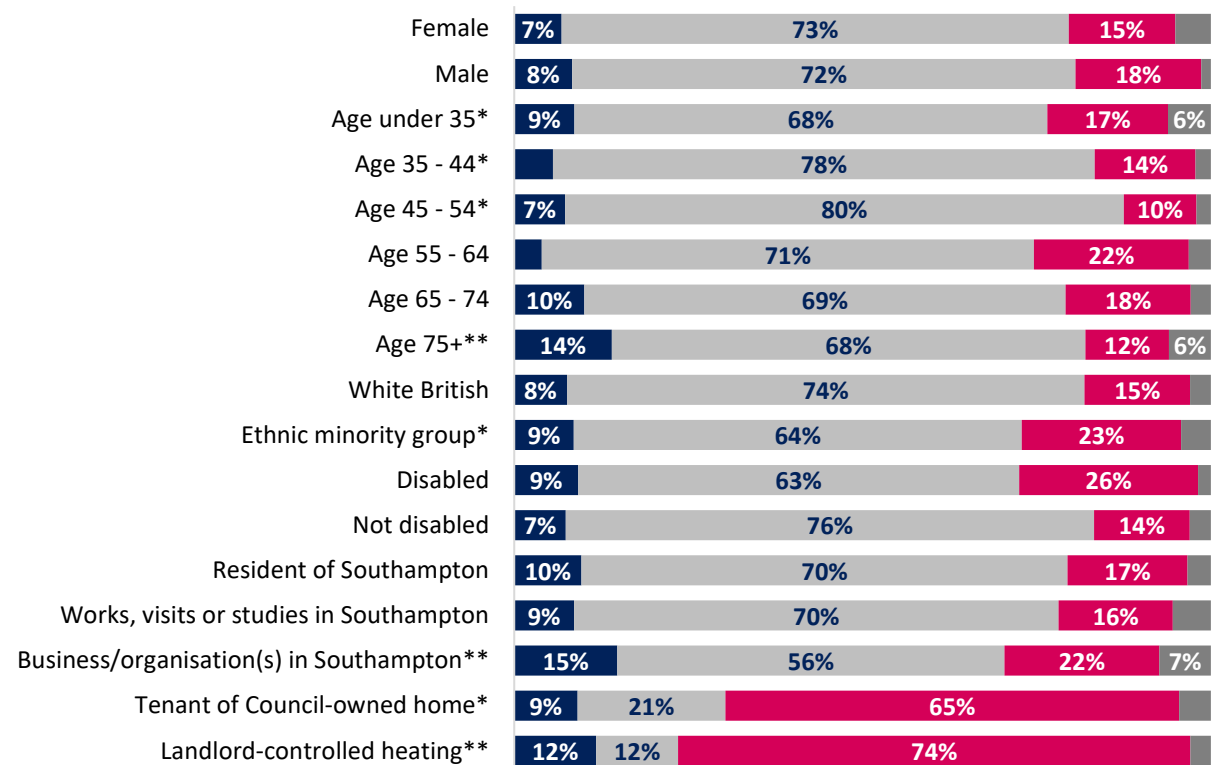
- 71% of respondents said that this proposal would have *no impact*
- This includes most breakdowns between 56% and 80%, apart from tenants of Council-owned homes and respondents with landlord-controlled heating (65% and 74% *negative* respectively)

**Question** If the following proposals were implemented, what impact do you feel this may have on you or your family? *Increase Housing Service Charges by 9%*

## Overall



## Broken down by demographics



\* Small sample size – fewer than 100 respondents  
 \*\* Small sample size – fewer than 50 respondents

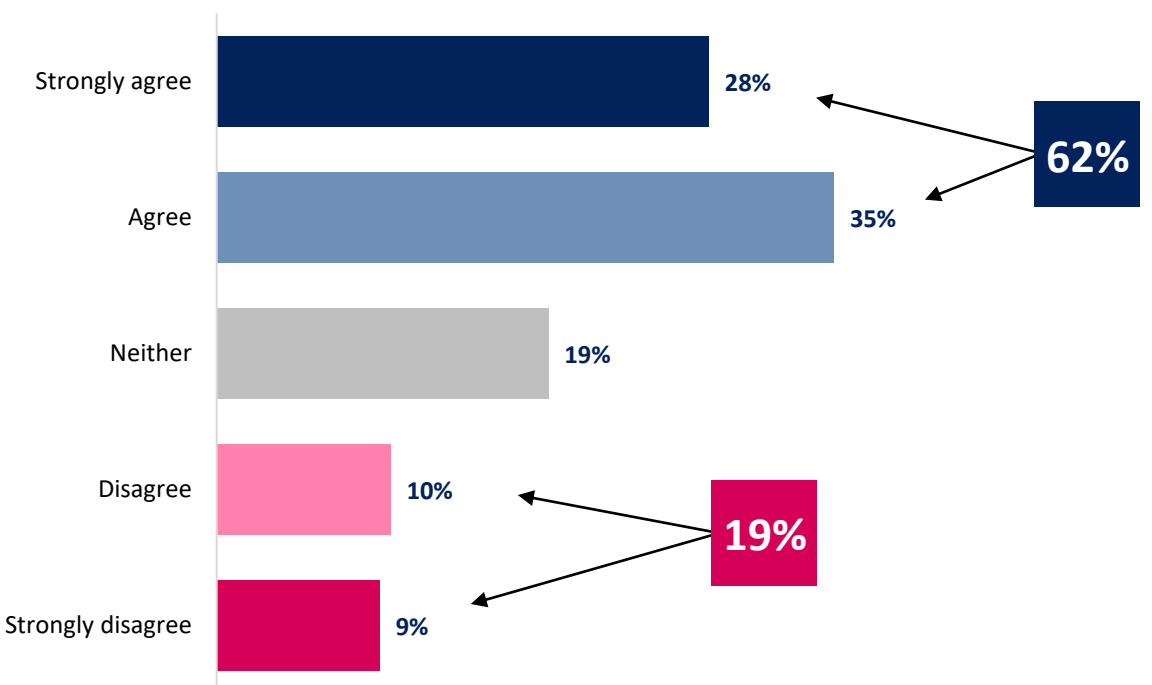


## Key findings

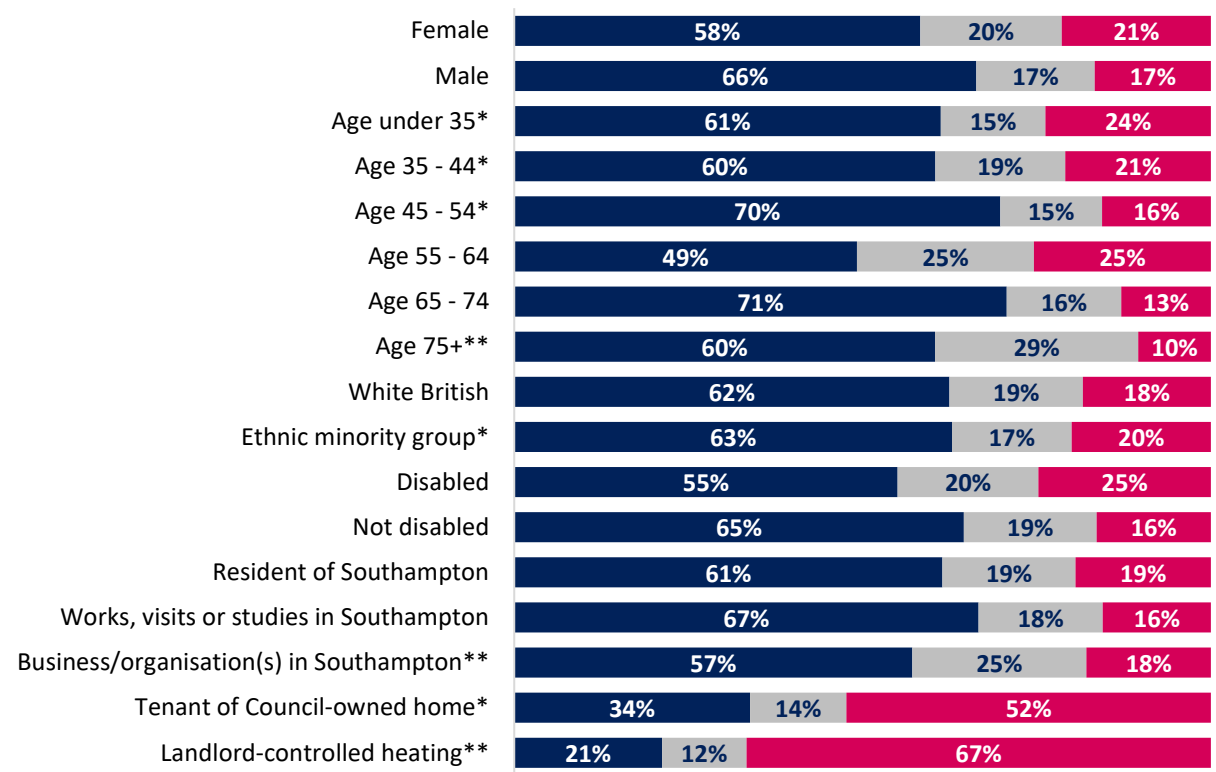
- 62% of respondents said that they *agree* with this proposal
- Again, most breakdowns responded majority *agree* between 55% and 71%, apart from tenants of Council-owned homes and respondents with landlord-controlled heating (52% and 67% *disagree* respectively), and respondents aged between 55 and 64 (49% *agree*)
- Respondents aged between 55 and 64 responded *agree* to a lesser extent than those aged between 65 and 74 by -22% points, 49% to 71%

**Question** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following proposals? *Increase Landlord Controlled Heating charges*

## Overall



## Broken down by demographics



\* Small sample size – fewer than 100 respondents  
 \*\* Small sample size – fewer than 50 respondents



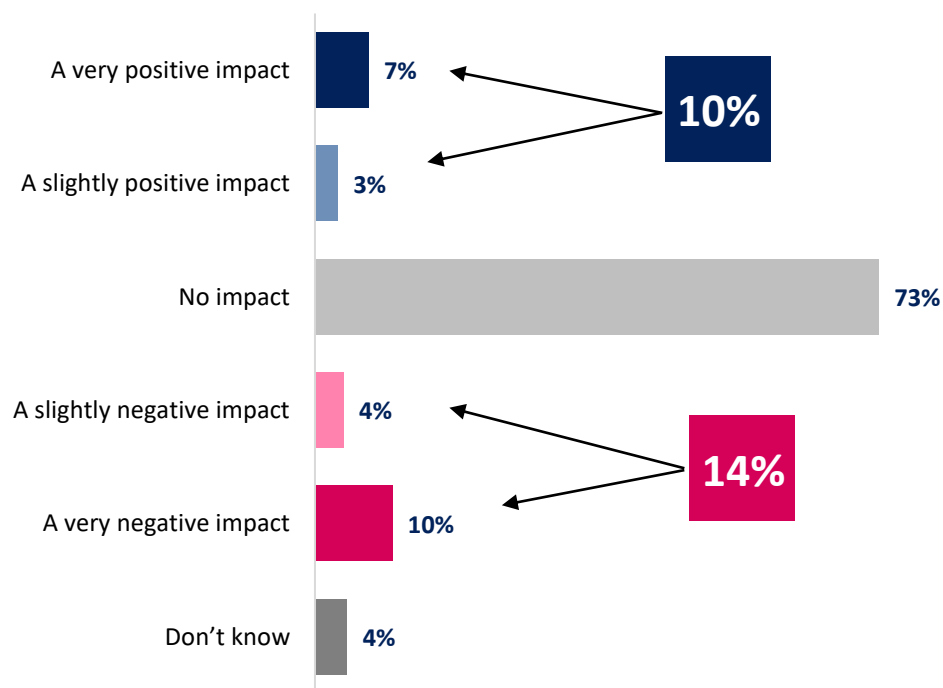
# Impact levels of increasing landlord-controlled heating charges

## Key findings

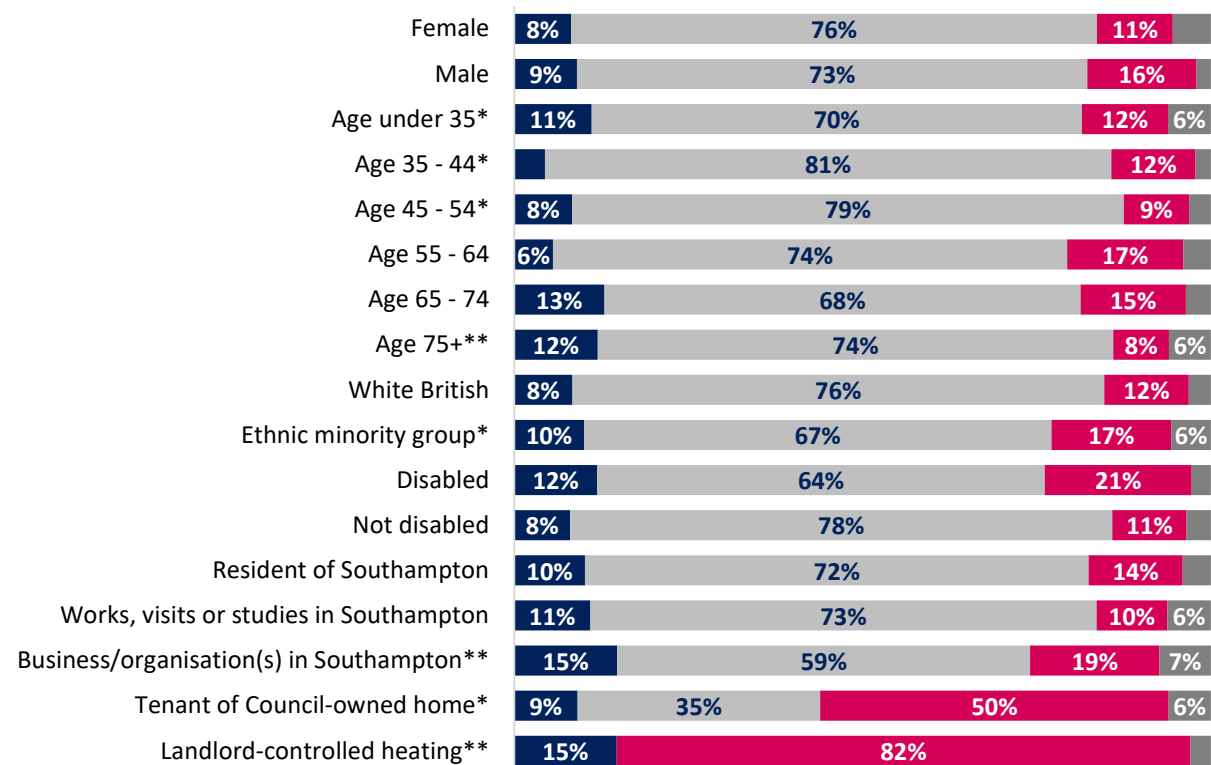
- 73% said that this proposal would have *no impact*
- Again, most breakdowns responded majority *agree* between 59% and 81%, apart from tenants of Council-owned homes and respondents with landlord-controlled heating (52% and 67% *disagree* respectively)

**Question** If the following proposals were implemented, what impact do you feel this may have on you or your family? *Increase landlord-controlled heating charges*

## Overall



## Broken down by demographics



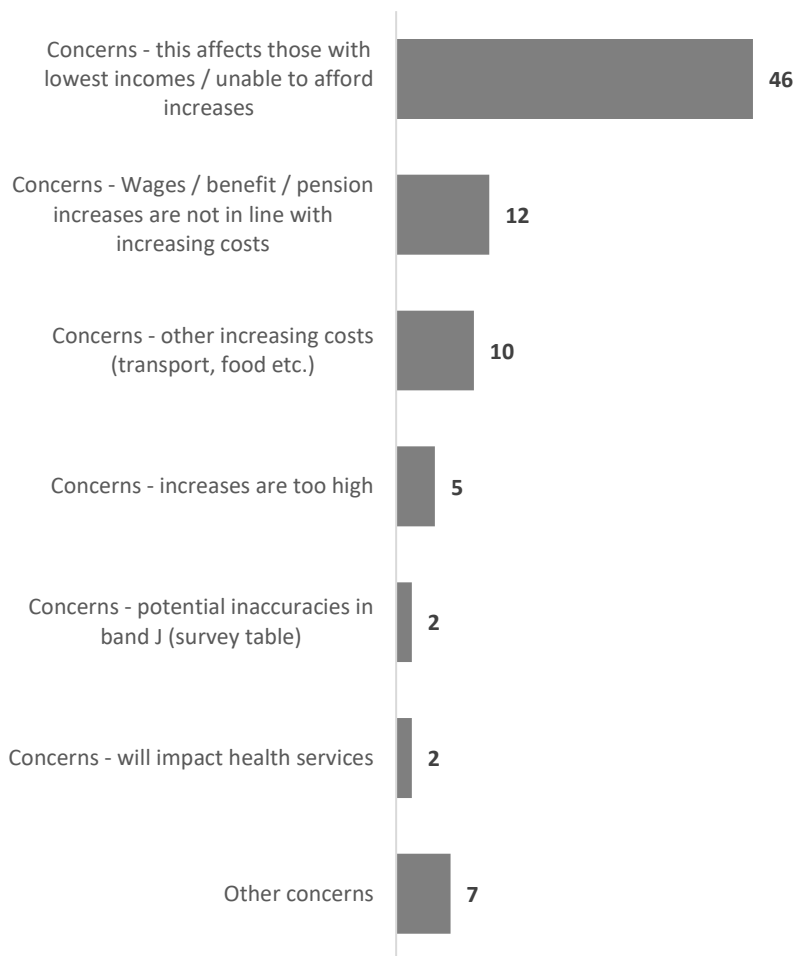
\* Small sample size – fewer than 100 respondents  
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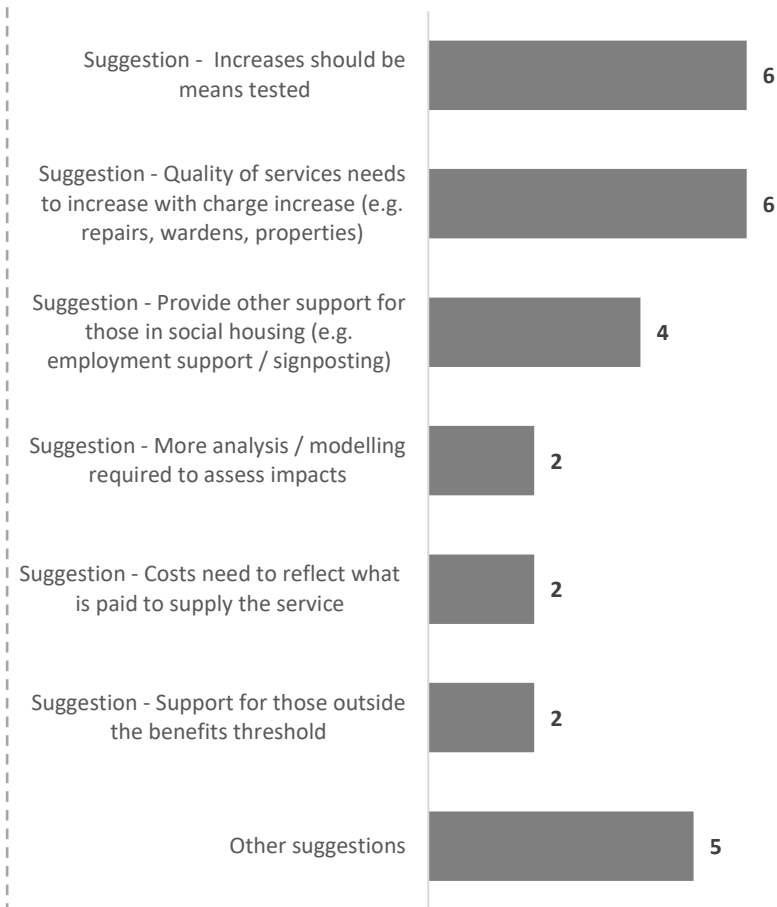
# Increase in housing costs (broadly) – Free text responses

**Increase in service charges, rent and landlord-controlled heating costs in council owned homes – any comments, impacts, suggestions or alternatives you feel we should consider**  
*The following graphs are presented in respondent count*

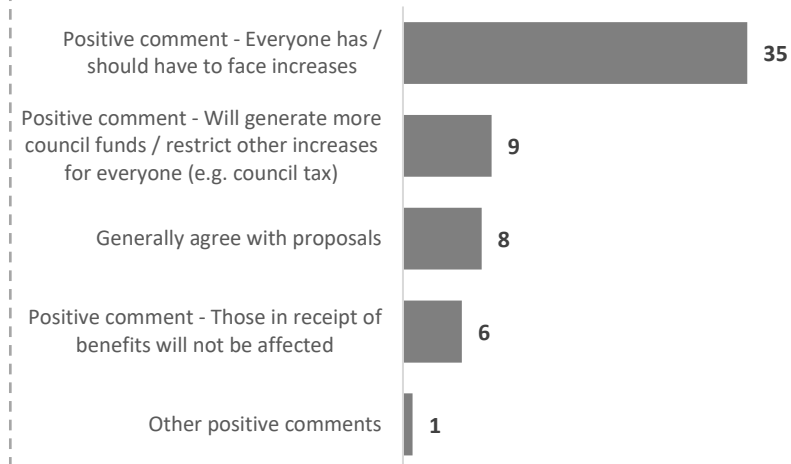
## Concerns / negative comments



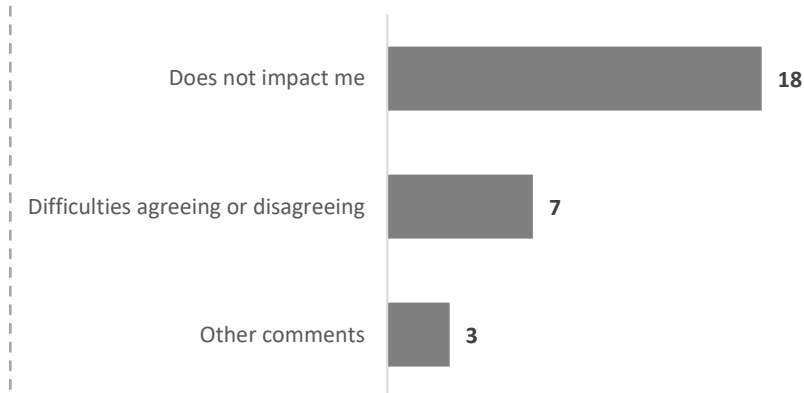
## Suggestions



## Positive comments



## Other comments



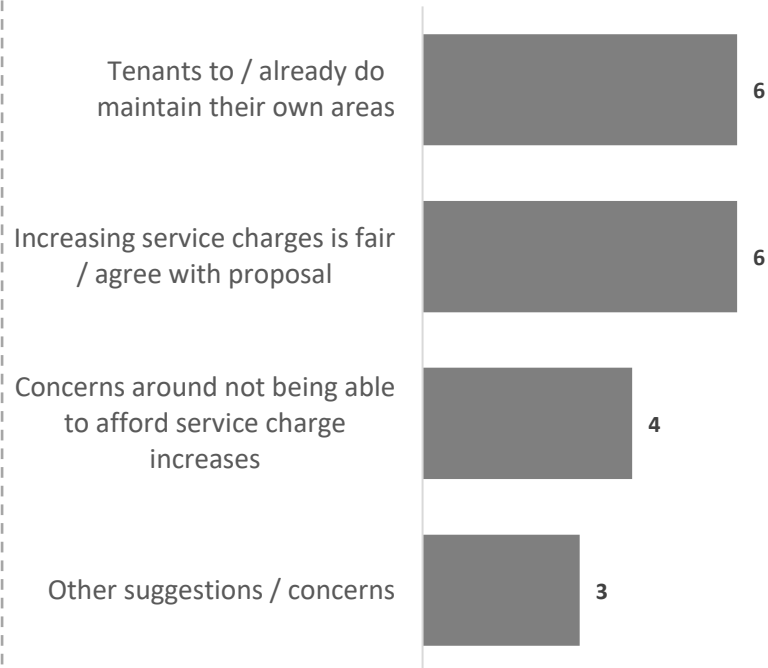


# Increase in housing costs (specific comments) – Free text responses

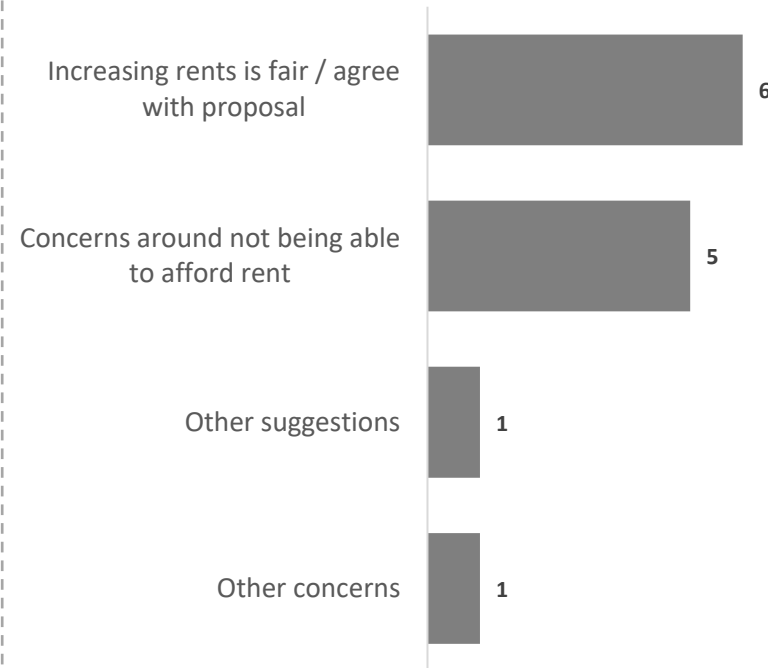
**Increase in service charges, rent and landlord-controlled heating costs in council owned homes – any comments, impacts, suggestions or alternatives you feel we should consider**

*The following graphs are presented in respondent count*

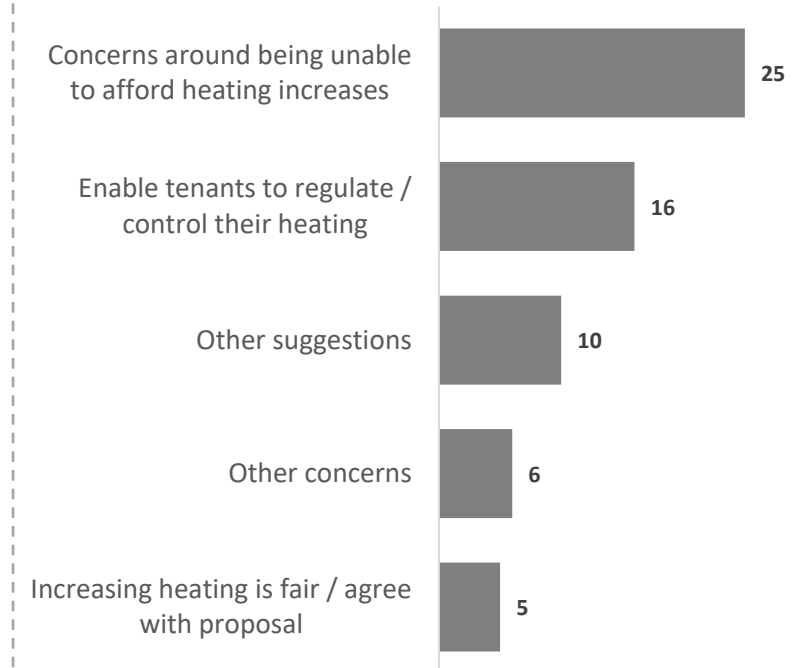
## Service charges



## Housing rents



## Landlord-controlled heating







# Responses & analysis

Meeting the remaining shortfall



Please use the following space to tell us your thoughts and suggestions on meeting the remaining shortfall in 2023/24.

*The following graph is presented in respondent count*

## Money saving suggestions – page 1

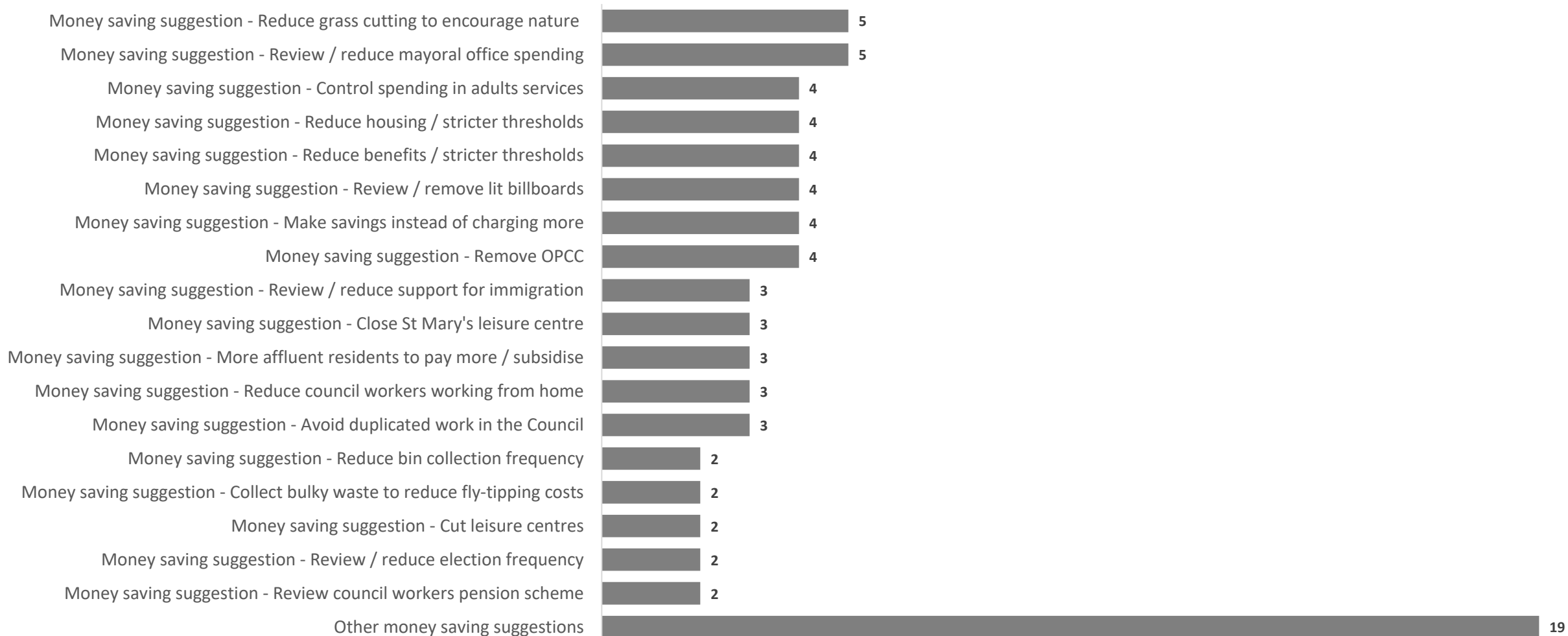




Please use the following space to tell us your thoughts and suggestions on meeting the remaining shortfall in 2023/24.

*The following graph is presented in respondent count*

## Money saving suggestions – page 2

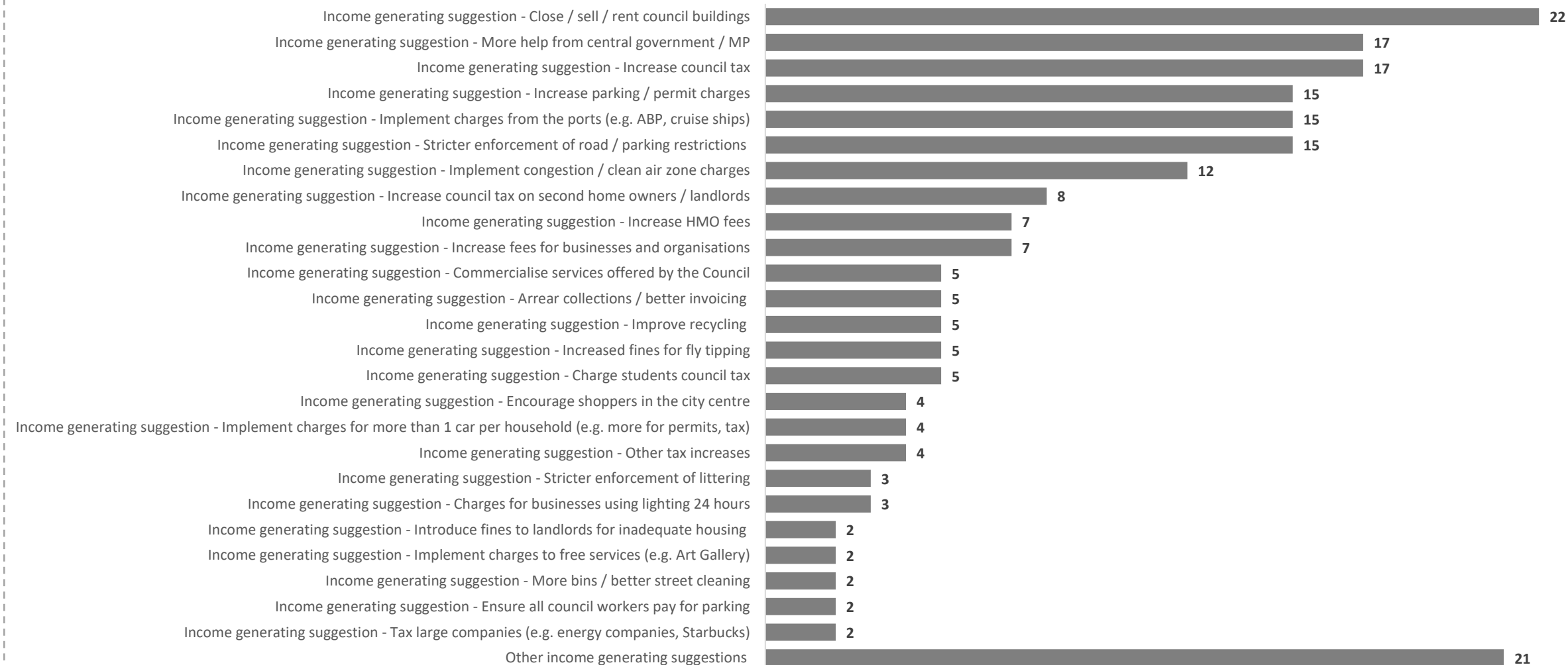




Please use the following space to tell us your thoughts and suggestions on meeting the remaining shortfall in 2023/24.

The following graph is presented in respondent count

## Income generation suggestions

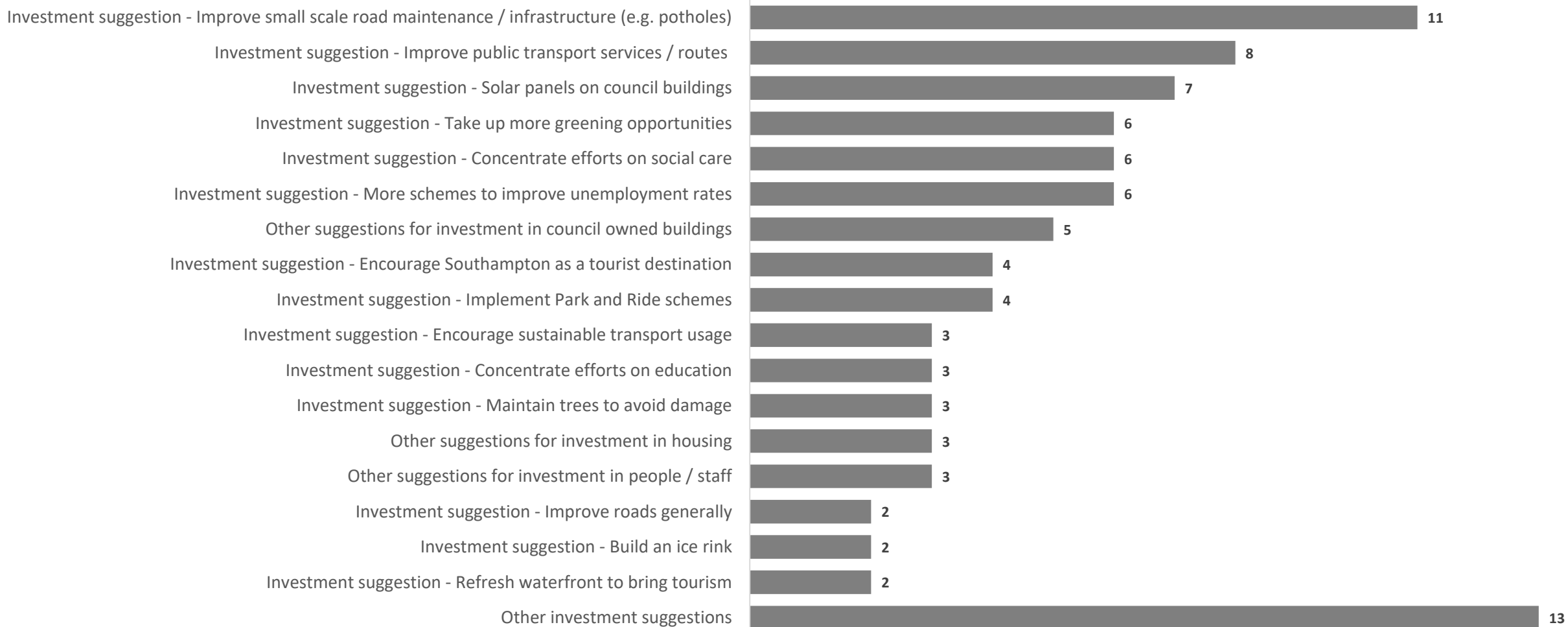




Please use the following space to tell us your thoughts and suggestions on meeting the remaining shortfall in 2023/24.

*The following graph is presented in respondent count*

## Investment suggestions

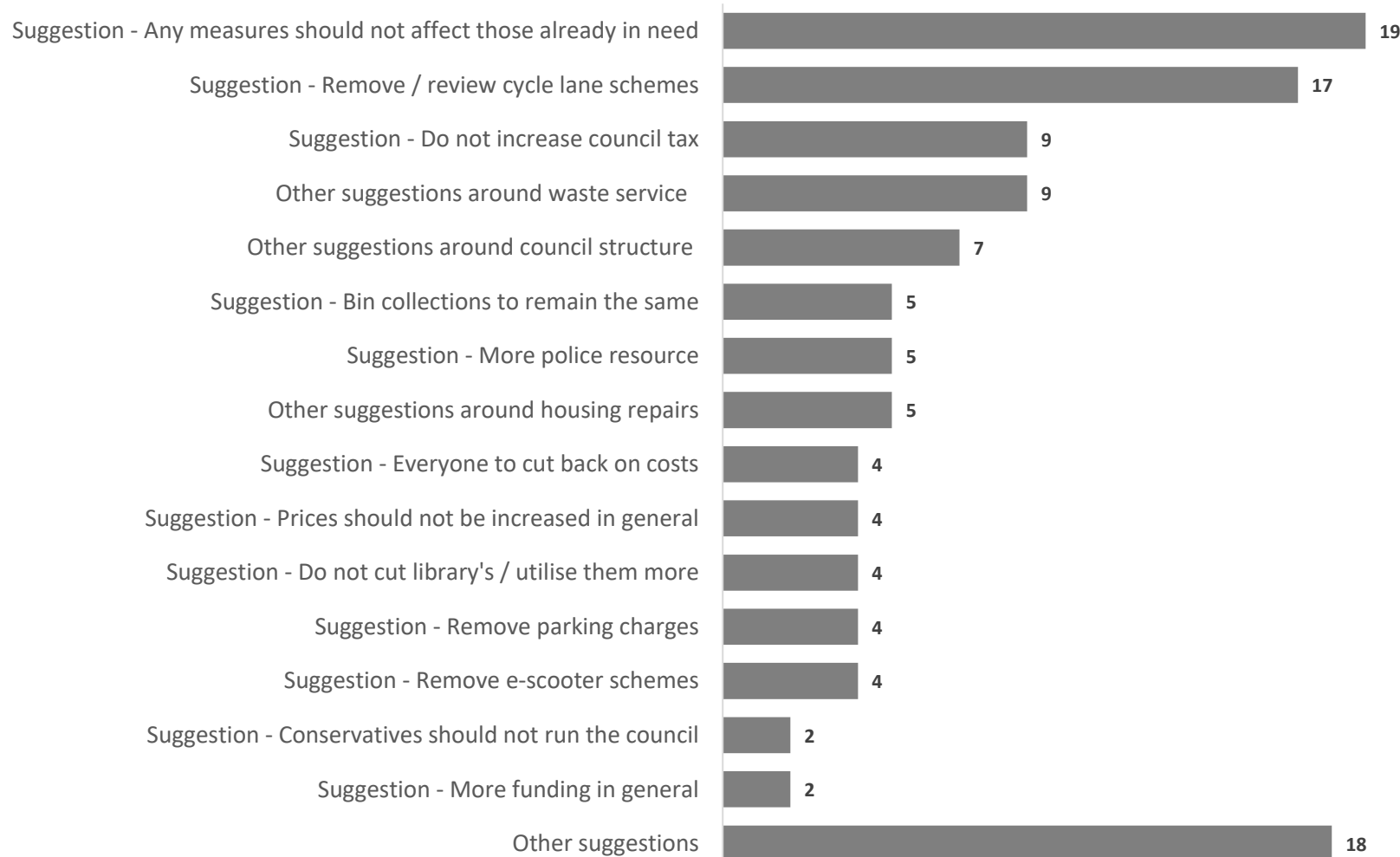




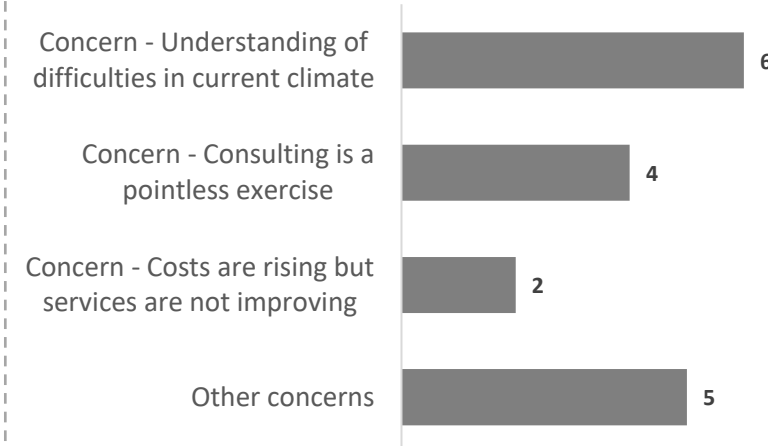
Please use the following space to tell us your thoughts and suggestions on meeting the remaining shortfall in 2023/24.

The following graphs are presented in respondent count

## Other suggestions



## Concerns / negative comments



## Positive and other comments

