



Help shape the future of discretionary council services report

1. Introduction

Phase one of the public consultation consisted of a resident survey to gather views on what people value most. This included asking if residents would pay more for non-statutory services to enable them to be continued. The council received 8,154 completed surveys by the survey closing date.

2. Profile of respondents

There was a good distribution of responses by age that correlated well against the 2021 census, apart from responses from under 18 years and the 18 – 24 year age groups. Overall, 36% of respondents were male, 59% were female, 0.3% identified as transgender/non-binary and 5% preferred not to say.

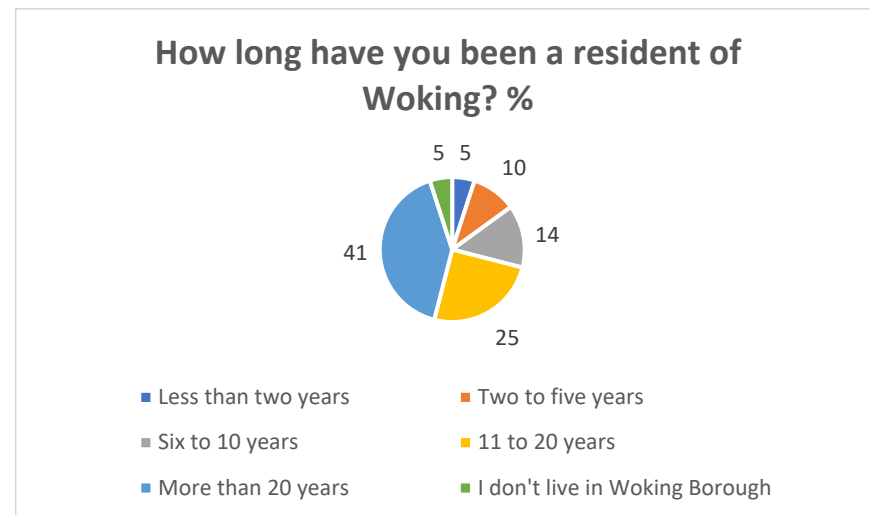
Gender	2021 Census		Survey	
	%	Number	%	Number
Female	50.2	52,300	59.3	4,837
Male	49.5	51,600	35.7	2,911
Transgender/Non-binary	0.3	348	0.3	27
Prefer not to say	0.03	32	4.6	379

Age	2021 Census		Survey	
	%	Number	%	Number
Under 18	24	25,000	1	53
18 - 24	5	4,900	2	125
25 - 44	29	29,800	37	2,992
45 - 64	26	26,900	39	3,197
65 - 79	12	12,100	18	1,503
80+	5	5,000	4	284

92% of people responding to the survey were a resident of the borough, with 7% living outside the borough and a further 2% responding on behalf of an organisation. The majority of respondents have lived in the borough for more than 20 years (41%), with 25% living here between 11 – 20 years and further 14% between 6 – 10 years.

There was a fairly even distribution of responses by ethnicity that correlated well against the 2021 census.

Ethnicity %	Census %	Survey %	Survey Number
White British	67.3	79	6,413
Any other White background	9.8	8.2	666
Prefer not to say	N/A	2.3	190
Indian	3.2	2.2	180
Other Asian background	2.3	2.0	164
Other	1.5	1.5	126
White Irish	1.0	1.5	121
Chinese	1.0	1.0	82
Other mixed background	1.0	0.8	65
White/Asian	1.4	0.7	56
Other Black background	0.2	0.2	18
White/Black Caribbean	0.6	0.2	18
Bangladeshi	0.7	0.2	15
Caribbean	0.3	0.2	15
African	1.3	0.2	14
Arab	0.6	0.1	11
White/Black African	0.5	0	0



3. Analysis of responses

Q1. Do you understand the severity of the council’s financial position?

Residents feel they have a good understanding of the severity of the council’s financial position, with 57% of respondents saying that they fully understand and 41% saying that they understand to some extent. Only 2% said that they did not understand at all. This generally correlates across all age groups. Groups identifying themselves as living with a disability or long term health condition and over 65 years of age also had a high awareness of the council’s financial position.

Understanding of the severity of the council’s financial position								
Options	Total %	Disability %	80 + %	65-79 %	45-64 %	25-44 %	18-24 %	Under 18 %
Fully	57	58	60	68	58	51	59	38
To some extent	41	39	36	31	40	46	38	55
Not at all	2	2	5	1	2	3	2	8

Q2. Which services do you value the most?

The top three most highly valued services across all demographics were access to parks, play areas and green spaces at 55%, closely followed by keeping the borough a safe place for everyone at 53% and keeping our streets clean at 32%. Access to swimming pools (29%) and access to leisure facilities (26%) came in a close fourth and fifth.

Supporting older people to live independently (21%) and supporting families and young people (18%) were also valued, especially for those with a disability and over 80 year olds.

No other service received higher than 10% in this question. Encouraging residents to volunteer was consistently the least popular across all demographics at 4% and did not gain more than 9% support across any age group. Providing spaces for residents and community groups to meet received 6% and did not achieve more than 15% support across any demographic, although this had slightly more value to people over 65 and with a disability or long term health condition.

Access to sports pitches and pavilions, promoting climate change initiatives and supporting arts and cultural opportunities all received 8% support across all demographics.

Service areas valued across demographics								
Demographic	Total%	Disability%	80+%	65-79%	45-64%	25-44%	18-24%	Under 18%
Access to parks, play areas and green spaces	55	42	30	43	51	68	41	43
Keeping the borough a safe place for everyone	53	49	51	51	56	50	44	43
Keeping our streets clean	32	32	32	31	36	36	22	21
Access to swimming pools	29	22	9	19	26	38	26	23
Access to leisure centres	26	17	12	19	26	30	38	26
Supporting older people to live independently	21	40	56	35	23	10	10	8
Supporting families and young people	18	20	11	14	17	22	23	42
Helping new and established businesses to thrive	10	9	10	11	10	9	13	10
Supporting arts and cultural opportunities	9	6	12	11	10	7	10	4
Access to public conveniences	9	17	20	15	8	6	9	6
Supporting community and voluntary groups through grants and subsidies	8	12	11	14	9	4	9	2
Promoting climate change initiatives	8	8	8	8	7	8	18	34
Access to sports pitches and pavilions	8	5	4	5	9	8	18	19
Providing spaces for the residents and community groups to meet	6	10	15	10	6	4	4	4
Encouraging residents to volunteer and play a greater role supporting their communities	4	6	8	9	4	2	5	6

Q3. In the past 12 months, how often have you used these discretionary council funded facilities?

According to the survey, The Vyne is the most popular Centre for the Community with 6% of respondents regularly using it more than once month. In comparison, St Mary's has 5% and both Parkview and Moorcroft are used by 3% of respondents. 30% of people over 45 use The Vyne, 21% of people over 45 use St Mary's and 8% of people over 45 use Moorcroft. St Mary's and The Vyne are more popular with respondents that are 80 plus or have a long-term health issue or disability. 20% of the younger age groups use Parkview.

The majority of respondents across all demographics said that they have never used the arts and theatre facilities. 92% of respondents have not used Buzz Theatre, 59% haven't used the Rhoda McGaw and 54% the Lightbox. Though the responses for the Rhoda McGaw and Buzz

Theatre may not be a true reflection of the use of these spaces, as Italia Conti Academy use these for rehearsals and shows throughout the year.

Over the past 12 months, The Lightbox has been the most well used of the arts and theatre services on a weekly and monthly basis, but this only amounts to 10%, with the Rhoda McGaw at 5% and Buzz Theatre at just 2%. However, both The Lightbox and Rhoda McGaw have 36% of people using the service a few times a year.

The Lightbox has a fairly even spread across all age groups who use it, including people that have a long-term health condition or disability, which ranges from 6% - 9%. The Rhoda McGaw is more popular with people under the age of 44 years, and Buzz Theatre is most popular with people aged between 18 – 24 years and probably reflects its main user demographics.

Age groups of people that use services more than once a week or more than once a month																
Demographic %	Total		Under 18		18-24		25-44		45-64		65-79		80+		Disability	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
The Vyne	3	3	6	0	2	6	2	3	2	2	5	2	13	6	7	5
St Mary's	3	2	0	2	3	5	4	3	3	2	3	1	10	2	7	3
Moorcroft	2	1	0	2	3	0	2	2	1	1	1	0	3	1	3	2
Parkview	2	1	2	4	5	6	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	3	2
The Lightbox	3	7	0	6	5	7	3	6	3	6	3	8	4	5	3	7
Rhoda McGaw Theatre	1	4	0	8	5	7	1	5	1	4	0	3	1	1	1	3
Buzz Theatre	1	1	0	0	0	5	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Woking Leisure Centre	22	12	36	17	31	14	28	19	20	10	15	6	9	4	17	21
Sportsbox	8	5	15	11	15	12	10	7	10	4	3	2	1	0	5	2
Eastwood	11	5	17	6	14	7	13	7	13	5	5	2	1	1	8	3
Pool in Park	21	12	21	19	22	16	30	19	17	9	12	4	5	0	16	7
Pitches/Pavilions	14	9	17	28	22	21	19	13	15	8	4	3	3	2	9	6

Q4. Would you be prepared to pay an additional charge to use any discretionary council services?

Living Well services (Centres for the Community, Day Care Centres, Community meals, Community alarms)

Respondents to living well services had the lowest percentage of people willing to pay more to use the services, as well as having the lowest percentage of people saying that they definitely would not be prepared to pay more.

With regards to the centres for the community, 20% said they would either maybe or definitely be prepared to pay more compared to 13% who said definitely not. 12% said they would either maybe or definitely be prepared to pay more for community meals, compared to 10% who said definitely not. 13% of respondents said they would either maybe or definitely be prepared to pay more for community alarms, compared to 10% who said definitely not.

However, these services also had the largest percentage of people that do not use them. 66% said that they do not use the centres for the community and between 75% and 78% do not use the day care centres or community meals and/or community alarm services.

Leisure services

21% of respondents that use the leisure centres said that they would be prepared to pay more for the service. 34% answered maybe, with 20% saying that they would not. 24% of respondents that use the swimming pools said that they would be prepared to pay more for the service and 32% said maybe. 19% said that they would not. A quarter of respondents do not use the leisure services.

Arts and culture services

15% of people who use the Lightbox said that they would be prepared to pay more for the service, 29% said maybe with 16% saying that they would not. 40% of people do not use the Lightbox. 14% of people who use the Rhoda McGaw and Buzz theatres said that they would be prepared to pay more for the service, 26% said maybe, with 13% saying that they would not. 47% said that they do not use these services.

Other services

Car parking had the largest percentage of respondents who would definitely not pay more, at 50%. Only 13% said that they would be prepared to pay more, and 25% people said maybe. Car parking also had the least number of respondents that said they didn't use the service, at 13%.

19% of respondents stated that they would pay more for garden waste collection with 28% saying maybe. 32% of respondents said they definitely wouldn't be prepared to pay more. Garden waste collections had the second fewest number of respondents that said they didn't use the service at 21%.

Would you be prepared to pay an additional charge to use any of these discretionary council services?				
Service Area	Yes %	Maybe %	Definitely not %	I don't use this service %
Leisure centres	21	34	20	25
Swimming pools	24	32	19	25
Centres for the Community	7	13	13	66
Day care centres	5	8	11	75
Community meals	6	6	10	78
Community alarm	6	7	10	77
Rhoda McGaw, Buzz theatre	14	26	14	47
Car parking	13	25	50	13
Garden waste collections	19	28	32	21
The Lightbox	15	29	16	40

Q5. Which of these discretionary services should we consider reducing or stop funding?

The vast majority of respondents, 60%, answered 'don't know' to should we consider reducing or stop funding centres for sports and leisure activities and centres for the communities, as well as community meals, community alarms and day care centre discretionary services. Broadly 20% to 30% across the service areas and demographics said to reduce, whilst figures to stop these services are very low, with no more than 11% agreeing.

More people have said to stop funding the arts and theatre services at 27%, compared to leisure at 5% and community centres at 9%. Arts and theatre services had the fewest responses saying they don't know. Across leisure service areas approximately 33/34% have said to reduce the services, whilst only 5% agreed to stop funding them.

Breakdown of responses by demographic to reducing or stop funding																
Service Area	Total %		Disability %		80 + %		65-79 %		45-64 %		25-44 %		18-24 %		Under 18 %	
	R = Reduce	S = Stop	R	S	R	S	R	S	R	S	R	S	R	S	R	S
Leisure centres	34	5	37	7	36	5	41	6	34	6	30	4	33	7	28	2
Swimming pools	33	5	36	8	34	5	41	6	33	6	28	4	30	10	32	4
Centres for the Community	29	9	29	7	25	4	32	6	28	8	28	10	27	16	25	9
Day care centre services	24	7	27	5	22	2	27	5	24	6	23	10	30	13	19	9
Community meals service	22	7	25	5	21	4	25	5	21	6	22	9	41	13	23	6
Community Alarm Service	21	11	23	8	15	7	24	8	20	10	21	14	25	19	19	13
Community theatres	33	22	31	22	28	15	35	23	33	22	33	23	15	16	9	21
The Lightbox	33	27	30	29	35	20	37	23	32	28	32	10	14	19	9	25
Garden Waste Collections	33	9	32	8	29	4	36	7	32	9	33	10	34	9	21	2

Q6. How should Woking Borough Council tackle its budget shortfall?

The majority of respondents, 32%, said that the council should find other organisations to deliver services, with 20% of people saying to charge users more. Only 4% said that the council should stop providing or funding services. Increasing Council Tax was the second least favourite option at 10%.

How should Woking Borough Council tackle its budget shortfall?								
Demographic	Total%	Disability%	80+%	65-79%	45-64%	25-44%	18-24%	Under 18%
Find another organisation to deliver the service	32	32	25	28	30	35	52	45
Charge users more for discretionary services	20	17	27	23	20	17	9	6
Other (please specify)	20	21	19	15	21	21	16	19
Reduce discretionary services provided or funded	16	15	15	17	15	16	11	15
Increase Council Tax for everyone	10	9	12	13	10	8	6	9
Stop providing or funding discretionary services	4	5	2	4	4	4	6	6

‘Other’

The final option for this question was ‘other’ which was an open text box giving respondents the opportunity to have their say. In total, 1,600 individual comments were received.

Many people took this opportunity to use this section to express concerns or dissatisfaction regarding the financial situation of the council. Some respondents repeated what was already asked in previous questions, therefore the analysis focused on what was different to what had already been asked in the survey.

To support the analysis of the significant number of verbatim responses, around 20% of these responses were randomly assessed to give an overall summary of the comments received.

Comments could be categorised into four groups.

1. Reference to previous leaders and councillors

- Accountability lies with this group and legal action should be taken against them.
- Pay back bonuses/ salaries/freeze pensions.
- A thorough audit should be undertaken/ investigation should take place before making any big decisions. Central government should have monitored and stepped in earlier.

2. Tarnished reputation and image of council and current staff

- Reduce numbers of staff/ salaries/ pension/ staff benefits.
 - Bring inexperienced staff in finance and property other services where required. Improve standard of management.
- Reduce number of council offices/move to a smaller building.

3. General resident views

- Angry about the situation and should not be penalised and asked to save the council.
- Worried about their future and well-being. They feel ashamed of living in the borough, there is no pride anymore.
- Concerned they may have to sell their properties and leave Woking.
- Lost trust in the Council and want greater transparency in Council decision making going forward.

4. Ideas

- Ask central government for support.
- Sell assets / review all current projects/ stop buying properties.
- Review all current contracts/re-negotiate supply chains.
- Focus on statutory services, vulnerable and those receiving means tested benefits and services that impact the well-being of residents.
- Charge more for services/ increase charges but ensure those on means tested benefits and vulnerable can still access services.
- Increase Council Tax for those in larger properties.
- Reduce/stop subsidies and grants to community groups/community assets.
- Work with private companies, philanthropists, and large businesses to contribute towards discretionary services to help them meet Corporate Social Responsibility commitments.

5. Conclusion

The results from this survey will feed into the option analysis to inform the Medium Term Financial Strategy that will be presented to September's council meetings.