



Report for New Corporate Plan and Priorities Consultation

On Behalf of Woking Borough Council

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Note: The quotes used throughout the report may not be the views of all the respondents but are the comments supplied in the freeform part of the questionnaire.

BACKGROUND

This report details the findings from the engagement project primarily designed to establish a new five-year Corporate Plan and Priorities for Woking Borough Council (WBC). The council see the project as an opportunity to act upon their commitment, launched earlier this year, to establishing effective two-way dialogue with residents and key stakeholders, to do more listening, and giving a voice to all members of the community.

The engagement took place using two key channels:

- **Eight engagement roadshows** held at different locations across the borough where residents have the opportunity to hear directly from both the Leader and Chief Executive of Woking Borough Council about the future vision they have for Woking, but more importantly to give residents the chance to ask questions, to share their views on the issues and services that matter the most to them and the improvements they would like to see being made by WBC in the future. One of these sessions took place with students at Woking College.
- **Consultation questionnaire** distributed to 3000 households randomly selected from across the borough but also available to be completed online via WBC's Community Forum portal. A freepost reply envelope was included in the postal survey version in order to encourage responses, however the covering letter also actively promoted online responses.

A separate report has been supplied with an overview from each of the eight roadshows along with details of the main themes and questions raised across all of the roadshows. The report also includes the results from the feedback forms, which were collected after each roadshow.

This report highlights the results from the **979 responses** received and analysed. This total comprised of 678 online responses and 301 postal responses. The communication team at WBC targeted their numerous databases and used other marketing communication channels to promote the online survey consultation as well as sending several personal invitations to the existing members of WBC's Residents' Panel to encourage them to respond to the consultation.

In total, **151** residents used this engagement to say they wanted to join the Residents' Panel. The consultation questionnaire included the schedule for the engagement roadshows and a question on these, as WBC were keen for as many people as possible to attend one of the events. 188 people (19%) said that they either had, or had thought about attending one of the roadshows.

Throughout the report, we have included a selection of the comments submitted in response to one of the open-ended questions. There were numerous comments, many of which were very detailed and the full listing of these verbatim responses is supplied in a separate file. In order to add a quantitative element to these responses, the comments were also coded.

As well as highlighting the overall results, the report will also illustrate where the views of different groups of respondents significantly differ. This segmentation includes: gender, age, and ward. In most cases and unless otherwise stated, results have been given as a percentage of the total overall number of valid responses (all answering). Where percentages do not add up to 100% or in some cases exceed 100% this is likely to be due to rounding up/down.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Key Priorities

From the results, there are seven priority areas that are considered to be the most important, and are in most need of improving. All of these issues were raised to a greater or lesser extent during the roadshows. These are:

- Keeping the borough, a safe place for everyone
- Taking action, where required, to deal with anti-social behaviour
- Having a council that listens to residents, and where everyone can 'have their say'
- Providing support for older, vulnerable people
- Taking steps to improve traffic flows across the borough
- Making it easier to travel around Woking Borough and the surrounding areas
- Encouraging vibrant village high streets by supporting local business

Furthermore, there are three more priority areas for improvement. These are:

- Tackling homelessness and its causes
- Supporting new & established local businesses & shops to create more local jobs
- Providing more high-quality affordable & key worker homes to meet the needs of local people

The third of these, the provision of, and right mix of new housing featured prominently in the roadshows. Although not mentioned in this list, encouraging and supporting initiatives relating to Climate Change and Sustainability was also mentioned frequently at the roadshows.

View on Woking Borough Council

- There are significant lack of trust and confidence issues amongst residents that were first highlighted in the consultation report published earlier in the year. These are not a quick fix, and it will take time for these perceptions to change. The roadshows were a good start, numerous people said during the sessions, that it was a refreshing change for the council and senior leadership team to want to listen, and to be inviting local people to share their views.
- There are also serious concerns around the financial strategy adopted by WBC in the past.

Overall Comments

- Whilst there was a strong response to the consultation, the profile of the responses does not reflect the diversity of the population in Woking Borough, despite the best efforts of the team at Woking to engage with numerous community groups during the consultation period. This lack of diversity was also apparent at most of the roadshows. The lack of diversity in responses is unlikely to be unique to this consultation, but it's something that needs to be noted, and some thought given as to what further steps can be taken next time to try and address this.
- There is much to be achieved in the next year, ensuring the Masterplan involves residents and generates a shared vision for the town centre will help, but also continuing the engagement with residents to rebuild trust and confidence is also vital.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

In order to capture the demographics of the panellists already on WBC's Residents' Panel, a data matching exercise took place with the 212 residents who indicated they were already members of the panel. We were able to match all but seventeen of these records with panellists. The main reason why we couldn't, was because a few residents elected not to provide their surname or postcode, which were the two fields we required to enable us to conduct the data matching.

- Overall, 52% of respondents were female, and 47% male.
- The following table shows the distribution of responses **by age**.

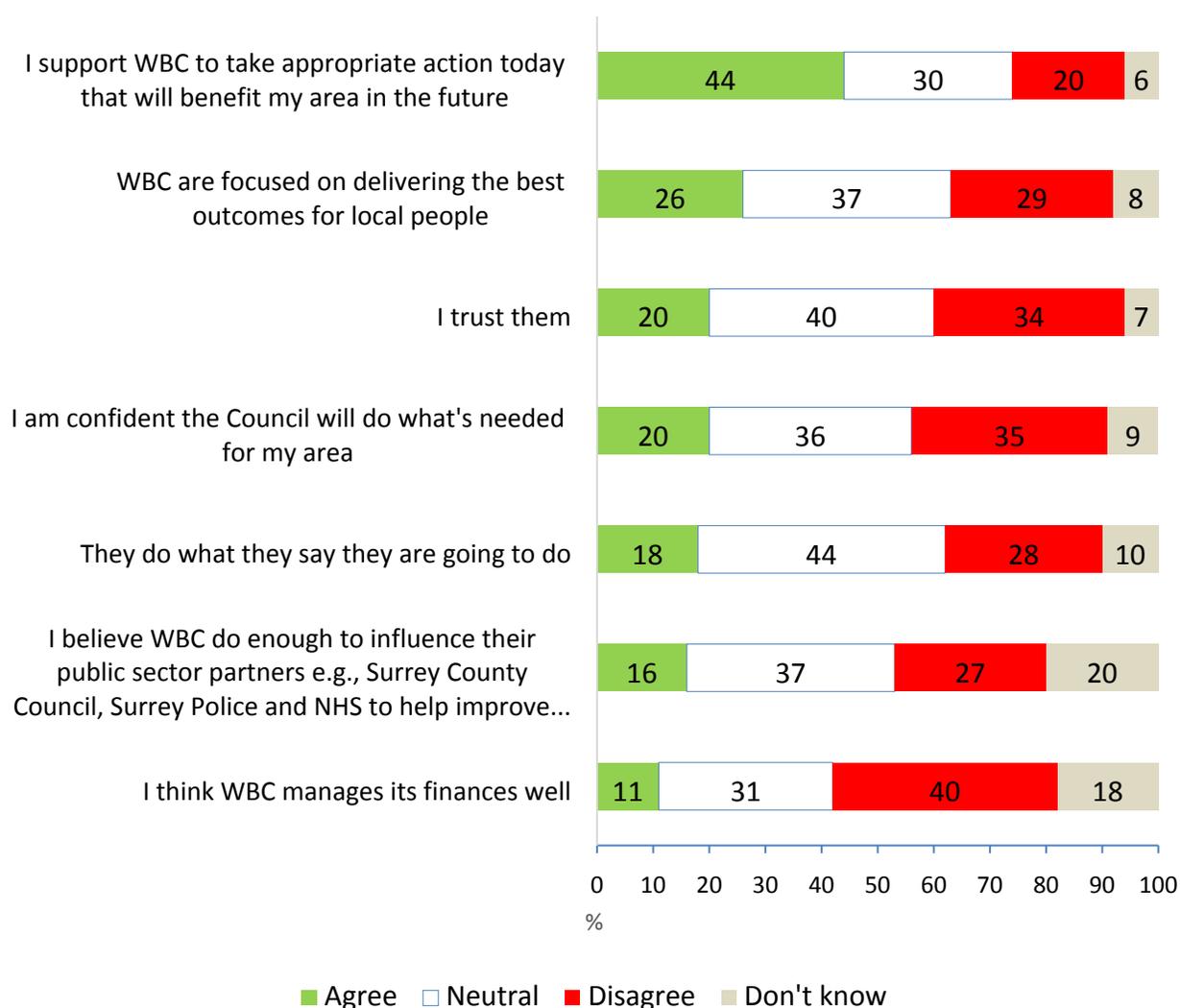
	Number	% of Total	% Borough 2011 Census
Under 18	9	1	-
18-24	15	2	9
25-44	226	24	39
45-64	373	39	32
65-79	263	28	13
80 or older	60	6	6

- 84% of responses were from homeowners (owned outright or buying on a mortgage).
- 6% were renting from a private landlord, and 8% renting from WBC or a Housing Association.
- Just under a third of responses (32%) were from people who also work in Woking Borough
- 90% of responses were from people who were White British or any other White background.
- Just twenty-six responses (3%) were from anyone from an Indian or Pakistani background. In the 2011 Census, 8% of Woking Borough residents were from these two backgrounds.
- All ten wards were well represented in the consultation and in most cases the distribution of responses was broadly in line with the population splits from 2021. Three wards; Canalside, Heathside and Pyrford were slightly under-represented, whilst two others; Horsell and Mount Hermon were marginally over-represented in the responses.
- Many of those responding had lived in the area for a long time. 77% had lived in the area for more than ten years whilst 14% had lived in Woking Borough for five years or less.
- Of the online responses, ninety-eight were from WBC employees, whilst four responses were from WBC Councillors. Forty-five were from people representing an organisation, or other community group based in the borough whilst twenty-six were from local business owners.

These figures are included to illustrate that despite Woking Borough being an area with people from diverse backgrounds, this diversity is not reflected in the consultation responses although attempts were made following the interim reporting to try and address this. This 'lack of diversity' in terms of age and background was also apparent across all of the roadshows.

OVERALL HALO OUTCOME MEASURES

This section of questions focuses on a selection of the desired outcomes arising from the relationship residents have with WBC. We call these the Halo Benefits statements, as they focus on outcomes rather than the transactions. Some of these statements were included in the initial Residents' Panel consultation that took place earlier this year, and where relevant, comparisons with these results are also shown. The survey questionnaire asked whether residents agreed or disagreed with each statement and the overall results are shown below.



There is a significant level of support (44%) for WBC taking appropriate action today that will benefit the local area in the future. Earlier this year, the figure was broadly the same at 46%. This is the most positive result across all of the seven statements.

However, the levels of agreement overall are relatively low based on our experience of using similar questions in other service environments albeit in the commercial sector and with the exception of one of the statements, the number disagreeing exceeded the number agreeing. Across all of the statements, the results were lower this time compared with earlier in the year. For all seven statements, the results across all of the wards were fairly consistent.

As well as low agreement scores, the level of 'neutral' or 'don't know' responses is also relatively high. In our experience, this is either because there are low levels of engagement with the organisation or a lack of awareness about what an organisation is or isn't doing.

The trust score is particularly important, as it is a key determinant of the success of any relationship, commercial or otherwise. Earlier this year, the % agree trust score was 29% compared with 20% this time. This 'trust' figure did not vary significantly whether someone was a member of WBC's Residents' Panel or if they had considered attending one of the roadshows. There were also no discernible differences in the trust score by age. The other major difference in the latest figures is that 34% disagreed compared with 19% earlier in the year.

20% of respondents said they were 'confident' WBC will do what's needed for my local area. Earlier this year, the corresponding agree figure was 27%. Overall, 35% disagreed whilst 9% of WBC employees also disagreed with this statement. From the roadshows feedback forms, where more information was shared with residents, the confidence figures were more positive.

18% said WBC 'do what they say they are going to do', compared with 27% earlier in the year. As we commented in the previous report, all of these results are baseline scores, and realistically it is still too early for people to assess whether there is a new culture in place at the council or not.

Two new statements were added to the consultation questionnaire for this project. One of these focused on how well WBC manages its finances. Only 11% of respondents thought WBC do manage their finances well, whilst 40% disagreed. This result is not a surprise as in all of the roadshows, questions were raised about WBC's previous financial decision making and strategy. Even amongst WBC employees, only 44% agreed, whilst 10% disagreed, a net score of 33.

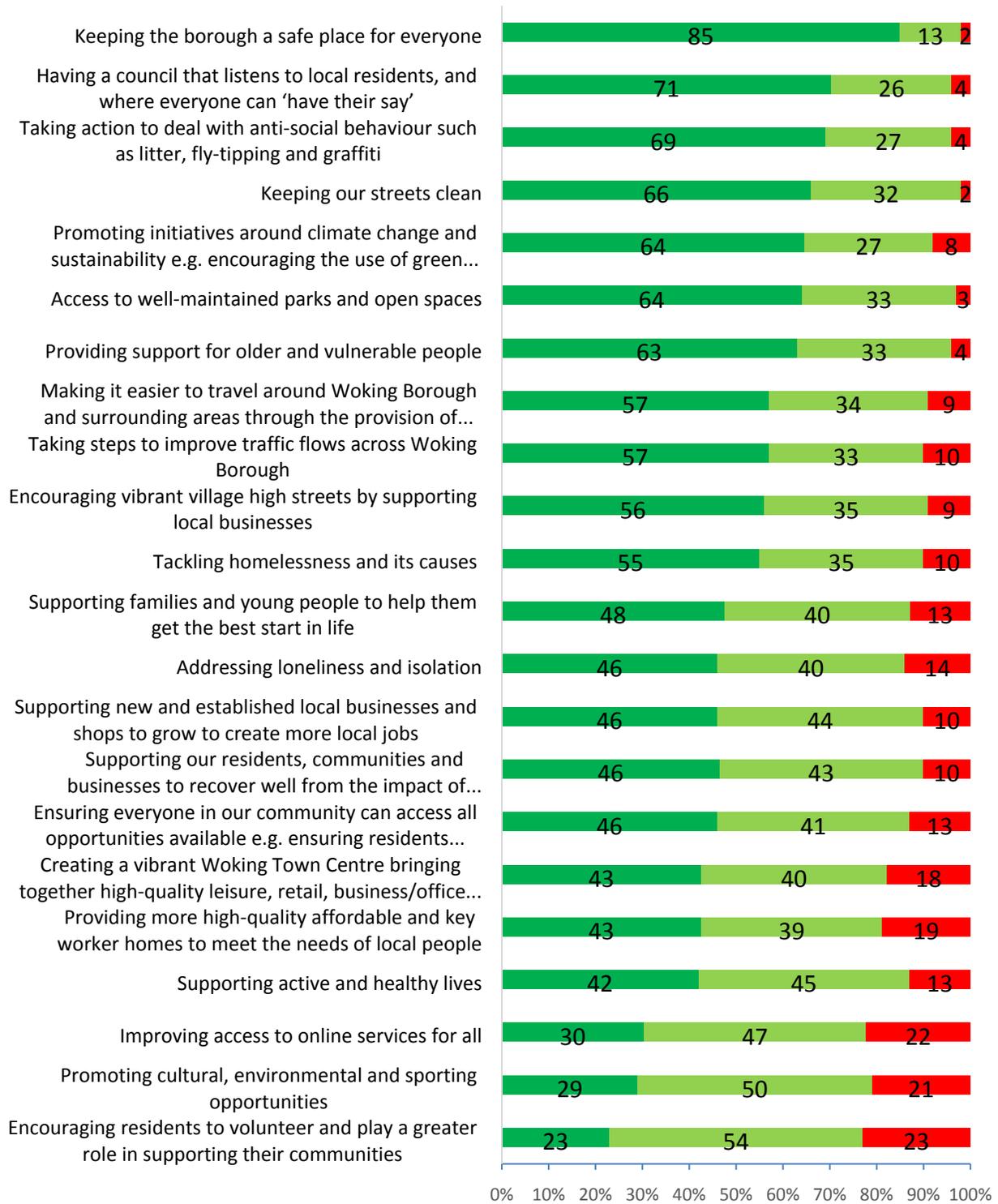
The second new statement focused on whether residents believe WBC do enough to influence their public sector partners to help improve life for those who live or work in the borough. Just 16% said they did. Interestingly, less than half of WBC employees (45%) also thought they were. Many of the comments raised by residents during the roadshows centred on local issues and concerns not directly under WBC's control or responsibility. These included: the condition of road surfaces, cycle ways, traffic congestion and road closures, provision of medical facilities, public transport, pressure on existing infrastructure, and even the location of the Days Aggregate Yard.

There was sense from the roadshows that local people would like WBC, their local council, to take more of a lead, in persuading these partner agencies take the appropriate action on behalf of local people. The people completing this consultation did not necessarily have the benefit of hearing the response from WBC's senior leadership team during each of the roadshows as to what they are already doing to address or help mitigate the impact of these for local people.

One conclusion from looking at these results is that one of the key priorities to be included in the new five-year Corporate Plan is to continue with the focus on developing a more engaged and effective Borough Council, with the objective of improving WBC's trust and confidence ratings.

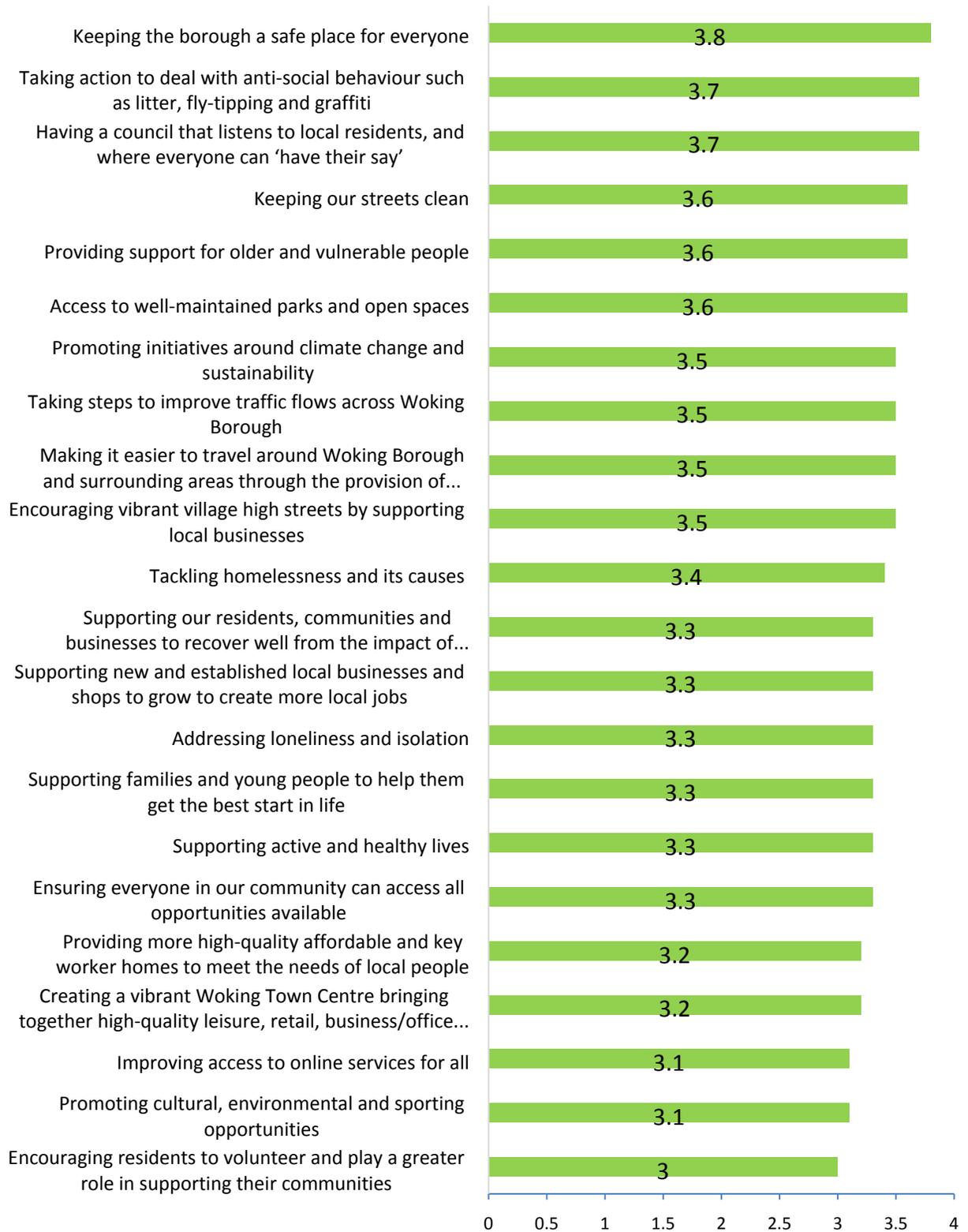
YOUR VIEWS ON LIVING IN WOKING BOROUGH

In this question, the consultation asked how important each of these issues were to them. The chart below shows the overall results ranked in terms of the % responding 'very important'.



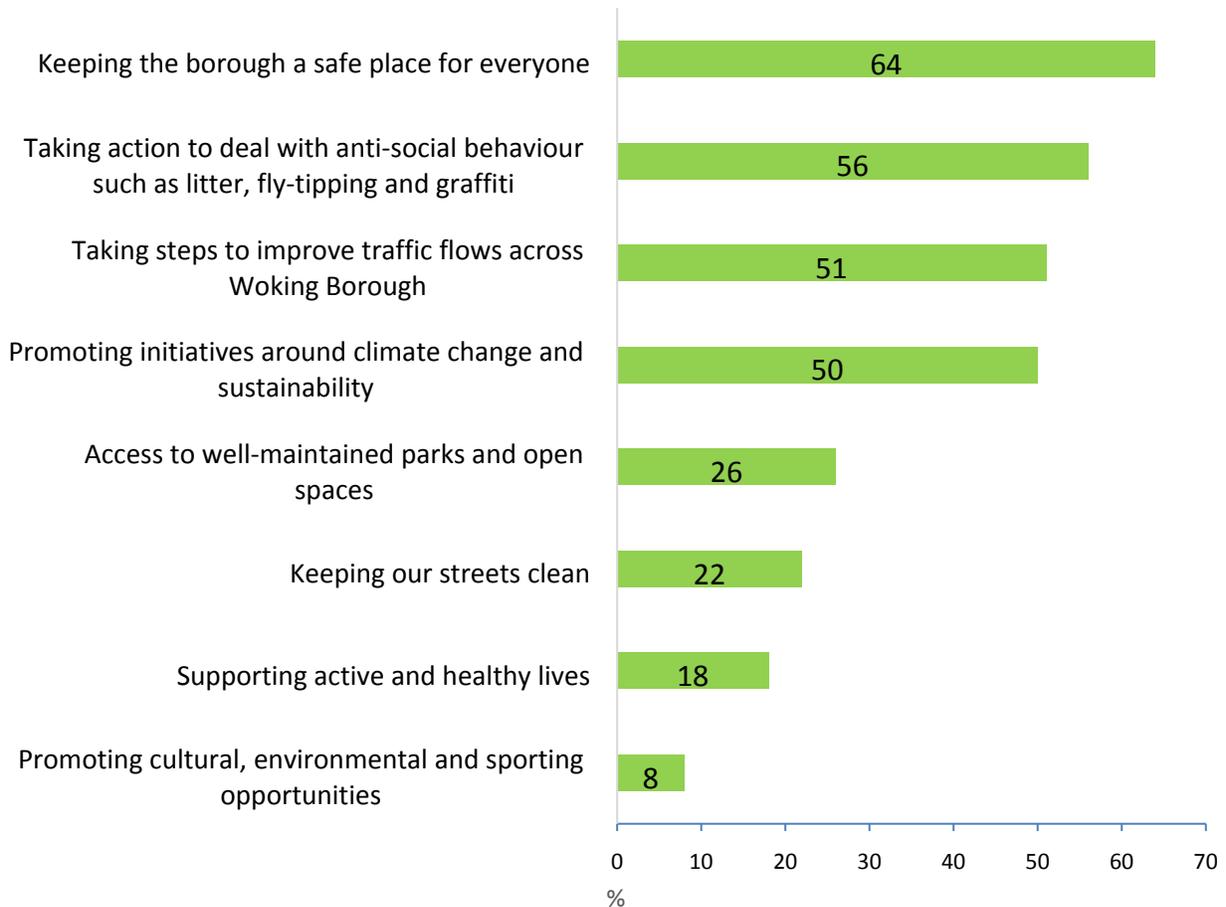
■ Very important ■ Fairly important ■ Not important

These issues are then ranked below in order of importance based on their overall mean scores, where 4 = very important, 3 = fairly important, 2 not very important and 1 = not all important.



LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Each of the objectives listed in the first main question were then allocated to one of three main themes, and the consultation questionnaire asked people to say which THREE of these issues they feel are in most need of improving. The chart below shows the overall results.



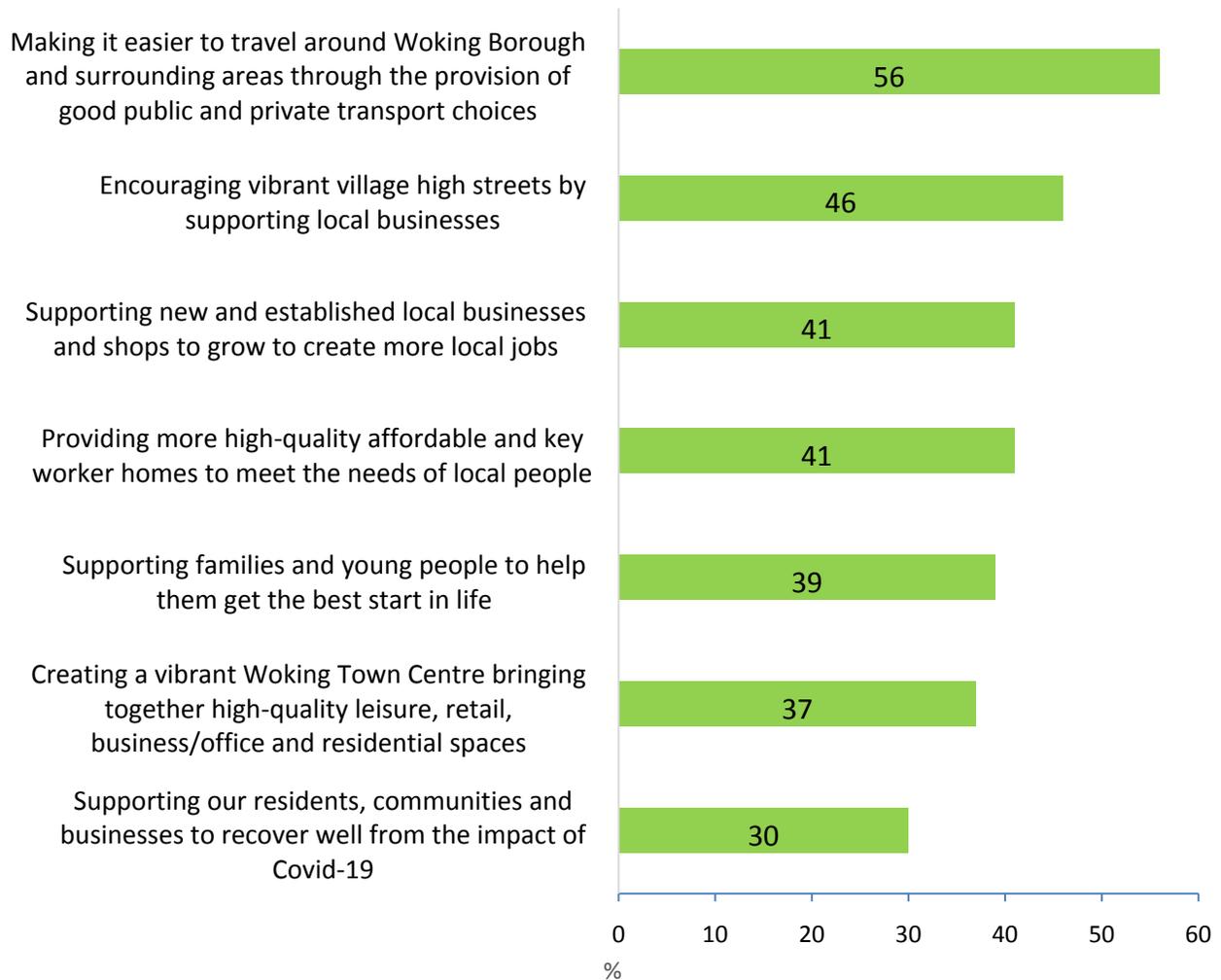
The three key issues based around the theme of the local environment that people would like to see improved in the future are:

- **Keeping the borough, a safe place for everyone**, this was the No. 1 ranked issue.
- **Taking action, where required, to deal with anti-social behaviour**, the No. 2 = ranked.
- **Taking steps to improve traffic flows across Woking Borough**, the No. 7= ranked issue.

“Woking is a great place to live in terms of location and price compared to other locations with similar travel times to London and the countryside. It has a great balance which is what attracted me and others to it. I believe Woking should focus on environmental issues and promoting better use of public transport instead of cars.”

LOCAL ECONOMY

Each of the objectives listed in the first main question were then allocated to one of three main themes, and the consultation questionnaire asked people to say which THREE of these issues they feel are in most need of improving. The chart below shows the overall results.

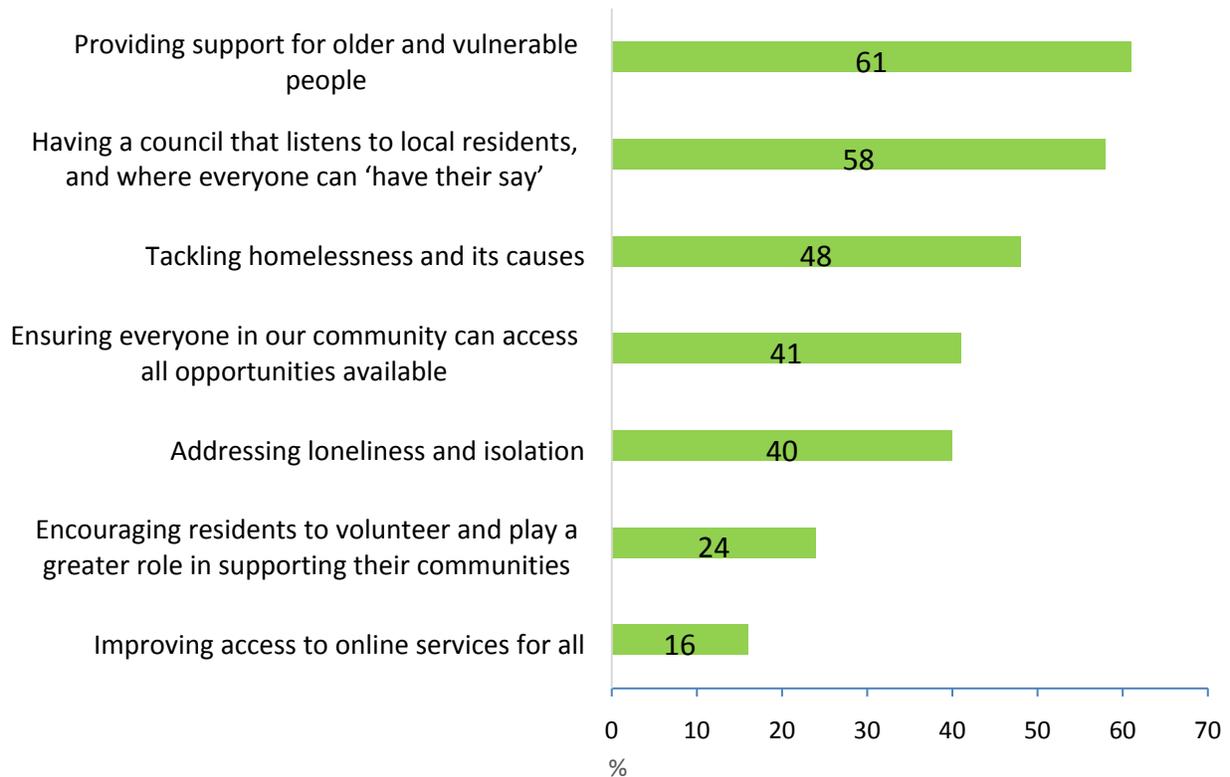


The three key issues based around the theme of the local economy that people would like to see improved in the future are:

- **Making it easier to travel around Woking Borough and surrounding areas**, No. 7= ranked
- **Encouraging vibrant village high streets by supporting local businesses**, No. 7= ranked
- **Supporting new and established local businesses and shops to create more local jobs**, the No. 12= highest ranked issue in terms of mean importance
- **Providing more high-quality affordable and key worker homes to meet the needs of local people**, the No. 18 = highest ranked issue in terms of mean importance

LOCAL COMMUNITY

Each of the objectives listed in the first main question were then allocated to one of three main themes, and the consultation questionnaire asked people to say which THREE of these issues they feel are in most need of improving. The chart below shows the overall results.



The three key issues based around the theme of the local community that people would like to see improved in the future are:

- **Providing support for older and vulnerable people**, the No. 4= ranked issue.
- **Having a council that listens to local residents, and where everyone can 'have their say'**, the No. 2= ranked issue by mean score in terms of overall importance.
- **Tackling homelessness and its causes**, the No. 11 = ranked issue overall.

"I feel like young people's interests are neglected here. Reviving young people's involvement through the provision of sports is an important post-covid response, as is vital youth work & clubs. The thing we find hardest is getting lessons for the kids to learn swimming. There doesn't seem to be nearly sufficient provision to give this vital skill to children."

IMPORTANCE AND IN MOST NEED OF IMPROVING

In the chart on the following page, the mean importance scores for each of the statements are illustrated on the x-axis. The vertical line shown in purple, is the overall mean of mean score for all of the priorities. Any priority to the right of this line is on average considered by residents to be more important relative to the others and any to the left is considered to be less important. This is not to say these attributes are not important, merely they are less important.

We have then added the results to the three separate questions asking which three priorities from the ones listed, were in most need of improving. Each of the top three priorities identified as being in need of improvement have been labelled in 'red' alongside a brief description of the priority. Most of these priorities are to the right of the line, so they are considered to be relatively more important as well as in most need of improving. These are the key ones to focus on.

They are:

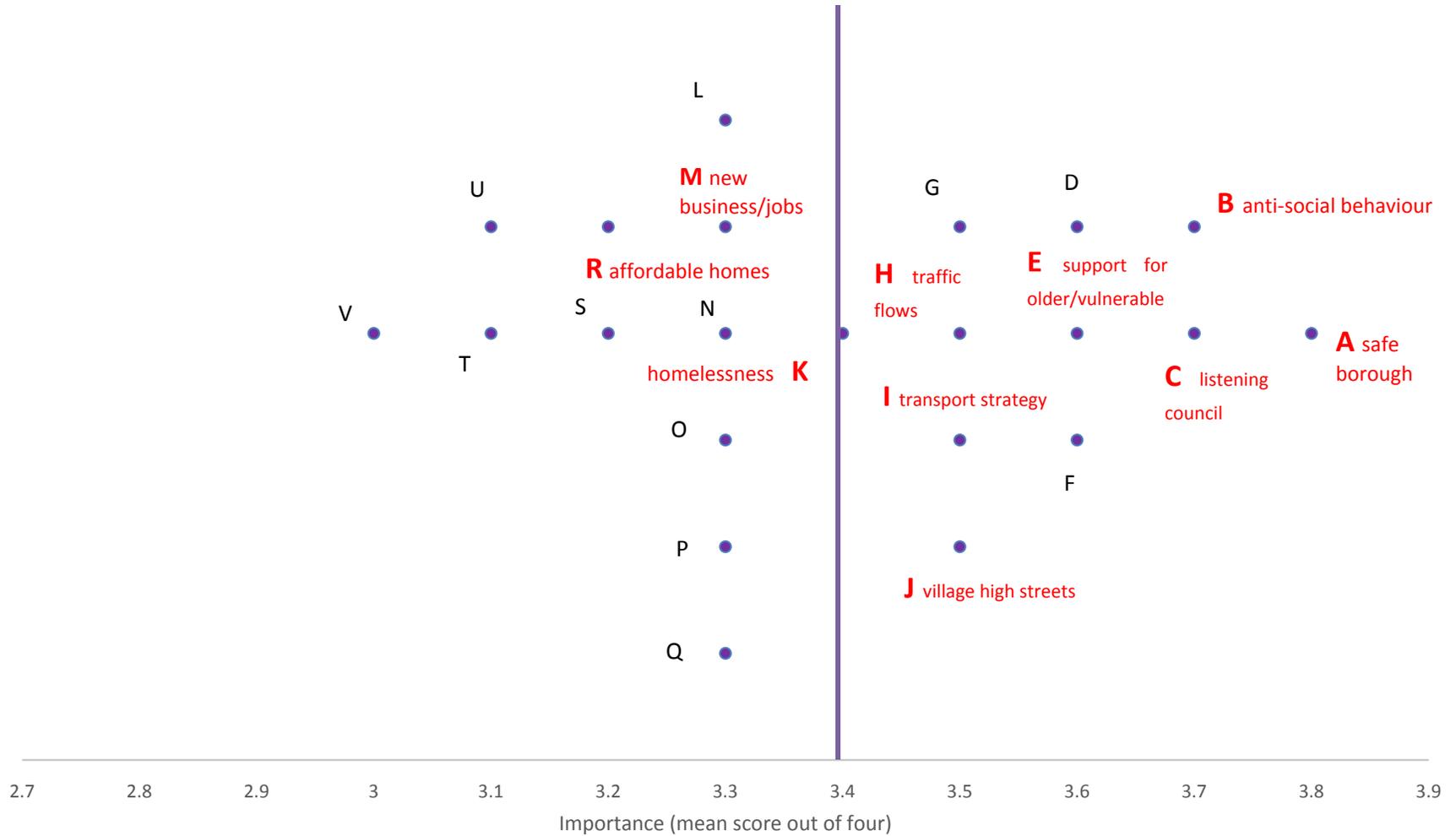
A	Keeping the borough, a safe place for everyone
B	Taking action, where required, to deal with anti-social behaviour
C	Having a council that listens to residents, and where everyone can 'have their say'
E	Providing support for older, vulnerable people
H	Taking steps to improve traffic flows across the borough
I	Making it easier to travel around Woking Borough and the surrounding areas
J	Encouraging vibrant village high streets by supporting local business

However, there are also three of the corporate priorities on or to the left of the mean score line. Whilst these are considered to be less important relative to the other priorities listed, a significant number of respondents said they are in need of improvement. All three of these themes were frequently mentioned as being priorities by residents during the engagement roadshows.

K	Tacking homelessness and its causes
M	Supporting new & established local businesses & shops to create more local jobs
R	Providing more high-quality affordable & key worker homes to meet the needs of local people

A number of the priorities featured in the consultation were considered to be important but were not identified as being in most need of improvement. These included **D: keeping the streets clean**, and **F: access to well-maintained parks and open spaces**. These were also not raised as being issues or concerns during the roadshows. In fact, easy access to green and open spaces were seen as one of the major benefits of living in the borough. This is also testament to how well WBC are already doing at keeping the streets clean, and maintaining parks and green spaces.

Promoting initiatives around Climate Change and sustainability (G) is also regarded as being 'more important' than many other issues, but was not seen as being in most need of improving. However, during all of the roadshows, it was one of the most frequently mentioned themes.



D: Keeping our streets clean, F: Access to well-maintained parks and open spaces, G: Promoting initiatives around Climate Change and sustainability, L: Supporting our residents, communities and businesses to recover well from the impact of Covid, N: Addressing loneliness & isolation, O: Supporting families and young people, P: Supporting active and healthy lives, Q: Ensuring everyone can access all opportunities, S: Creating a vibrant Woking Town Centre, T: Improving access to online services for all, U: Promoting cultural and sporting opportunities, V: Encouraging residents to volunteer

FINANCE AND CHALLENGES

In this section, detailed information was provided showing Woking's 2021/22 budget, where the money was spent and the amount of money that was allocated to each area of the budget. The consultation questionnaire then included two additional open-ended questions.

The first one asked, if WBC **had more money to invest**, what would be the top three priorities as to where WBC should be spending this? The responses were coded, and the top eight were:

- 41% environmental initiatives e.g. relating to Climate Change, sustainability, flooding
- 35% more affordable, low-cost housing for local people
- 25% investment in services and support for children, teenagers, older residents
- 24% support for local businesses and strengthen the local economy
- 21% measures to support independent living
- 21% invest in promoting better health and well-being
- 20% place making, managing the local environment, infrastructure delivery
- 16% improvements to road surfaces and pavements, such as repairing potholes

Secondly, If WBC had to **make cost savings**, where should they be looking to make these?

- 53% said spend less on Corporate and Democratic Services
- 30% reduce expenditure on Place Making
- 14% Health, Wellbeing and Cultural Development
- 13% limit the development and investment being proposed for Woking Town Centre
- 13% reduce spending on sustaining the local economy
- 11% reduce expenditure on measures around Environmental Quality
- 10% on reducing Community Support related activities and services
- 9% reduce the WBC debt

Many of the people responding to the question took the headings for the areas of expenditure directly from the chart showing the 2021/22 budgetary spending without giving any further detail. Other respondents gave more detailed responses suggesting where specific cost savings should be made or in the first question, areas which would benefit from further investment. The full listing of these responses is also supplied in a separate file.

“Proper consultation with residents. Greater transparency over the Council finances (especially debt levels). Greater full council oversight of decisions which impact council finances.....”

OTHER ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

There were also two other open-ended questions, both of which invited residents to say if anything has been missed off the list of priorities, which they feel should be treated as a priority by WBC over the next five years. A list of these comments will be supplied in a separate file.

There were numerous responses acknowledging that the list of issues was already very comprehensive and covered most of the issues in the locality. A number of other areas for attention were mentioned as being missing from the initial listing although not all of these come under the direct responsibility of WBC. All of the comments were coded, with the suggested code frame following the current list of priorities taken from the Corporate Plan for 2021/22.

For the first question, 416 comments were received.

The top six comments received were:

- 33% addressing the borough's infrastructure needs, prioritise sustainable travel
- 18% conserving existing habitats and creating new ones
- 11% an innovative, pro-active and effective council
- 8% Community Safety; more police presence especially in Woking Town Centre, safer streets
- 7% initiating a business review to ensure the council can deliver best value for taxpayers
- 6% building affordable and key worker homes

On the second open-ended question, the top six coded comments received were:

- 34% addressing the borough's infrastructure needs, prioritise sustainable travel
- 11% initiating a business review to ensure the council can deliver best value for taxpayers
- 10% conserving existing habitats and creating new ones
- 7% Community Safety related
- 7% creating a vibrant economic hub bringing together leisure, retail & residential space
- 6% building affordable and key worker homes

"It is extremely important to me and future generations that precious remaining green belt land, including ancient woodland and flood plains is NOT developed for housing or other uses. It is of paramount importance to preserve and protect it. The changed business environment with much more home working means that more brownfield land, redundant office buildings etc. are ready for conversion or to be replaced with housing."

APPENDIX ONE: COMMUNICATION & MARKETING

The table below details the marketing and communication activity WBC used to support the consultation.

Newsletters and editorial	
WBC e-newsletter, 29 October	
WBC e-newsletter, 5 November	
WBC e-newsletter, 19 November	
WBC e-newsletter, 26 November	
WBC e-newsletter, 03 December	
Woking Works e-newsletter	
Transforming Sheerwater project update	Autumn edition
Woking News & Mail DPS	Full page advert and article
Woking News & Mail DPS	Full page advert and article
Media and influencers	
Press release to all local media	Second press release about the online survey & remaining roadshows
Follow-up calls with broadcast media	Woking Radio, That's TV, Brooklands Radio, BBC Surrey
Follow-up call with Woking Live	Get LDR to post link to survey on Woking Live
Contact admins of key Facebook groups	Horsell Village Wire
Direct mail/email	
Residents' Panel	Email to all members inviting them to complete the survey
Residents' Panel	Email to all members reminding them to complete the survey
Residents' Panel	Email to 24 - 45 yr. olds asking them to complete the survey
Residents Panel	Email to all members reminding them to complete the survey
Internal comms	
Email to all staff	Invite staff to complete online survey and share with networks
Email to all staff from Julie	Invite staff to complete online survey and share with networks
Email to all Cllrs	Invite them to share online survey
Email to all Cllrs	Reminder to share and complete the online survey
Email to Pyford & Byfleet/West Byfleet Cllrs	Reminder to share and complete the online survey
Email to Youth Council	Sandie Bolger shared with Youth Council and promoted the survey
New Vision Homes	Invite staff to complete online survey and share with networks
Email to Fullbrook and St John the Baptist schools	Invite to ask 6th from pupils to complete online survey
Digital assets	
Email signature	Send all staff email requesting people replace or stack banners
Printed assets	
Civic window posters X6	Ordered, displayed
Social media - paid	
Facebook advertising - questionnaire	X5 days, 17 to 22 November, daily budget of £25.
Facebook advertising - questionnaire	X5 days, 03 to 08 December, daily budget of £25.
Social media - organic	
Regularly posted on all corporate social media channels	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Nextdoor and Instagram posts regularly