

2026/27 Budget consultation

Summary Report



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Key findings

Council Tax, fees and charges

Overall, the results indicate that respondents somewhat support an increase in Council Tax and fees and charges.

When specifically asked if they would support a rise in Council Tax, 62% of respondents indicated their support for varying amounts.

The most favoured increase was an increase of less than 4.99%, this was chosen by 27% of respondents. Additionally, 21% supported an increase of 4.99%, and 15% supported an increase of more than 4.99%. However, 36% would prefer to see no increase.

Furthermore, this year 42% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would support increasing Council Tax to the unitary average if it resulted in fewer service cuts, this is down on last year's 53%.

However, when asked about their preferred methods to balance the budget, increasing Council Tax was the least popular option. The top choices were selling council owned property and stopping services which we do not legally have to deliver.

Just over half (54%) of respondents said the council should increase fees and charges to cover rising costs.

Lobbying Central Government

The public was clearly in favour of lobbying central government for change, with 86% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the government should take urgent action to fund local government fairly, and 86% in favour of central government increasing funding to pay for the rising demand for adult social care. However, only 38% agreed that councils should be given more power to set council tax locally, this is a drop from last year where 49% agreed.

Priorities and Concerns

The top priority for most respondents was the condition of roads and pavements, with 783 respondents (55%) expressing concern. Crime was the second most cited issue with 415 respondents (29%) and public transport was the joint third most cited issue alongside education and schools both with 404 respondents (28%).

Additional comments

We provided respondents with an opportunity to leave free-text comments near the end of the survey. Many people expressed concerns about perceived wasteful spending (consultants, projects, management costs) and unaffordable Council Tax rises.

The third most commented area was high social care and SEND transport costs. Residents repeatedly said that the exceptionally high costs of social care and SEND – especially expensive private placements and costly transport arrangements – are placing an unsustainable strain on the council's budget and must be better managed.

Many residents felt the council is not transparent about how money is spent or how decisions are made, saying they can't understand where funds go, why certain projects are prioritised, or how major financial choices are approved.

Residents frequently raised concerns about the poor condition of Somerset's roads, highlighting potholes, repeated low-quality repairs and a lack of routine maintenance as major issues that urgently need attention.

Consultation context

The Somerset Council budget consultation for 2026/2027 was launched in December 2025 and closed in January 2026. The aim of this consultation was to gather views from residents and businesses in Somerset about how the council should balance the budget and where to look for potential savings for the year ahead. This consultation is a vital part of our commitment to transparency, community engagement, and financial planning.

This report should help plan, prioritise and allocate resources effectively and ensure that budget decisions are taken with the views of the communities in mind.

In November 2023 Somerset Council declared a financial emergency with a projected budget gap of £100 million. Local authorities legally must set a balanced budget and not spend more than they have available. The cost of delivering services has risen dramatically over the last few years particularly in areas such as adult and children's social care.

Our income comes from Council Tax, government grants, and fees and charges such as parking charges and planning fees. Somerset has an historically low level of Council Tax, below the national average and less than some neighbouring authorities in Bristol, Dorset, Cornwall, and Plymouth.

This report summarises the findings of the budget consultation exercise.

Methodology

- The budget consultation opened on 3 December 2025 and closed on 14 January 2026 and was widely promoted via a variety of online and offline channels.
- Structured responses were gathered using our consultation platform Citizen Space, and paper copies were made available in libraries across the county. Unstructured responses and feedback were gathered via email and social media comments.
- The consultation was shared with businesses via a large database of newsletters and all business contacts were invited to an online budget briefing. The combination of communication activities with businesses resulted in 114 responses from businesses.
- Overall, the consultation received 1,427 responses. 1,358 of those responses were from people describing themselves as residents of Somerset, 114 from businesses, and the rest made of up Councillors, Somerset Council employees, people from community groups or charities.
- This report summarises the key findings and provides comparative demographic analysis from the Somerset Council Budget Consultation 2026-2027. Notable demographic variances from the average response are also highlighted, including comparison to the demographic profile of Somerset.
- As this was an open consultation, the respondents are not a representative sample of the Somerset population. Most of the consultation questions were optional, and if 'no response' was provided to a question, this was not included in the analysis. As such, the totals for each question generally add up to less than the total number of respondents who replied via the consultation survey.

A note on coding

The free text responses have been analysed using AI to help us identify themes. All responses are reviewed by our team before any conclusions are drawn. You can find a copy of our privacy notice, which talks about Somerset Council's use of AI on our website here:

www.somerset.gov.uk/privacy-notices

Communications and promotion

- Press releases and widespread media coverage
- Dedicated consultation page on the Somerset Council website Somerset Council e-newsletters
- Multiple organic posts on main Council social media platforms, totalling 48,882 reach and 200 engagements
- The consultation was available in Somerset libraries



News roundup

5 December 2025

Consultations

Have your say on Somerset Council's budget

Residents and businesses are encouraged to take part in Somerset Council's annual budget consultation.

The budget consultation opens today (3 December) and is due to close on **14 January**. The link can be found via the Council's [2026/27 Budget Consultation page](#), with paper copies available in [libraries](#).

Read more





Business bulletin

Have your say on our budget for 2026-2027

Have your say Budget consultation

We invite you to share your views on our proposed budget for 2026-2027. Your





Our services

Home > Have your say on Somerset Council's budget

Have your say on Somerset Council's budget

Residents invited to share views on Somerset Council's budget plans as the authority seeks feedback to shape future spending priorities

Residents and businesses are encouraged to take part in Somerset Council's annual budget consultation.

The budget consultation opens today (3 December) and is due to close on **14 January**. The link can be found via the Council's [2026/27 Budget Consultation page](#), with paper copies available in [Somerset libraries](#).

In previous years the budget consultation has helped Councillors understand people's views and priorities as they have taken difficult decisions to save millions of pounds and avoid the threat of a Section 114 Notice (this similar to a bankruptcy notice for councils, issued when they can no longer balance their budgets).

Have your say Budget consultation

About this article

Last updated December 17, 2025





Our services

Home > Somerset Council welcomes finance settlement but continues to call for fairer funding

Somerset Council welcomes finance settlement but continues to call for fairer funding

Somerset Council cautiously welcomes increased Local Government Finance Settlement but calls for a fairer funding model

Somerset Council's [Leader Bill Revans](#) has cautiously welcomed the 3-year Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025/6 but has urged the Government to do more to increase councils' spending power without putting the burden on taxpayers.

As part of last week's announcement on the provisional settlement, Somerset Council understands it will receive an increase in its Core Spending Power - this is revenue funding available for council services through the Local Government Finance Settlement - of around 13% over the next 3 years.

While this is positive news, there is an assumption that around 97% of that increase is funded by local people through Council Tax and this will require greater tax increases to support this. It also



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MPs call for more council funding from government



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Everything we know so far about Somerset Council's 2026 budget

By Laura Linham 12th Jan 2026

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19 December 2025 at 09:01

Have you had your say in our budget consultation? We're facing tough financial decisions for 2026-27, with rising costs for essential services like social care and chil... [See more](#)



Have your say Budget Consultation 2026/2027

Boost this post to get more reach for Somerset Council.

Boost post

5 15 comments 6 shares



9,061 followers 4w

Have you had your say in our budget consultation? We're facing tough financial decisions for 2026-27, with rising costs for essential services like social care and children's services. ...more



Have your say Budget Consultation 2026/2027

3

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News > Somerset News > Labour Party

No final decision made on size of planned Somerset council tax increase

Bills will be going up later this year

f X e

NEWS By [Daniel Mumby](#) Local Democracy Reporter, [Daniel Mumby](#) and [Local Democracy Reporter](#)

04:54, 12 Jan 2026

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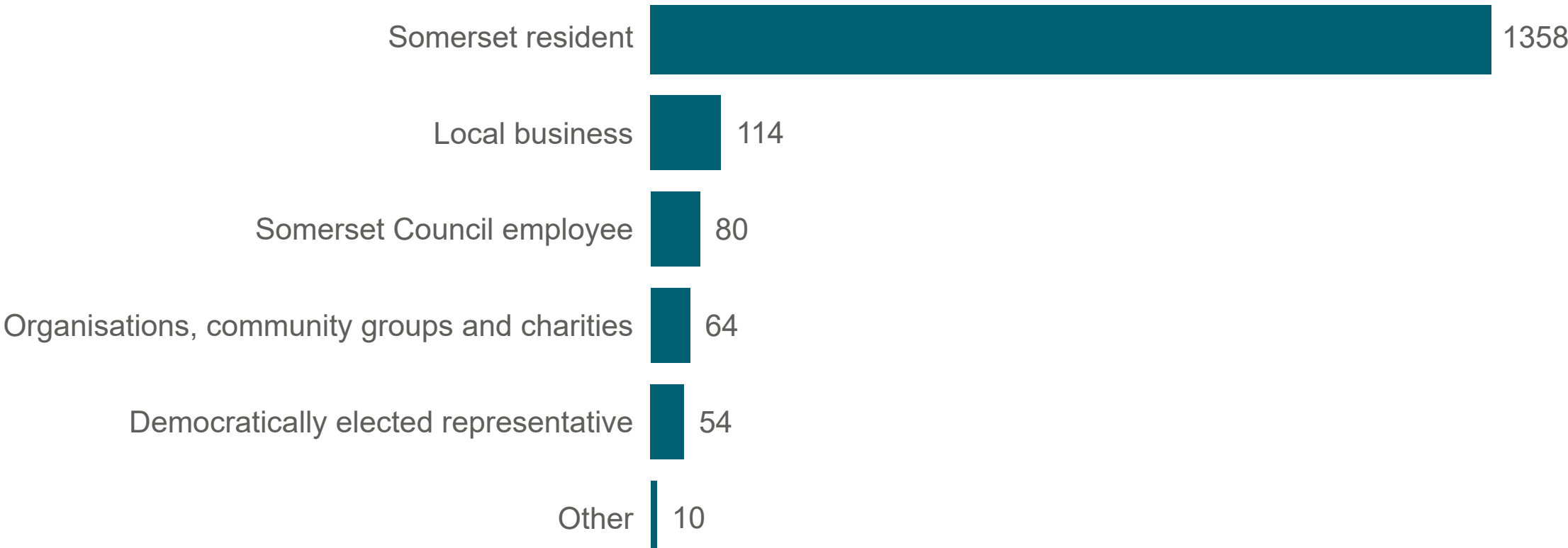
Demographic analysis

To understand how views may vary among different demographics, we have identified several groups for the more detailed analyses in this report.

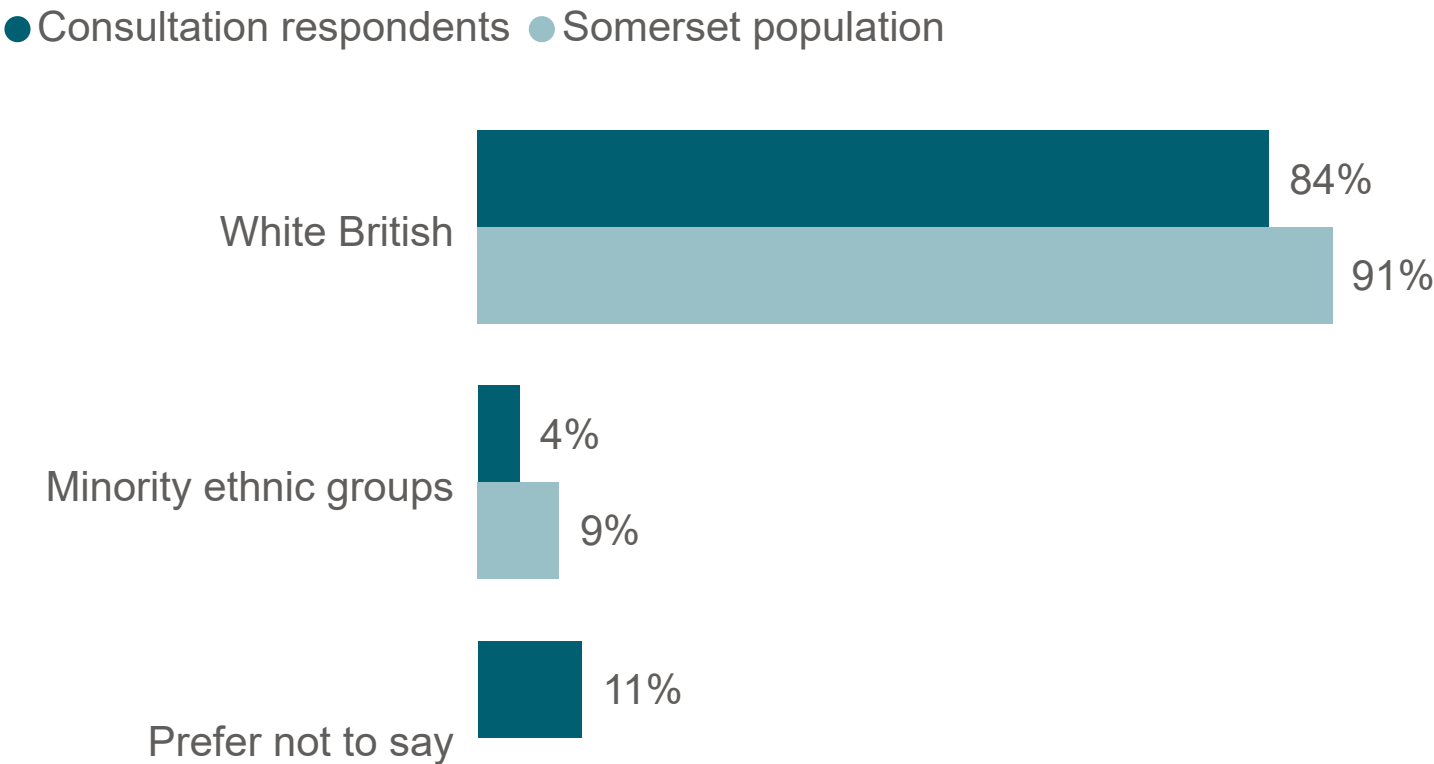
The graphs showing the demographic breakdown on this page compare the consultation respondents to the overall population of Somerset according to census data.

It shows people with disabilities are slightly under- represented, although it should be noted there were around 9% of respondents who selected ‘prefer not to say’. Minority ethnic groups were also slightly under-represented.

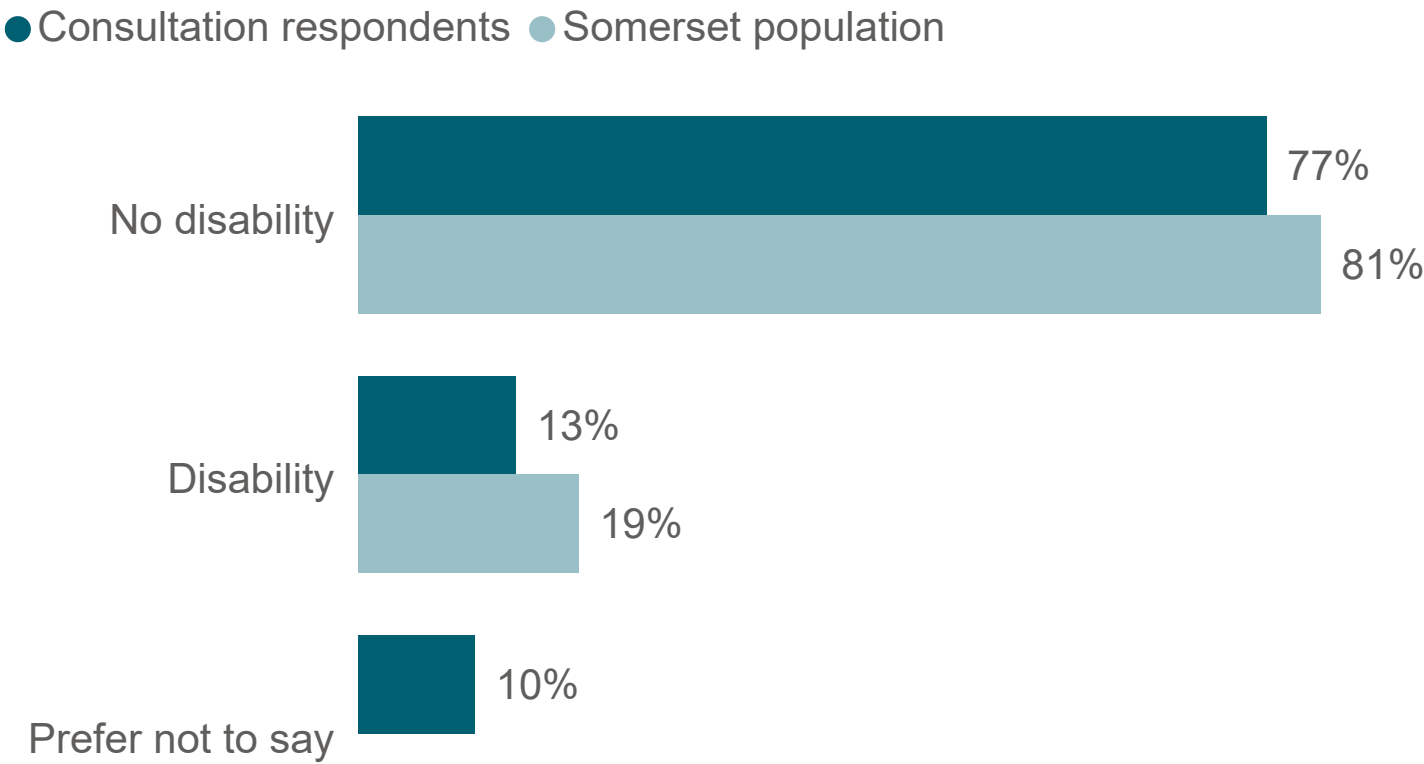
Number of respondents by group



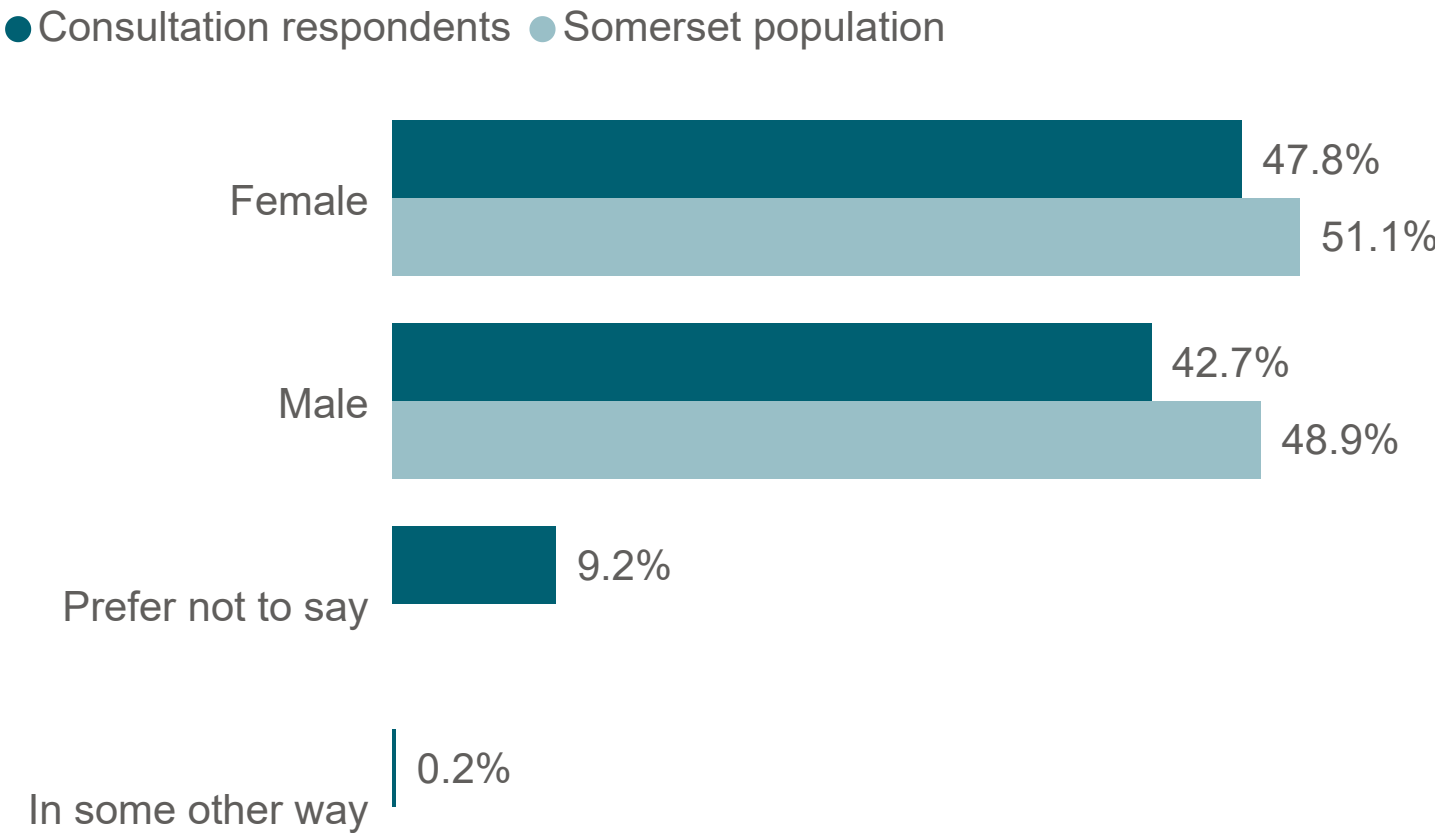
Respondents' ethnic groups, compared to Somerset population (Census 2021)



Proportion of respondents who said they had a disability compared to Somerset population (Census 2021)



Respondents' sex identity compared to Somerset population (Census 2021)

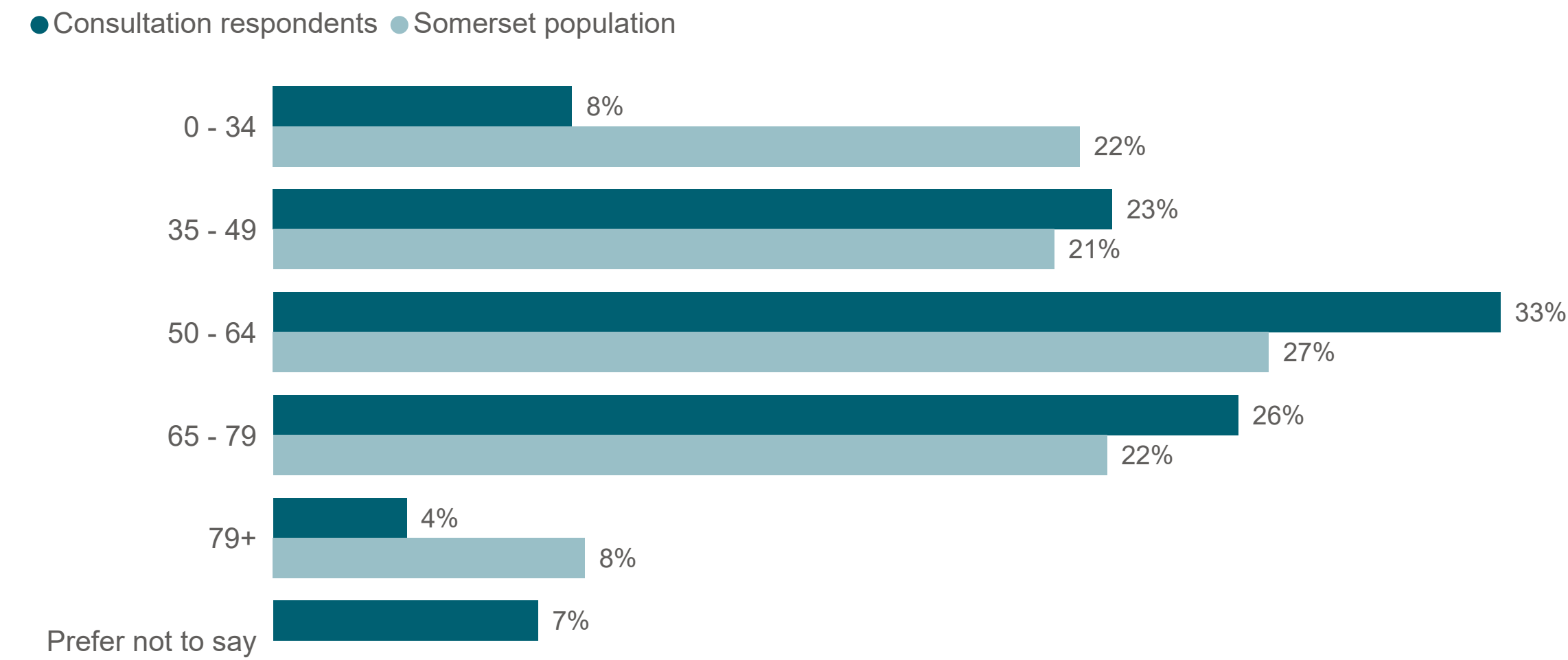


Demographic analysis

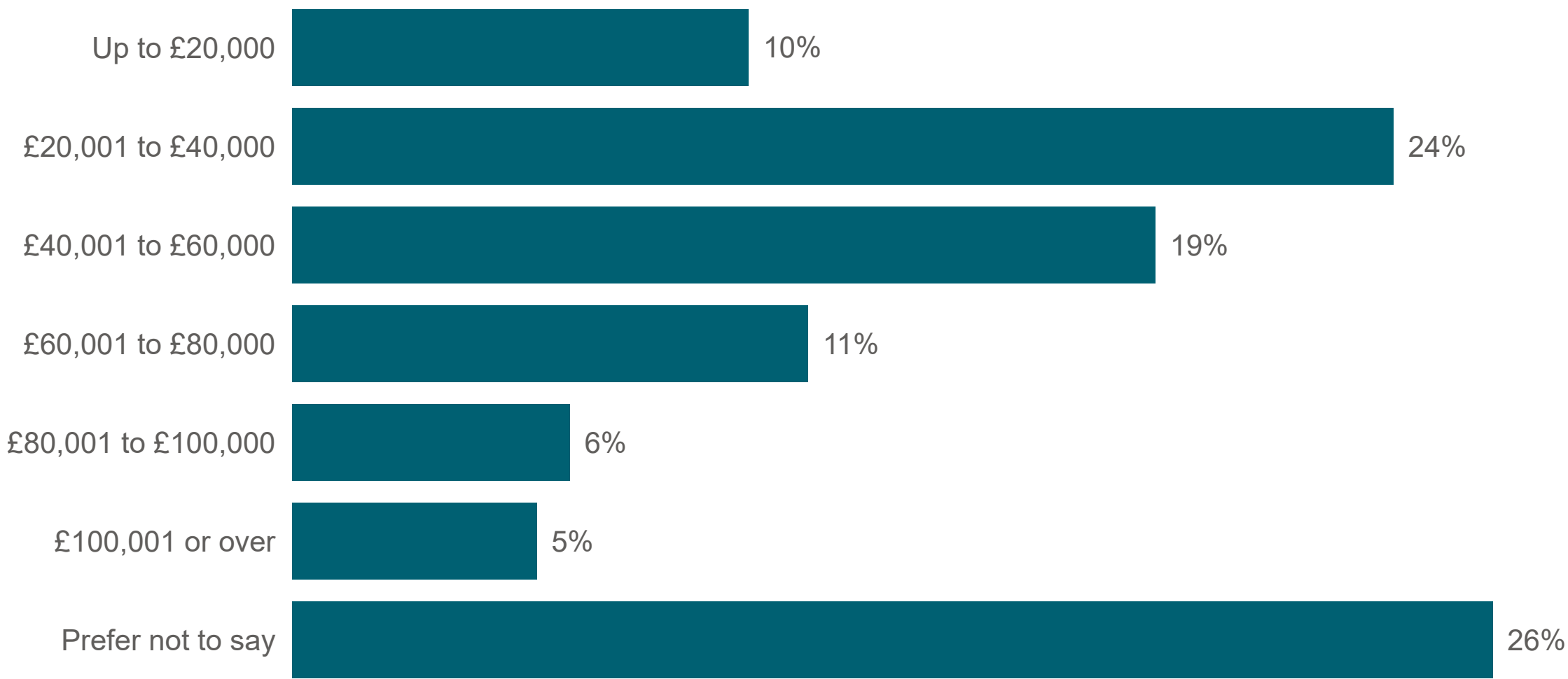
The age data should be used with caution due to the relatively low number of respondents aged under 34. The results clearly show that young people’s views are under-represented throughout the survey and people over the age of 50 are over-represented. Efforts were made to promote the survey to younger people through channels such as social media and school newsletters, but these results are not unexpected with a consultation of this nature.

We also gathered data on household income to compare responses to questions about Council Tax. Overall, 26% of respondents selected ‘prefer not to say’, 34% of respondents said they have a household income of under £40,000, 19% have a household income of between £40k to £80k, and 11% over £80k.

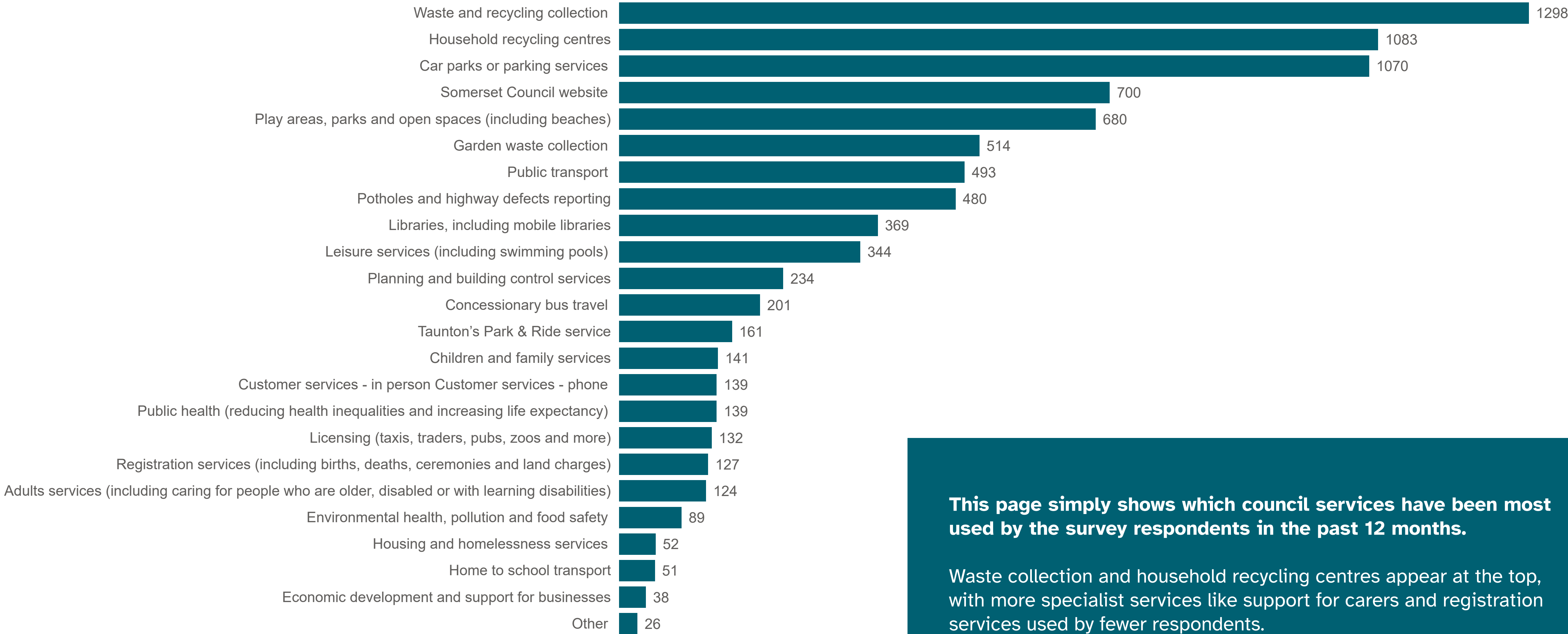
Respondents' age profile compared to Somerset population (Census 2021)



Respondents by household income



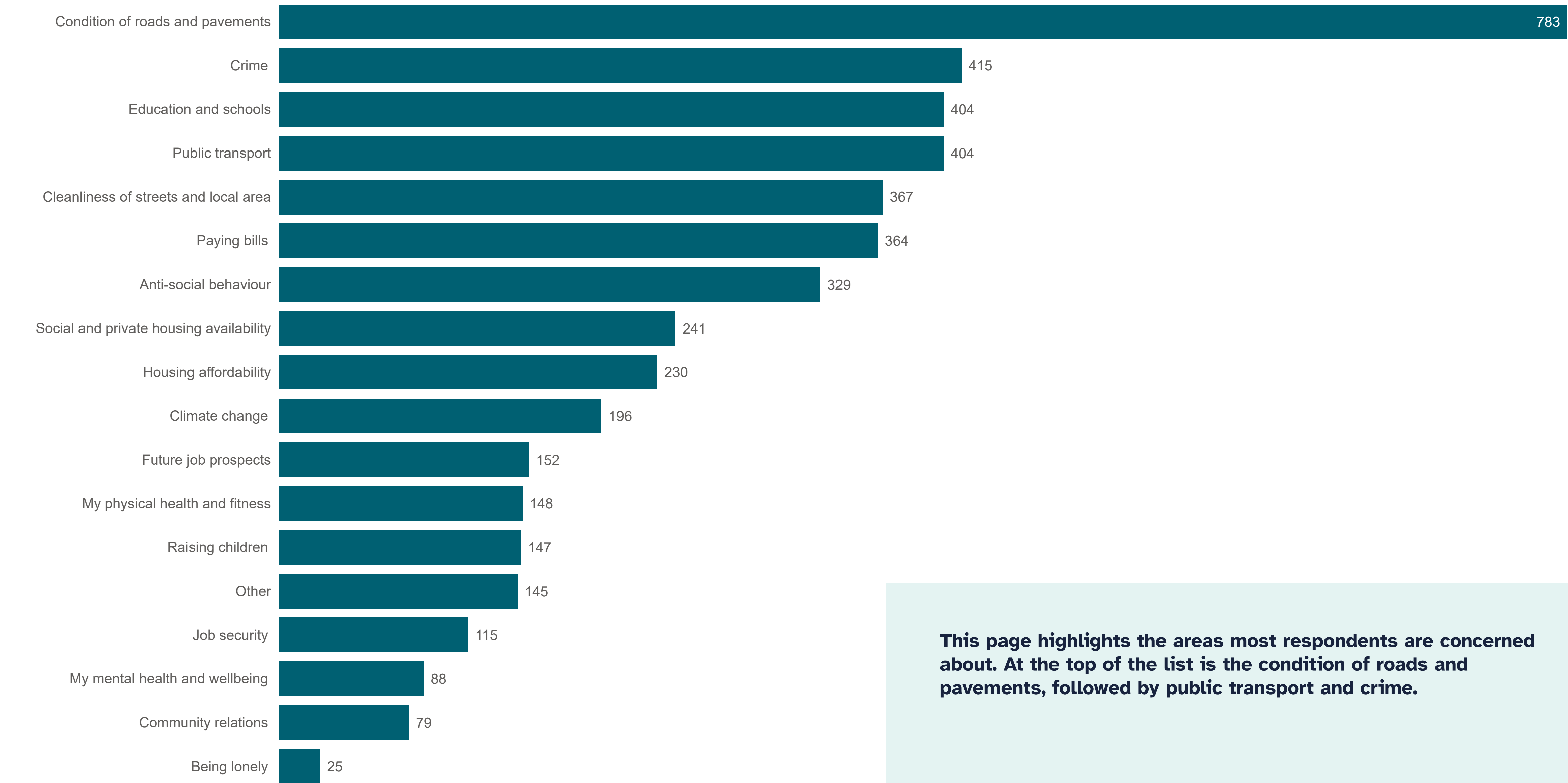
Services used in past 12 months



This page simply shows which council services have been most used by the survey respondents in the past 12 months.

Waste collection and household recycling centres appear at the top, with more specialist services like support for carers and registration services used by fewer respondents.

Which of the following are you most concerned about?



This page highlights the areas most respondents are concerned about. At the top of the list is the condition of roads and pavements, followed by public transport and crime.

Budget preferences

In this section we asked the public to consider various actions we could take to help balance our budget by ranking options in order of preference.

The graph shows the preferences in order.

There is strong support from respondents for Somerset Council to sell council-owned property and stop services which we legally do not have to deliver.

The least popular options were increasing Council Tax, reducing service standards, and introducing new fees and charges for services.

Average preference rating for budget options

(Highest average priority rating)



- Selling council-owned property (2.8)
- Stopping services which we legally do not have to deliver (3.1)
- Increasing fees and charges (3.5)
- Introducing new fees and charges for services (3.5)
- Reducing service standards (3.9)
- Increasing Council Tax (4.1)

(Lowest average priority rating)

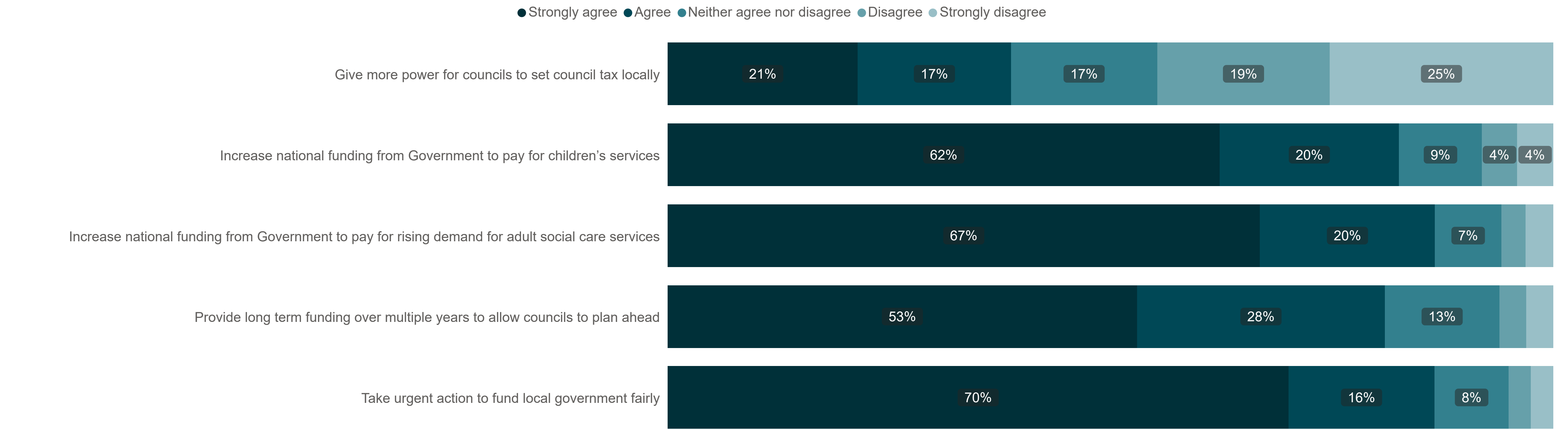
Lobbying Government

In this section we asked for views on lobbying and gave options of areas where we could call for the Government to make changes to national policy.

Respondents are strongly in favour of Somerset Council lobbying for Government to take urgent action to fund local government fairly. They were also supportive of us calling for increased funding from the Government to pay for the rising demand for adult social care services.

Consultees were less supportive of the suggestion that councils have additional powers to set Council Tax locally.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that Somerset Council should lobby the Government for change in the following areas?



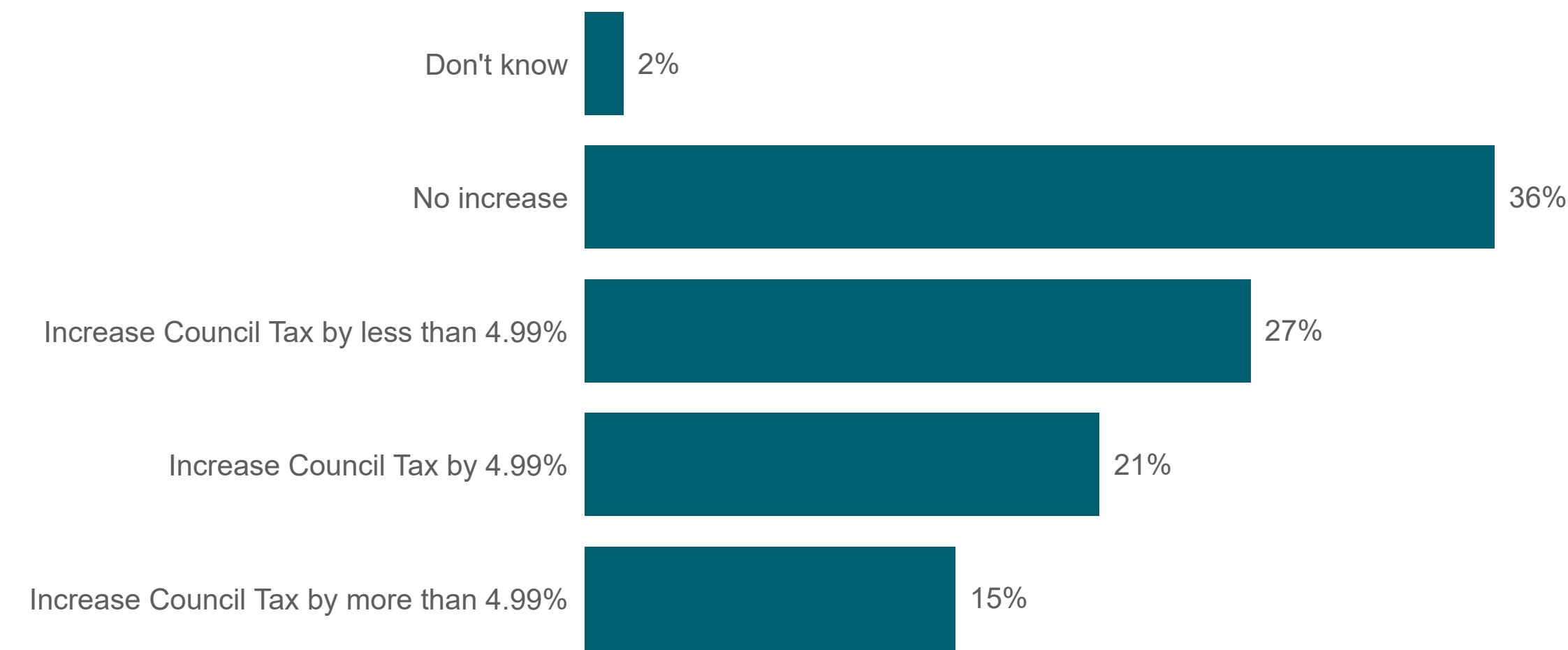
Council Tax

Council Tax is the main income source for local councils but the ability for councils to increase Council Tax is carefully controlled by the government. In this section we asked whether Somerset residents would be happy to consider paying more in Council Tax if it was permitted.

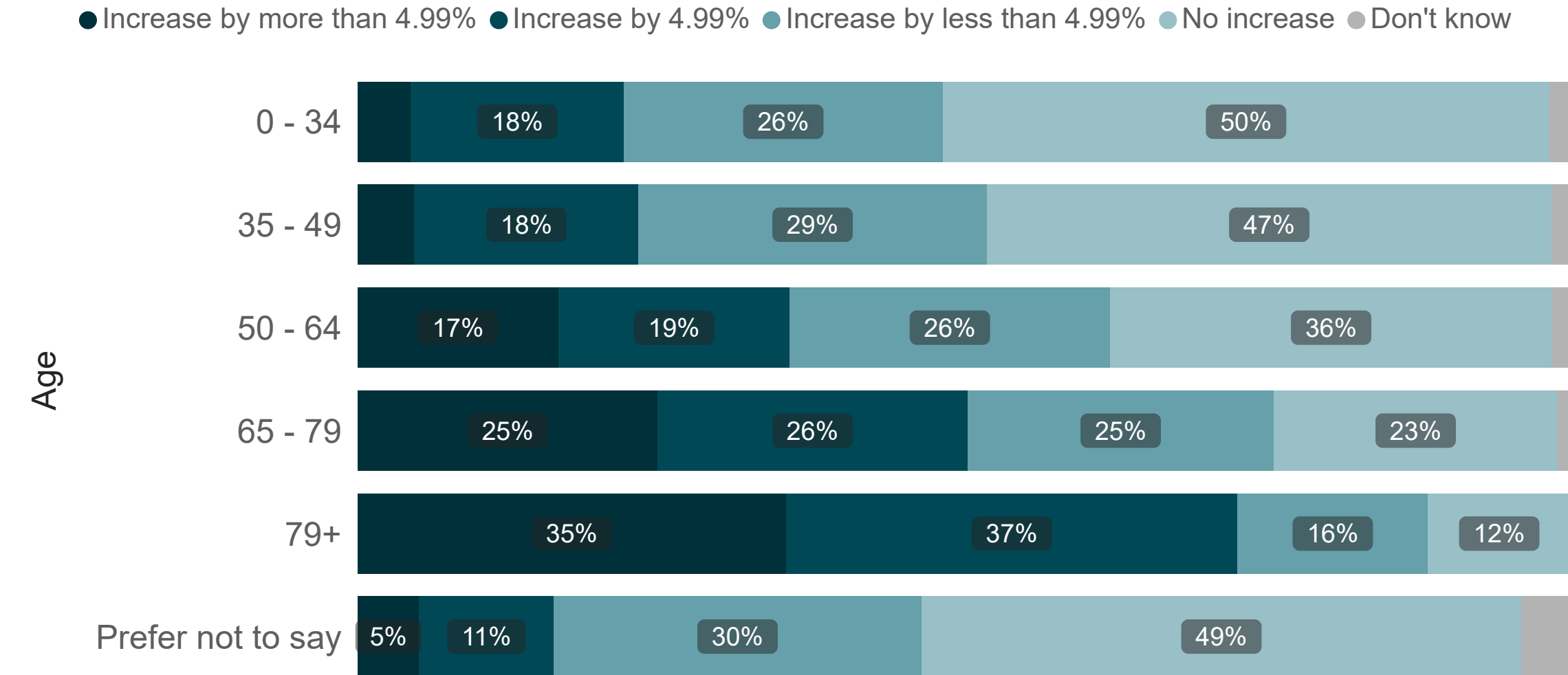
Overall, the results show most respondents were in favour of an increase, with 15% in favour of a rise by more than 4.99%, 21% in favour of a rise of 4.99% and 27% of a rise by less than 4.99%. 36% preferred no increase in Council Tax.

When broken down by age, the results showed the older people were the more likely they were to support a higher rise in Council Tax. When split by household income, the higher the household income, the more likely respondents were to support a higher increase.

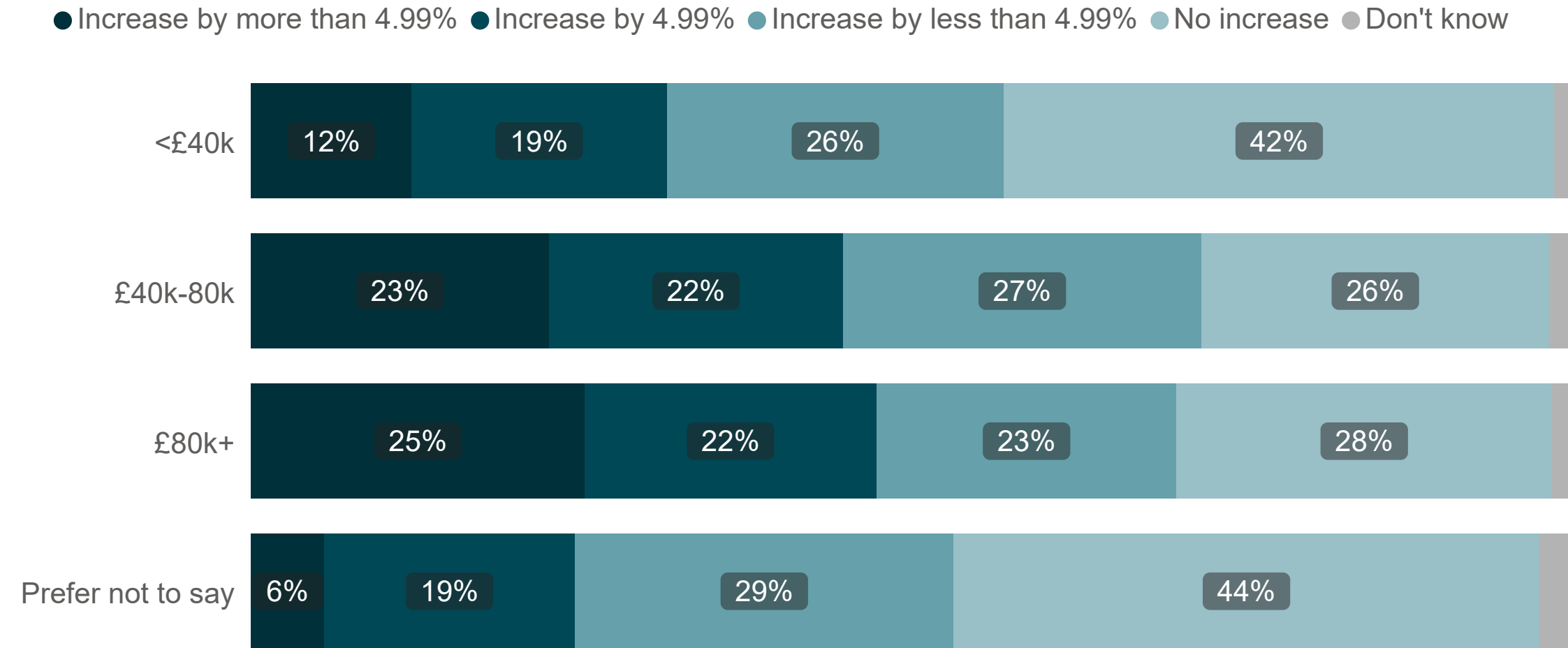
Preferred Council Tax increase



Preferred Council Tax increase, by age



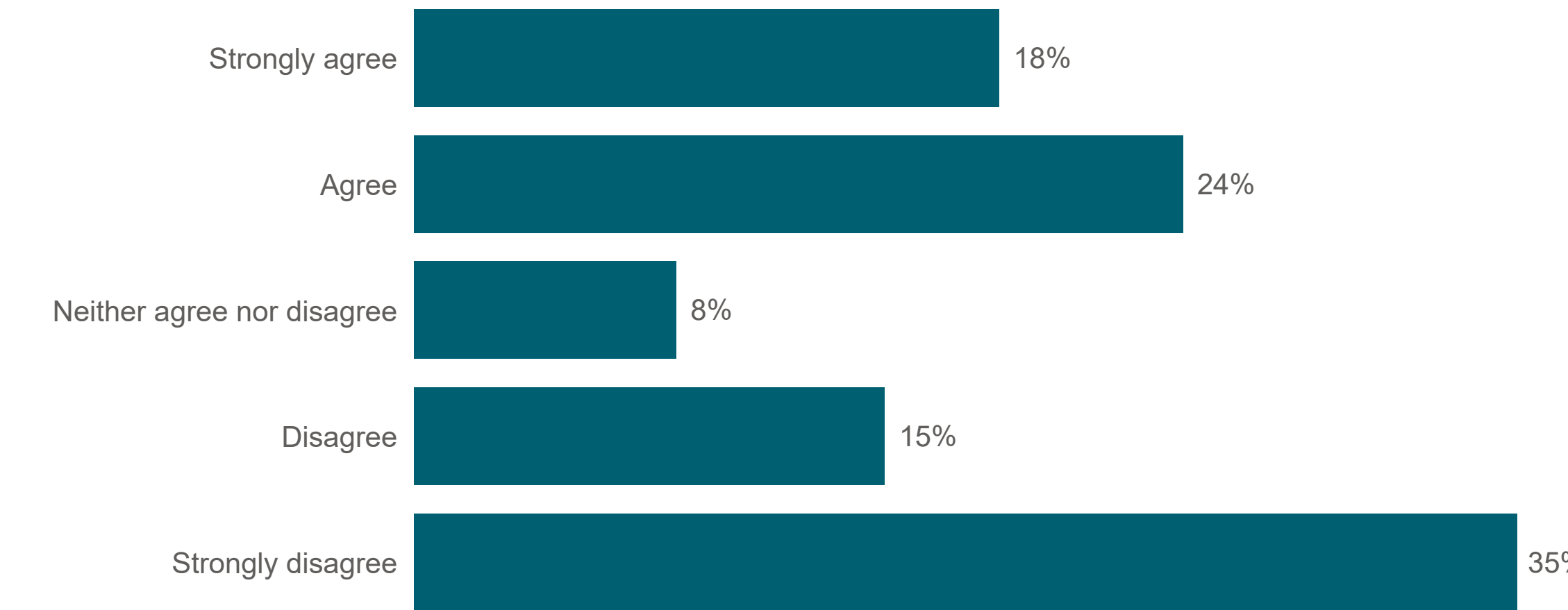
Preferred Council Tax increase, by household income



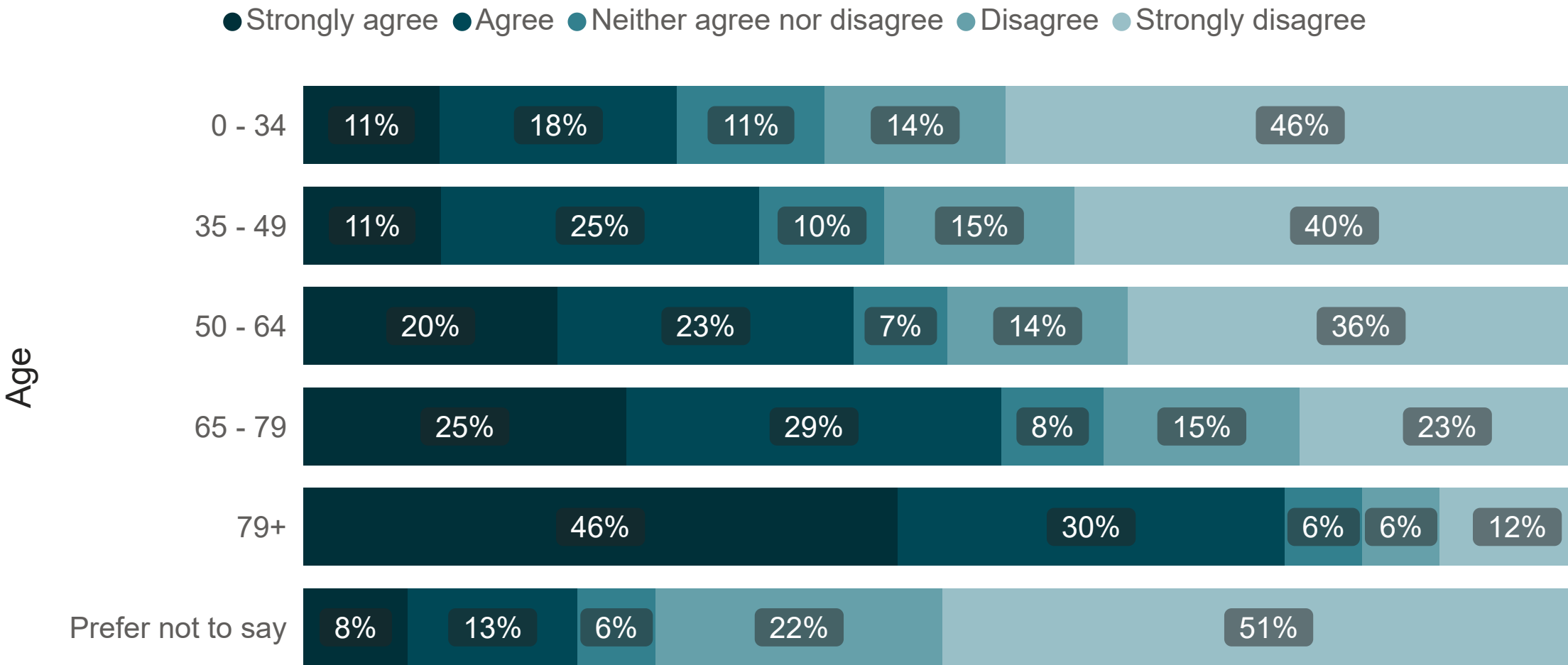
Council Tax

We also asked people if they would support a rise in Council Tax to put Somerset in line with other unitary councils if it led to fewer service cuts. Unlike last year where this was supported, this year 49% of people who responded were against putting up Council Tax in line with the Unitary average.

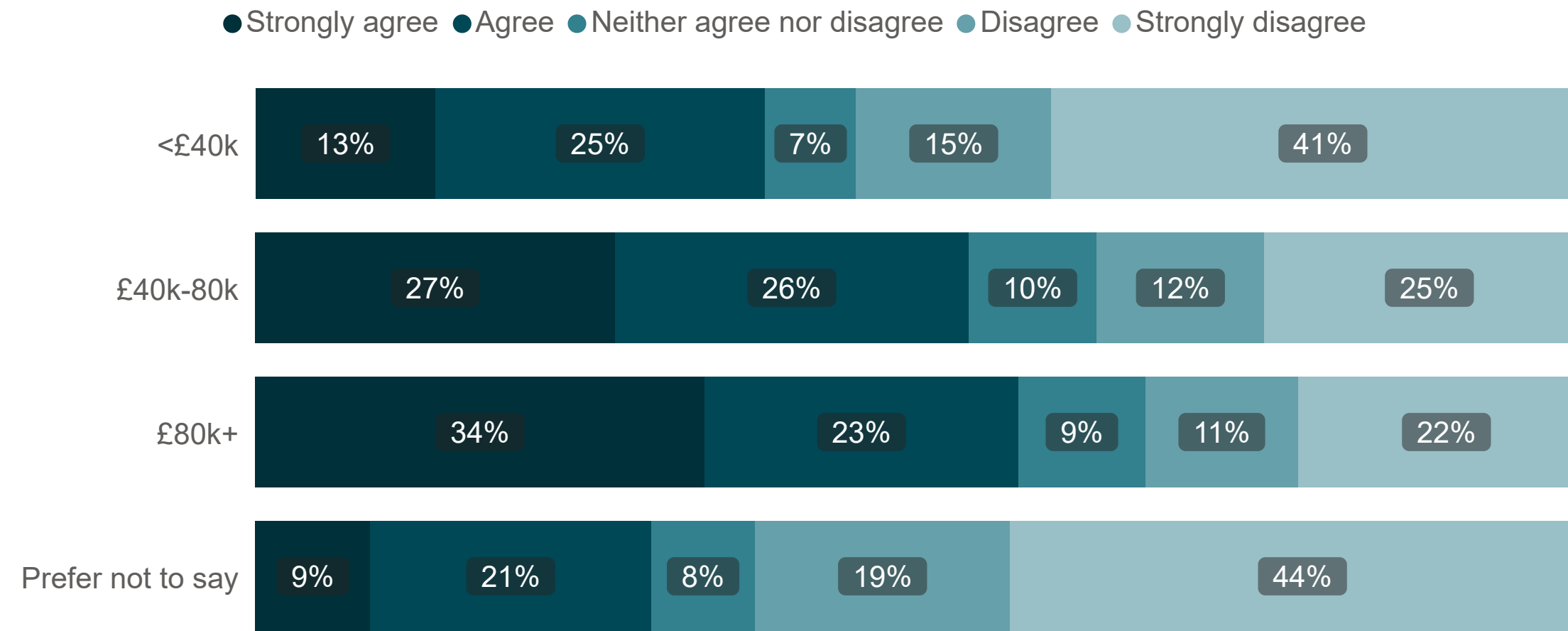
Would you agree to a rise in Council Tax, to put Somerset in line with the national average for a unitary authority, if it led to fewer service cuts?



Would you agree to a rise in Council Tax, to put Somerset in line with the national average for a unitary authority, if it led to fewer service cuts? Responses by age



Would you agree to a rise in Council Tax, to put Somerset in line with the national average for a unitary authority, if it led to fewer service cuts? Responses by household income



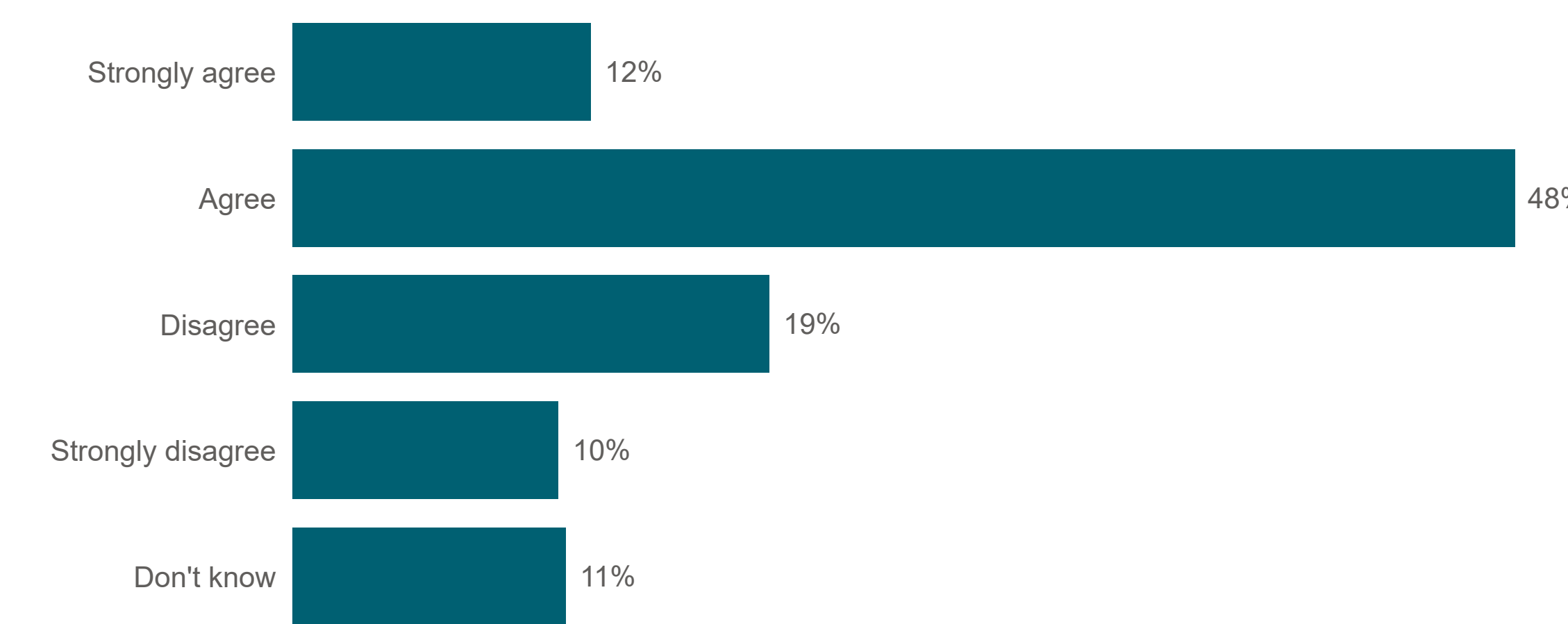
Fees and charges

In this section we asked if we should consider increasing fees and charges to cover our rising costs. 54% were in favour, with 32% against.

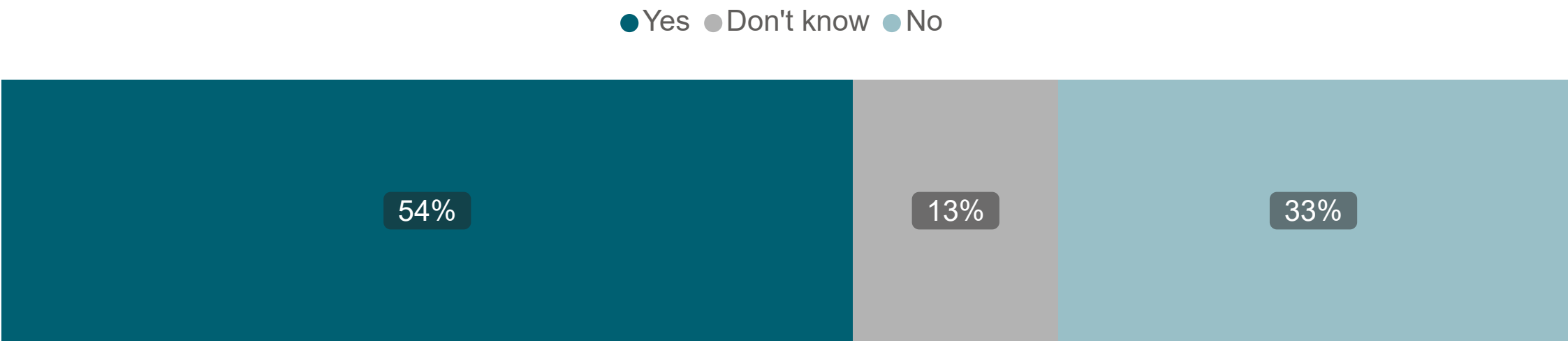
We also asked if people would agree with a proposal to introduce new charges for services that are currently free to cover costs. Most respondents (60%) either strongly agreed or agreed that we should, just over a quarter (29%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

When asked by how much we should raise fees and charges, 9% supported a rise above inflation, 55% in line with inflation, 11% less than inflation, and 19% preferred to see no increase at all.

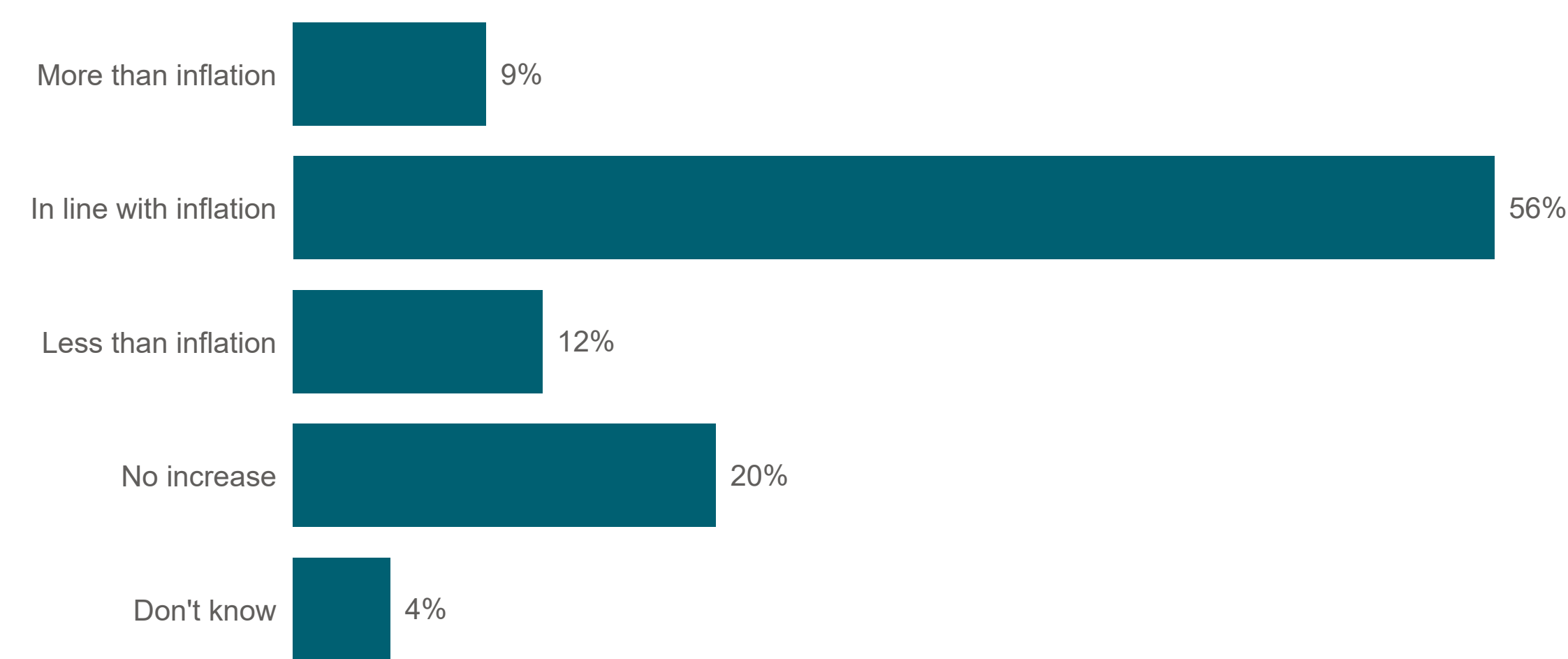
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to cover the costs of running some local services by introducing new charges for services that are currently free?



To cover our rising costs, should the council increase fees and charges?



How much should the council increase fees and charges?



Making savings in service areas

We asked in which services we should look to make savings.

55% of respondents suggested we should look to make savings in planning, followed by 47% suggesting economic development and support for businesses.

Whereas 83% said they do not think we should look to make savings in road maintenance, followed by 68% who said not to make savings in Waste services.

In principle, do you think we should look to make savings in the following service areas?



Further comments

This was a free text section where 51% of respondents left a comment, 727 comments in total.

We analysed the responses and these are the key themes:

1. Concerns that the council wastes money.
2. Residents cannot afford further Council Tax rises.
3. Concerns about social care costs.
4. Calls for far greater transparency.
5. Desire to protect core services.
6. Ideas for raising income or reducing spend.
7. Public frustration and distrust.

Free text summary

The free text comments highlight resistance to any further rise in Council Tax, driven mainly by the cost of living pressures and a belief that residents already receive “less for more”.

Many comments focus on concerns about inefficiency and waste, particularly spending on consultants, agency staff, senior salaries, and projects seen as unnecessary.

Some of those commenting want the Council to demonstrate internal savings first, especially in management structures, office costs, procurement, and contract oversight. There were comments suggesting trust in the Council’s financial decision making is currently low, and respondents want greater transparency.

At the same time, people strongly value key council services - notably roads, public transport, waste services, and essential social care. They want these protected but also want clearer explanations for the rising cost of adult and children’s services.

Overall, many of those commenting understand the financial pressures but expect the Council to make visible, meaningful efficiency improvements before seeking higher contributions from households.

Several ideas to raise income or reduce spend were put forward, ranging from reducing spend on consultants to increasing enforcement fines (littering, dog fouling, fly-tipping etc). All these will be shared with the Council’s Executive and services so they can be considered.

Feedback provided via social media

We have captured feedback gathered via social media channels, this includes; Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), LinkedIn, Nextdoor and Instagram.

- 32 - Wasteful spending allegation

28 - Accountability and competence criticisms

25 - Consultation cynicism and ‘you won’t listen’

23 - Opposition to council tax increase and affordability concerns

22 - Support for council position and realism about budgets

15 - General or neutral / unclear

8 - Political representation and accountability

8 - Staffing costs, pensions and agency spend

6 - Transparency and audit of spending

6 - Impact on services and vulnerable people

6 - Social care funding should not be from council tax

4 - Political blame and party politics

2 - Energy efficiency or environmental suggestions
- 2 - Calls for section 114 or gov intervention

1 - Opposition to parking charges

1 - Cllr allowances should be expenses only

1 - Climate spending criticism

1 - Protest against paying council tax

1 - More investment in social care and SEND

1 - Business rates collection and enforcement



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