

Have your say

Wirral Council Budget 2022/23 Proposal – Europa Fun Pool Public Consultation Report



Consultation: 31 January – 27 March 2022

Report: 20 April 2022

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1.0 Executive Summary

Wirral Council is facing significant financial challenges and is currently going through a detailed process to set a budget for the next year. This is part of a wider approach to address long term structural issues in the council's finances and deliver substantial savings to balance the budget.

The council is legally obliged to set a balanced budget or risk Government intervention, and the savings measures currently being proposed are intended to put the authority on a stable financial footing for the long-term.

A number of budget proposals were consulted on, this budget proposal is for the permanent closure of the fun pool elements at Europa Pools. This option includes the closure of the fun pools, flumes, and associated water features.

This option is not a total facility closure, the competition pool, catering, and other areas will remain open. The service would seek to add fun elements into the water space both at Europa and at other sites during holiday periods and at weekends.

The fun pool element has been re-purposed as a fitness facility and will continue to operate as such. The Council's central One Stop Shop Appointments Service is also operating from the centre.

This option will generate a potential saving of £250,000 (full year effect) if taken.

Through this consultation people were asked to provide their views of the Europa budget proposal considering reduced budgets and were asked for further ideas on savings in leisure services.

These consultation findings will be presented at the council's Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee at the meeting planned for June. The Committee will scrutinise the savings proposals taking into account the comments of the public including any suggestions on alternative ways of making savings and the budget allotted by the full Council. Decision will be made on the Europa fun pool proposal.

1.1 Key Findings

- 240 people answered the online survey, no paper copies were returned.
- Most respondents (73.9%) said they were a regular user of Wirral Council swimming pools when asked if they or someone they care for is a regular user of Wirral Council swimming pools (Question 1).

- People most commonly had used a council leisure swimming pool more than 1 year ago (33.2%), when asked when was the last time they had used a council leisure swimming pool (Question 2).
- When asked how often they used council leisure facilities, the most prevalent answer was less than once a month (29.7%) (Question 3).
- Most respondents (72.0%) said they were not members of the Wirral Council's Invigor8 scheme, and 28.0% are members (Question 4).
- Most respondents disagreed (77%) that closing down the "fun pool" at the leisure centre is acceptable if it will help protect and expand other leisure facilities at the site, 61.5% strongly disagreed and 17.1% agreed with closure (Question 5a).
- Most respondents disagreed (72.3%) that if the competition pool was made available for more leisure /casual use this budget savings option to shut the "fun" pool would be acceptable, 53.6% strongly disagreed and 18.3% agreed (Question 5b).
- Most respondents disagreed (73.6%) that if additional provision were made available at the competition pool for juniors, then this savings proposal would be acceptable, 52.3% strongly disagreed and 19.2% agreed (Question 5c).
- Most respondents disagreed (77.5%) that if new facilities in place of the "fun pool" were made available for the public at this site e.g., gym, then this budget savings option to shut the "fun" pool would be acceptable, 63% strongly disagreed and 16.6% agreed (Question 5d).
- The most popular alternative ideas to generate budget savings were (Question 6):
 - Savings should be made elsewhere (26.0%).
 - People including children should be able to access the "fun" pool, especially because it is a deprived area (15.1%).
 - New revenue sources should be found (9.6%).
 - Prices should be raised to allow the "fun" pool to stay open (8.9%).
 - Advertising should be increased, and people encouraged to use the facilities, to raise more money (7.5%).
- The top additional comments on the budget saving proposals were (Question 7):
 - People including children should be able to access the "fun" pool, especially because it is a deprived area (36.6%).

- It is not good social value to replace the pool with a gym, because there are no other similar “fun” pools on the Wirral and many gyms (14.6%).
- Closing the “fun” pool will have a detrimental effect on children learning to swim (12.8%).
- Closing the “fun” pool will have a detrimental effect on people’s health and wellbeing (8.5%).
- Savings should be made elsewhere (8.5%).

2.0 Methodology

Through the Europa consultation people were asked to tell us their views of the budget proposal considering reduced budgets and were asked for further ideas on savings in leisure services.

Following the consultation, the feedback will be considered at a meeting of the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee in June 2022.

The consultation was carried out between 31 January – 27 March 2022. The approach used was an online public consultation through the ‘Have your say’ consultation portal at www.haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk with a page dedicated to the Europa Consultation. Documents provided on the site included a summary of the Europa Budget Proposal and an Easy Read version of the questionnaire.

One online questionnaire was provided for residents to engage with. Respondents were also able to request paper copies of the survey, including an Easy Read version, or submit additional comments via a dedicated email address, which was published on the ‘Have your say’ website alongside the online tool. Completed Easy Read surveys were accepted until 10 April 2022.

2.1 Questionnaire

The consultation questionnaire was developed on the Europa budget proposal and enabled stakeholders to record their feedback. To enable further understanding, and in-depth analysis, respondents were invited to provide free-text comments to expand on their ideas or concerns.

Following closure of the consultation, the responses to each of the direct questions were collated and the responses included in this report. For the free-text comment question, a text coding approach was used based on the reoccurring themes. This data was then collated and summarised in the report. For specific tools where percentages do not add up to 100, this may be due to rounding, or the question is multi-coded. All free-text questions and ideas that offered respondents the option to provide written feedback could have covered multiple themes. Therefore, with free-text responses being categorised using a coding system, some comments will be multi-coded and therefore may add up to more than 100 percent.

No paper questionnaires were submitted.

No Easy Read questionnaires were submitted.

2.2 Analysis of Respondents

Respondents to the online tools were provided with the option to provide demographic information about themselves. It must be noted that this is an option and that not all respondents included this information. This data allows the demographic results to be included in this report to enable analysis of the scope of responses and representation from different demographic groups.

2.3 Interpretation of Results

In terms of the results, it is important to note that:

- The public consultation is not representative of the overall population but provides information on the opinion of those residents who engaged.
- For specific tools where percentages do not add up to 100, this may be due to rounding, or the question is multi-coded. All free-text questions and ideas that offered respondents the option to provide written feedback could have covered multiple themes. Therefore, with free-text responses being categorised using a coding system, some comments will be multi-coded and therefore add up to more than 100 percent.

2.4 Communication

To raise awareness amongst as many residents, stakeholders, and businesses as possible, a consultation sub campaign was carried out which, linking with the overall budget narrative and service specific responses, urged target audiences to take part in the consultation.

A variety of communications channels and platforms were utilised. This included:

- Organic social media (mix of platforms) – 187,107 impressions and 10,319 interactions
- Targeted, sponsored social media – 160,107 impressions and 562 link clicks
- Resident Email (inclusion in 5 editions)
- Partner/ Stakeholder updates
- Availability of Easy read questionnaires
- Councillor Updates (including consultation specific URL and narrative to share with constituents)
- Creation of a dedicated Budget email inbox
- Digital campaign box adverts on council owned platforms (linking to HYS page)
- Press/ Content Media releases

- Budget updates posted to wirralview.com (Budget/ consultation specific news tab)
- Posts on Staff Facebook page
- Exec View (Staff Newsletter)
- Shared narrative for regular Workforce, Directorate and Team updates

In addition to the above, the service itself administered the issuing and recording of paper copies and responses, as well as direct engagement with friends/ interest groups.

3.0 Results

The questionnaire was responded to by 240 people, with 240 through the online portal. There were no paper copies submitted. No Easy Read versions were submitted. No questions were mandatory so respondents could choose which questions to respond to.

3.1 Questionnaire Results

3.1.1 Question 1: Are you, or someone you care for, a regular user of Wirral Council swimming pools?

The majority of respondents (73.9%) said they were a regular user of Wirral Council swimming pools.

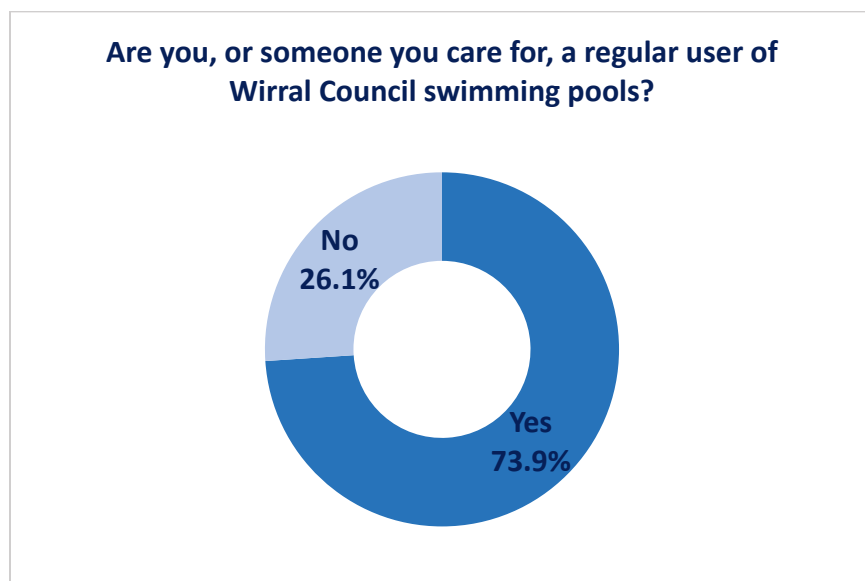


Figure 1: Chart showing whether respondents are regular users of Wirral Council swimming pools

Are you, or someone you care for, a regular user of Wirral Council swimming pools?	Online	%
Yes	176	73.9%
No	62	26.1%
Total	238	100.0%

Table 1: Table showing whether respondents are regular users of Wirral Council swimming pools

3.1.2 Question 2: When was the last time you used a council leisure swimming pool?

People most commonly had used a council leisure swimming pool more than 1 year ago (33.2%). Note: the Europa fun pool has been closed since the first Covid-19 lockdown, so this may be contributing to the high figure. The next most prevalent answer (28.2%) was respondents saying they had used a council leisure swimming pool in the last week.

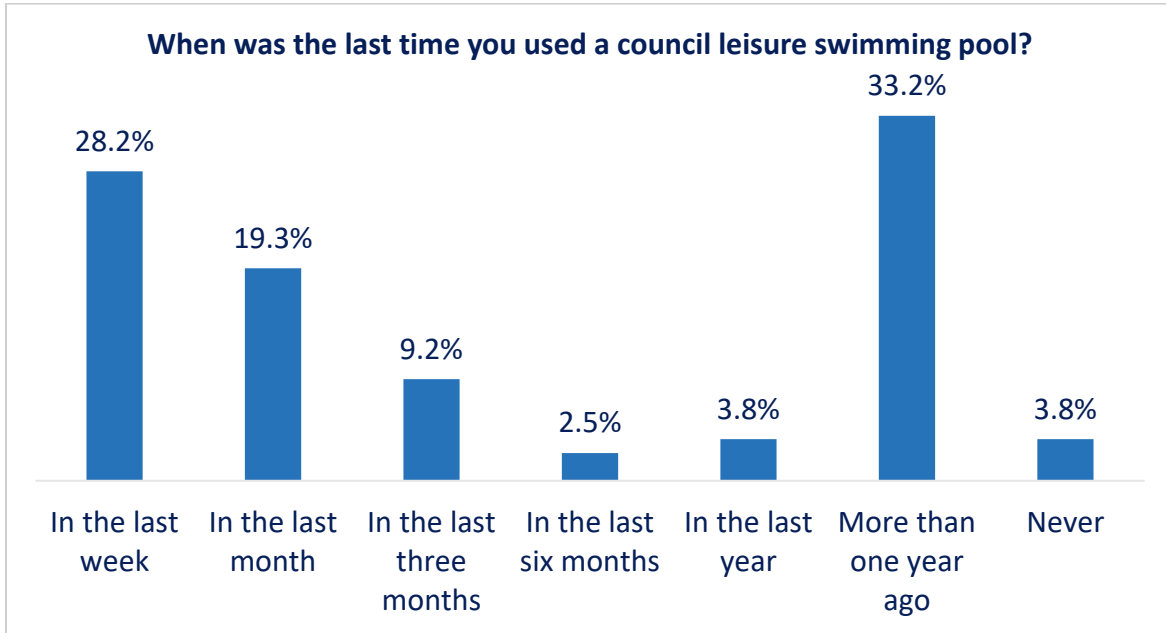


Figure 2: Chart showing when respondents last used a council leisure pool

How often do you use council leisure facilities?	Online	%
More than once a week	64	27.1%
Once a week	41	17.4%
Once a fortnight	20	8.5%
Monthly	41	17.4%
Less than once a month	70	29.7%
Total	236	100.0%

Table 2: Table showing when respondents last used a council leisure pool

3.1.3 Question 3: How often do you use council leisure facilities?

The most prevalent answer was less than once a month (29.7%). Note: the Europa fun pool has been closed since the first Covid-19 lockdown, so this may be contributing to the high figure. The next most prevalent answer was more than once a week (27.1%).

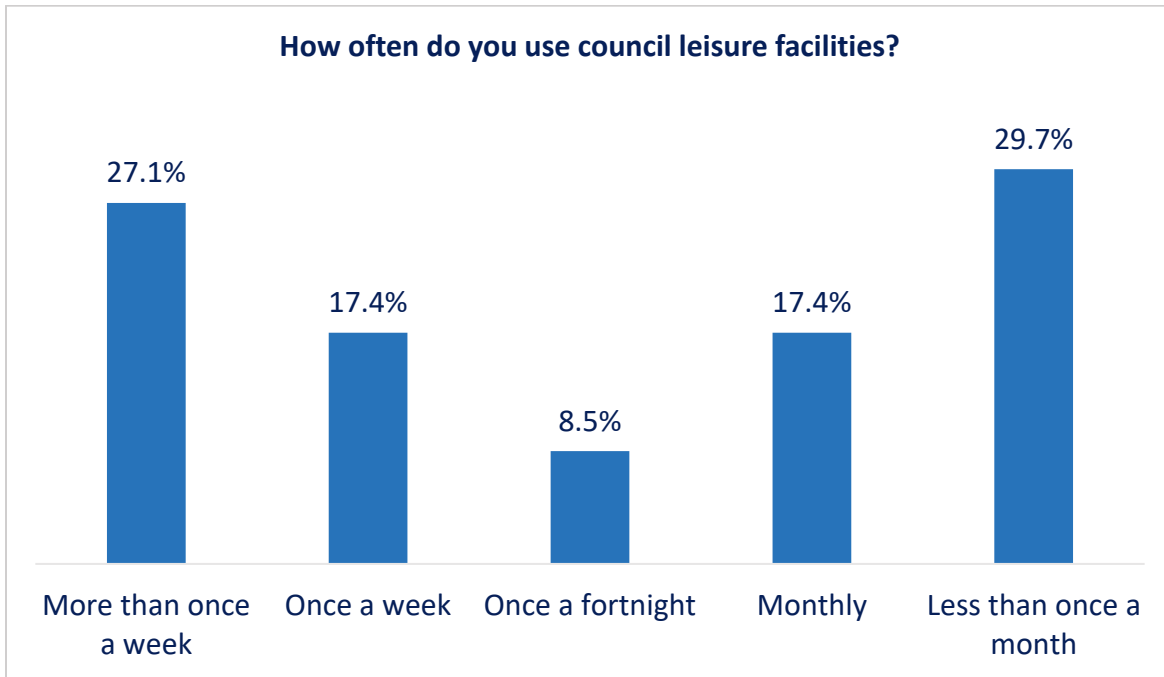


Figure 3: Chart showing how often respondents use council leisure facilities

How often do you use council leisure facilities?	Online	%
More than once a week	64	27.1%
Once a week	41	17.4%
Once a fortnight	20	8.5%
Monthly	41	17.4%
Less than once a month	70	29.7%
Total	236	100.0%

Table 3: Table showing how often respondents use council leisure facilities

3.1.4 Question 4: Are you a member of Wirral Council’s Invigor8 scheme allowing access to council leisure services?

72.0% of respondents said they were not members of the Wirral Council’s Invigor8 scheme, and 28.0% are members.

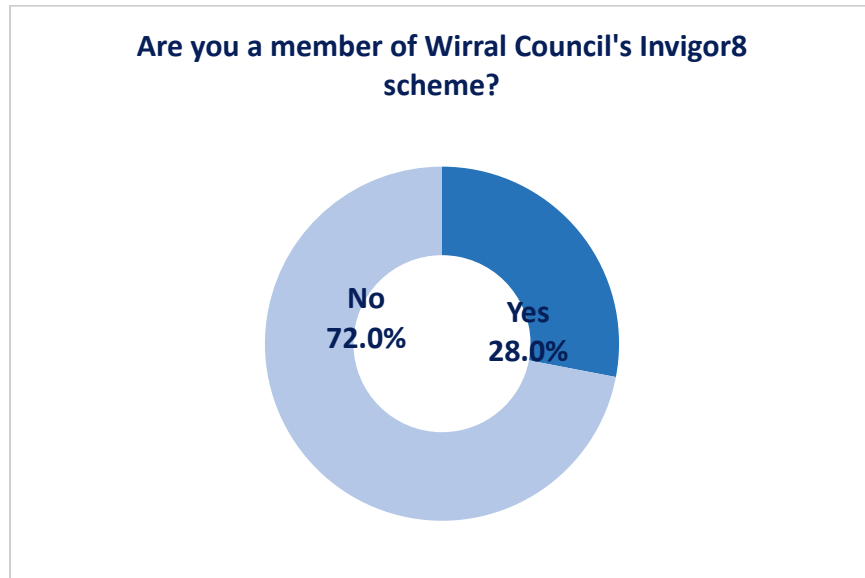


Figure 4: Chart showing how many respondents are members of Wirral Council’s Invigor8 scheme

Are you a member of Wirral Council’s Invigor8 scheme allowing access to council leisure services?	Online	%
Yes	65	28.0%
No	167	72.0%
Total	232	100.0%

Table 4: Table showing how many respondents are members of Wirral Council’s Invigor8 scheme

3.1.5 Question 5a: Closing down the “fun pool” at the leisure centre is acceptable if it will help protect and expand other leisure facilities at the site.

Most respondents (77.0%) disagreed overall that closing down the “fun pool” at the leisure centre is acceptable if it will help protect and expand other leisure facilities at the site, 15.5% disagreed strongly. 17.1% agreed that closing down the “fun pool” at the leisure centre is acceptable if it will help protect and expand other leisure facilities at the site.

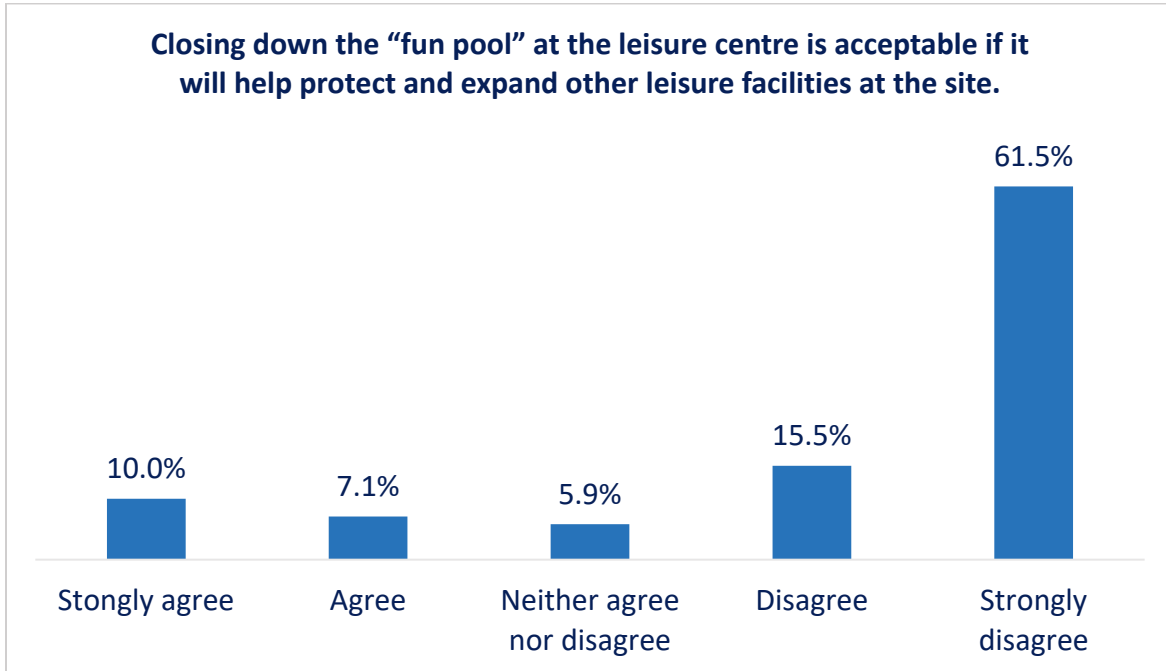


Figure 5: Chart totalling the number of responses by agreement level

Closing down the “fun pool” at the leisure centre is acceptable if it will help protect and expand other leisure facilities at the site.	Online	%
Strongly agree	24	10.0%
Agree	17	7.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	14	5.9%
Disagree	37	15.5%
Strongly disagree	147	61.5%
Total	239	100.0%

Table 5: Table totalling the number of responses by agreement level

3.1.6 Question 5b: If the competition pool was made available for more leisure /casual use this budget savings option to shut the “fun” pool would be acceptable.

Most respondents (72.3%) disagreed that if the competition pool was made available for more leisure /casual use this budget savings option to shut the “fun” pool would be acceptable, 53.6% disagreed strongly. 18.3% agreed that if the competition pool was made available for more leisure /casual use this budget savings option to shut the “fun” pool would be acceptable.

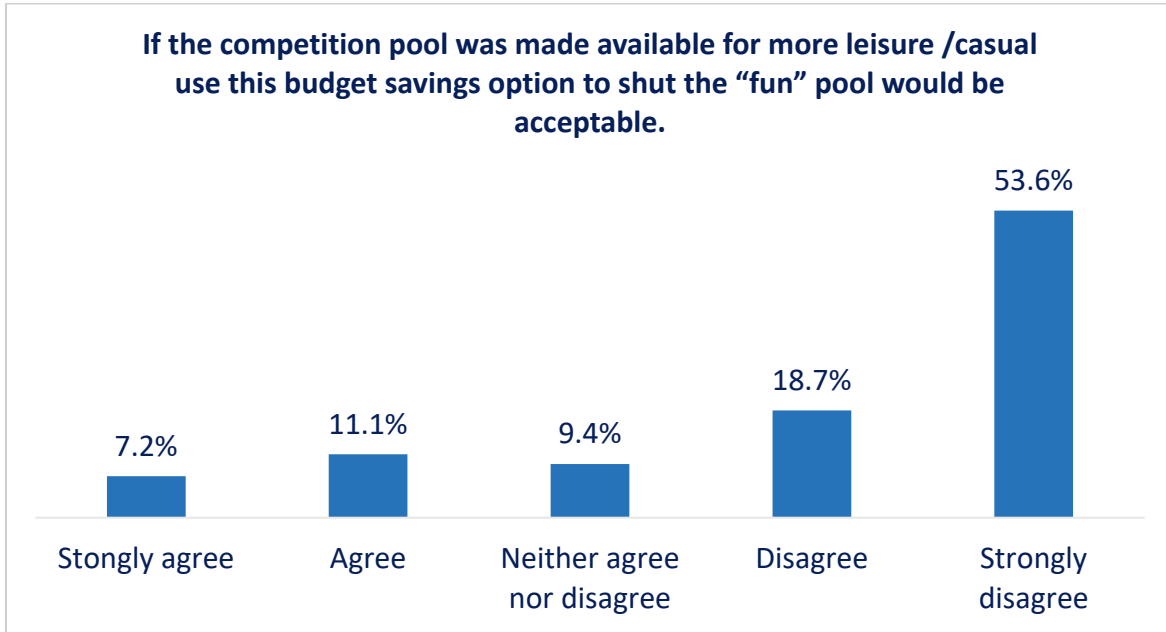


Figure 6: Chart totalling the number of responses by agreement level

If the competition pool was made available for more leisure /casual use this budget savings option to shut the “fun” pool would be acceptable.	Online	%
Strongly agree	17	7.2%
Agree	26	11.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	22	9.4%
Disagree	44	18.7%
Strongly disagree	126	53.6%
Total	235	100.0%

Table 6: Table totalling the number of responses by agreement level

3.1.7 Question 5c: If additional provision were made available at the competition pool for juniors, then this saving proposal would be acceptable.

Most respondents (73.6%) disagreed that if additional provision were made available at the competition pool for juniors, then this savings proposal would be acceptable, 52.3% disagreed strongly. 19.2% agreed that if additional provision were made available at the competition pool for juniors, then this savings proposal would be acceptable.

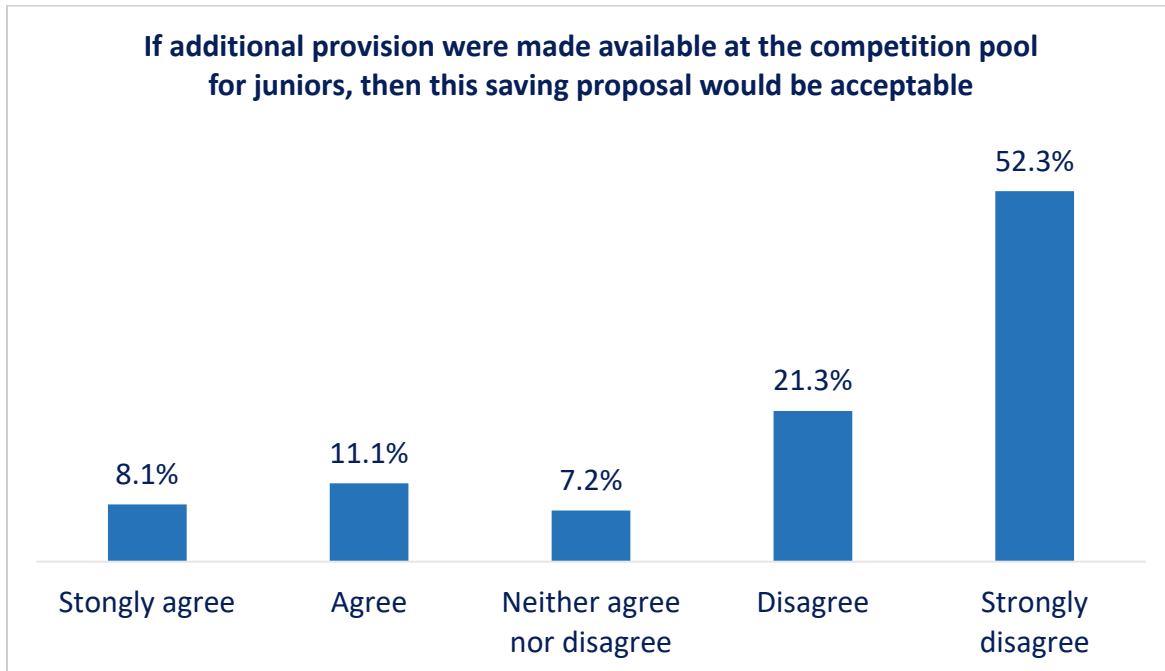


Figure 7: Chart totalling the number of responses by agreement level

If additional provision were made available at the competition pool for juniors, then this saving proposal would be acceptable.	Online	%
Strongly agree	19	8.1%
Agree	26	11.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	17	7.2%
Disagree	50	21.3%
Strongly disagree	123	52.3%
Total	235	100.0%

Table 7: Table totalling the number of responses by agreement level

3.1.8 Question 5d: If new facilities in place of the “fun pool” were made available for the public at this site e.g., gym, then this budget savings option to shut the “fun” pool would be acceptable.

Most respondents (77.4%) disagreed that if new facilities in place of the “fun pool” were made available for the public at this site e.g., gym, then this budget savings option to shut the “fun” pool would be acceptable, 63.0% disagreed strongly. 16.6% agreed that that if new facilities in place of the “fun pool” were made available for the public at this site e.g., gym, then this budget savings option to shut the “fun” pool would be acceptable.



Figure 8: Chart totalling the number of responses by agreement level

If new facilities in place of the “fun pool” were made available for the public at this site e.g., gym, then this budget savings option to shut the “fun” pool would be acceptable.	Online	%
Strongly agree	15	6.4%
Agree	24	10.2%
Neither agree nor disagree	13	5.5%
Disagree	34	14.5%
Strongly disagree	148	63.0%
Total	234	99.6%

Table 8: Table totalling the number of responses by agreement level

3.1.9 Question 6: Do you have any alternative ideas to generate budget savings in leisure services?

Respondents were asked if they had any alternative ideas to generate budget savings in leisure services. There were 121 comments from Engagement HQ, which were categorised into themes; many comments contained multiple themes so the figures will not add up to 100%, nor will they match the figures in the previous questions.

The chart below shows the themes:

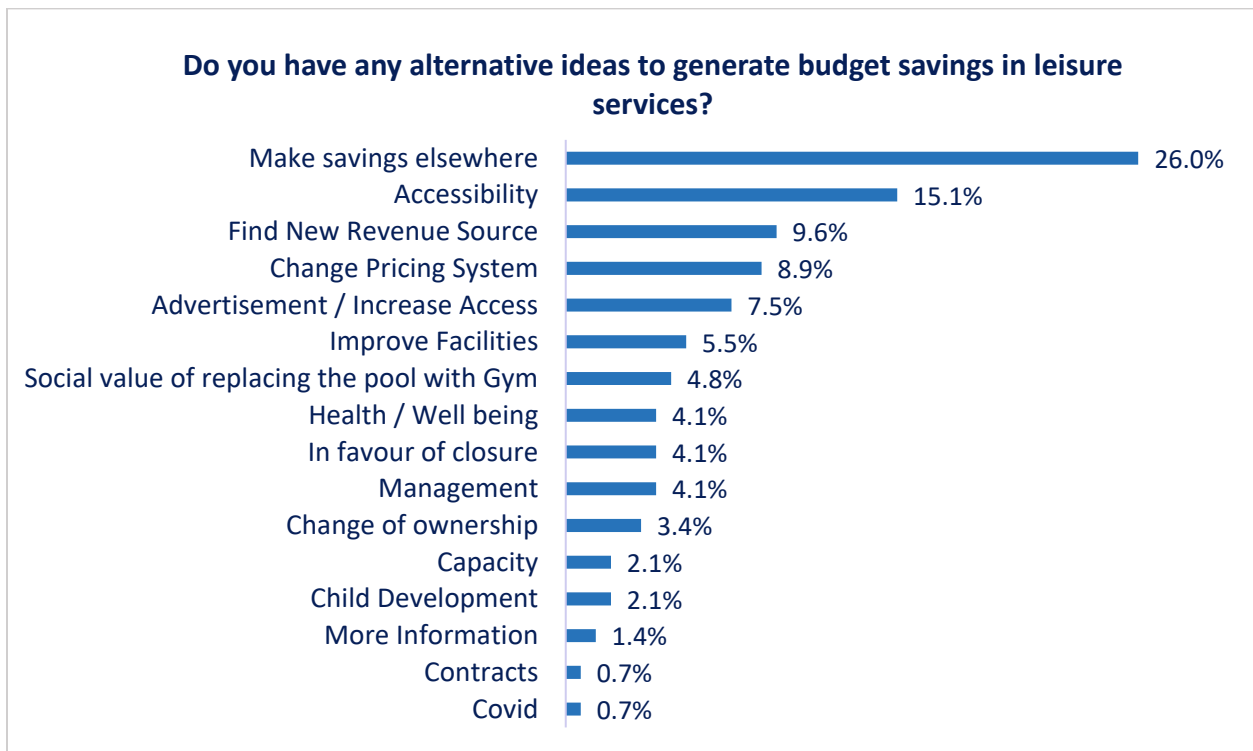


Figure 9: Chart showing the themes of alternative ideas to generate budget savings in leisure services

Theme	Total	% Of all themes
Make savings elsewhere	38	26.0%
Accessibility	22	15.1%
Find New Revenue Source	14	9.6%
Change Pricing System	13	8.9%
Advertisement / Increase Access	11	7.5%
Improve Facilities	8	5.5%
Social value of replacing the pool with Gym	7	4.8%
Health / Well being	6	4.1%
In favour of closure	6	4.1%
Management	6	4.1%
Change of ownership	5	3.4%
Capacity	3	2.1%
Child Development	3	2.1%
More Information	2	1.4%
Contracts	1	0.7%
Covid	1	0.7%
Total	146	100.0%

Table 9: Themes of alternative ideas to generate budget savings in leisure services

Make savings elsewhere

38 (26.0%) of the comments suggested that savings should be made elsewhere. 18 (12.3%) of these suggested that council salaries should be cut; 6 (4.1%) of the comments said that other pools in the Wirral should close. The other suggestions included: stopping other projects, reducing the use of consultants within the council, and reducing services elsewhere and thereby reducing running costs.

Accessibility

22 (15.1%) of the comments related to accessibility. 12 (8.2%) of these said it is important for children and families to have access to the fun pool facilities, and 7 (4.8%) said that facilities shouldn't be taken away from deprived areas. Other comments said that the community should have access to these facilities and so should people with additional needs.

Find New Revenue Source

14 (9.6%) of the comments suggested that new revenue sources should be found. These included reducing council salaries, seeking more government funding, increasing parking charges, fundraising, hiring out parts of leisure centres, and selling golf courses and council buildings.

Change pricing system

13 (8.9%) of the comments suggested changing the pricing system. The comments suggested increasing charges for using the swimming pools and gym to allow the fun pool to stay open.

Advertisement / Increase Access

11 (7.5%) of the comments related to advertising and increasing access. The respondents commented that by advertising and encouraging more customers into the leisure centre, more revenue could be raised.

3.1.10 Question 7: Do you have any additional comments on this budget saving proposal?

Respondents were asked if they had any additional comments on this budget saving proposal. There were 131 comments from Engagement HQ, which were categorised into themes; many comments contained multiple themes so the figures will not add up to 100%, nor will they match the figures in the previous questions.

The chart below shows the themes:

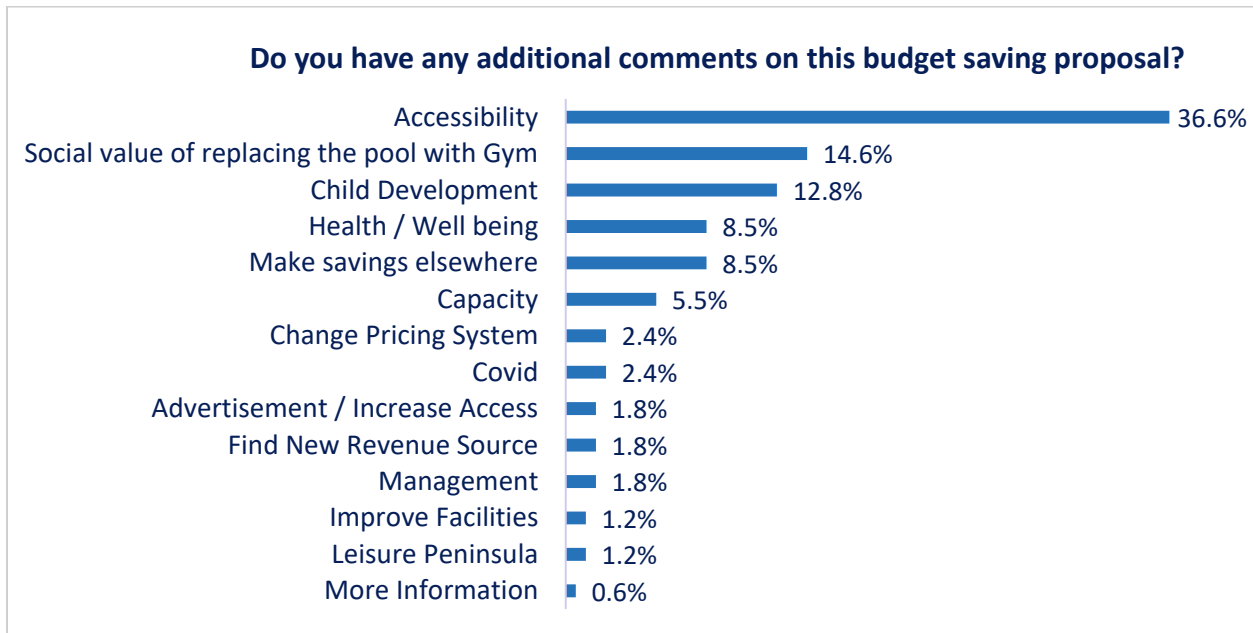


Figure 10: Chart showing the themes of additional comments on this budget saving proposal

Theme	Total	% Of all themes
Accessibility	60	36.6%
Social value of replacing the pool with Gym	24	14.6%
Child Development	21	12.8%
Health / Well being	14	8.5%
Make savings elsewhere	14	8.5%
Capacity	9	5.5%
Change Pricing System	4	2.4%
Covid	4	2.4%
Advertisement / Increase Access	3	1.8%
Find New Revenue Source	3	1.8%
Management	3	1.8%
Improve Facilities	2	1.2%
Leisure Peninsula	2	1.2%
More Information	1	0.6%
Total	164	100.0%

Table 10: Themes of additional comments on this budget saving proposal

Accessibility

60 (36.6%) of the comments related to accessibility. 49 (29.9%) of the respondents were concerned that closing the pool would make it more difficult for children to access swimming facilities. 19 (11.6%) of the comments related to the unfairness of closing a pool down in a deprived area. 4 (2.4%) comments mentioned that the pool is good for people with additional needs, and several of the comments mentioned that there is no nearby alternative.

Social value of replacing the pool with gym

24 (14.6%) people commented on the fact that it is not good social value to replace the pool with a gym, because there are no other similar fun pools on the Wirral and many gyms. Respondents also commented that children cannot use a gym.

Child development

21 (12.8%) respondents were concerned that closing the leisure pool would have a detrimental effect on children learning to swim. Many commented that not all parents can afford to pay for swimming lessons.

Health/ wellbeing

14 (8.5%) of the comments related to health and wellbeing. Many people felt that closing Europa pools would influence people's physical and mental health, and that it would particularly affect children, causing lower exercise and higher obesity rates.

Make savings elsewhere

14 (8.5%) of the comments suggested that savings should be made elsewhere. The suggested areas included: reducing council salaries, closing other pools, selling council buildings, reducing administration, or closing other leisure facilities such as golf courses, Bidston tennis centre and libraries.

3.2 Direct Representations

One direct representation was received via the dedicated email address supplied for the consultation process. This is provided in Appendix 1.

4.0 Demographics and Site Traffic

4.1 Demographics

Registration was required to engage in the online Budget Consultation. The registration form included questions regarding demographics including gender, age group, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, however not all questions in the registration form were compulsory and respondents could choose to select 'prefer not to say' or skip the question. The demographics results are summarised below.

Most of the respondents (92.6%) classed themselves as local residents.



Figure 11: Who are you registering as?

The gender of respondents was 63.9% female, 33.0% male, with 2.6% preferring not to say and 0.4% preferring their own term.

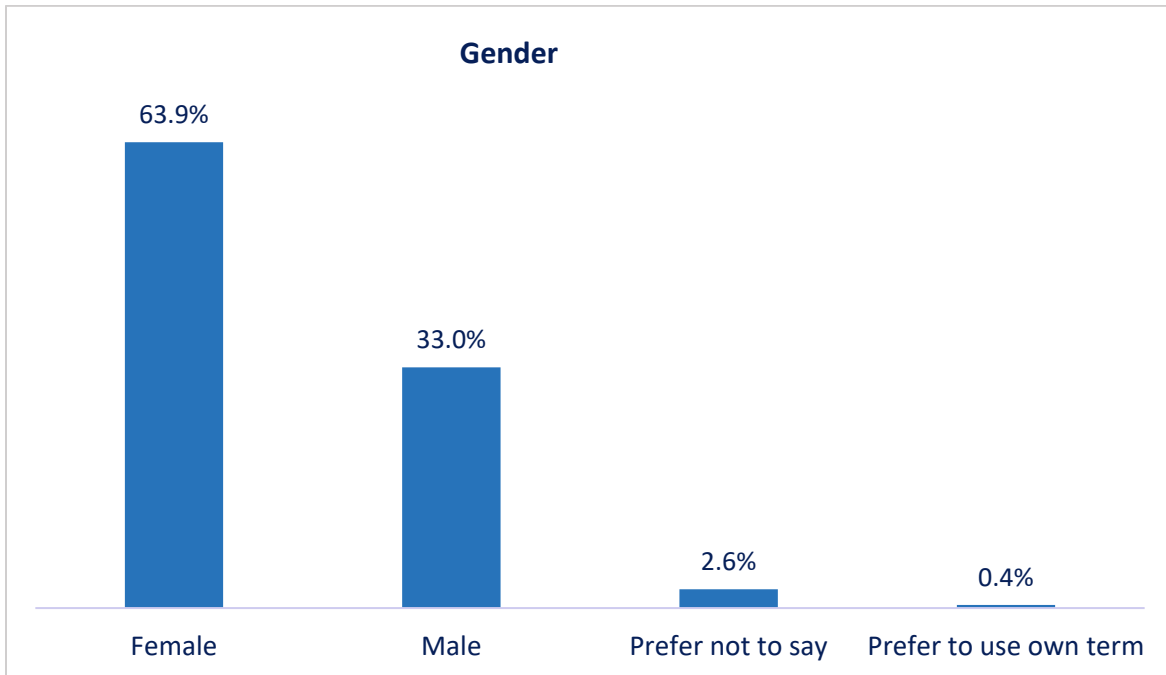


Figure 12: Gender of respondents

The age group profile is illustrated with the most common age groups were 35-44 years (35.2%), followed by 45-54 years (22.3%). The least represented groups were under 16s (0%) and 16-24 years (2.1%).

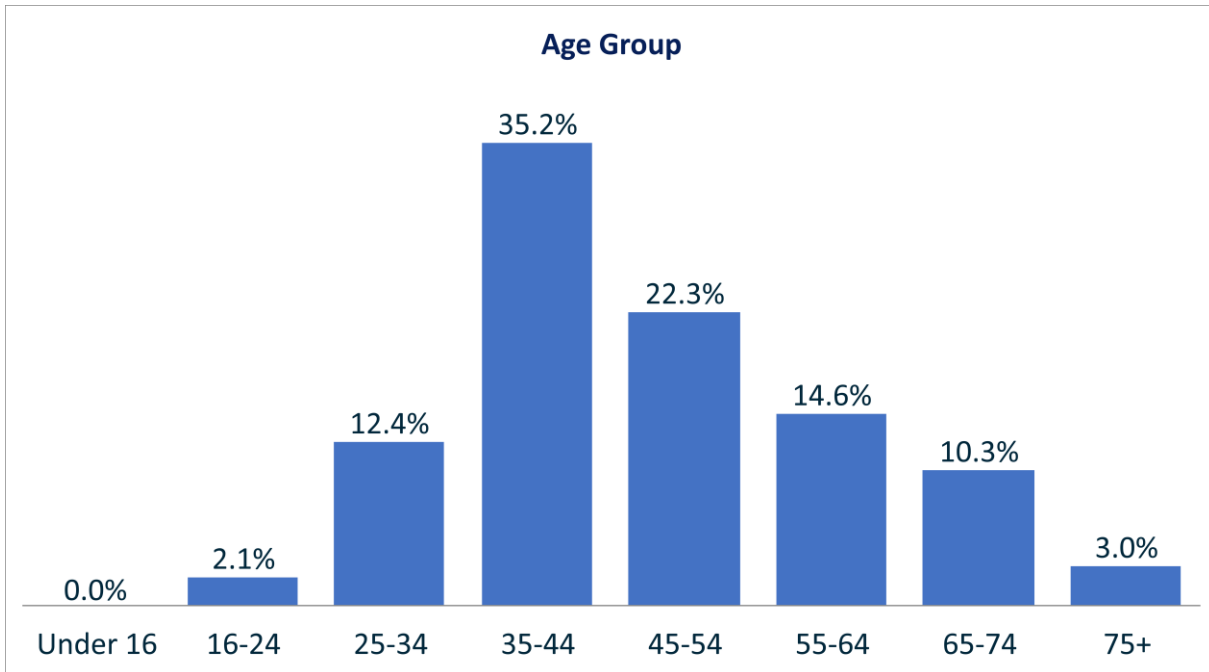


Figure 13: Age group of respondents

91.8% of respondents were white British, with only 3.0% of respondents were of a non-white or other (1.7%) ethnicity.

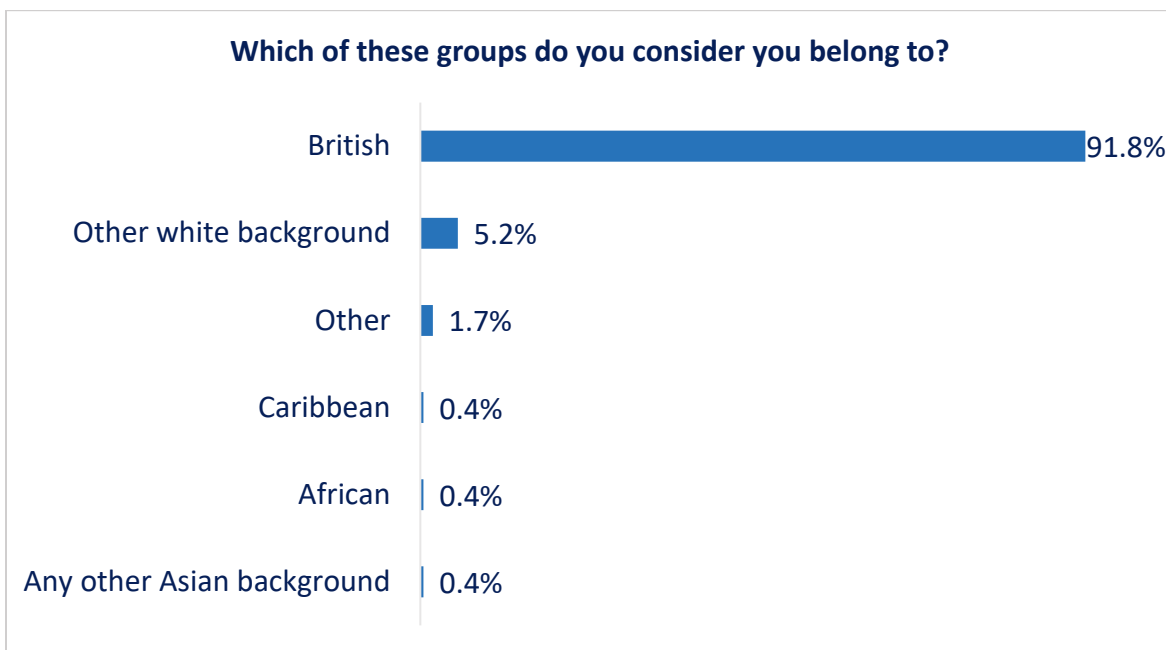


Figure 14: Ethnicity of respondents

81.4% of respondents were heterosexual, 3.5% were gay/ lesbian, 0.9% bisexual and 14.2% preferred not to say.

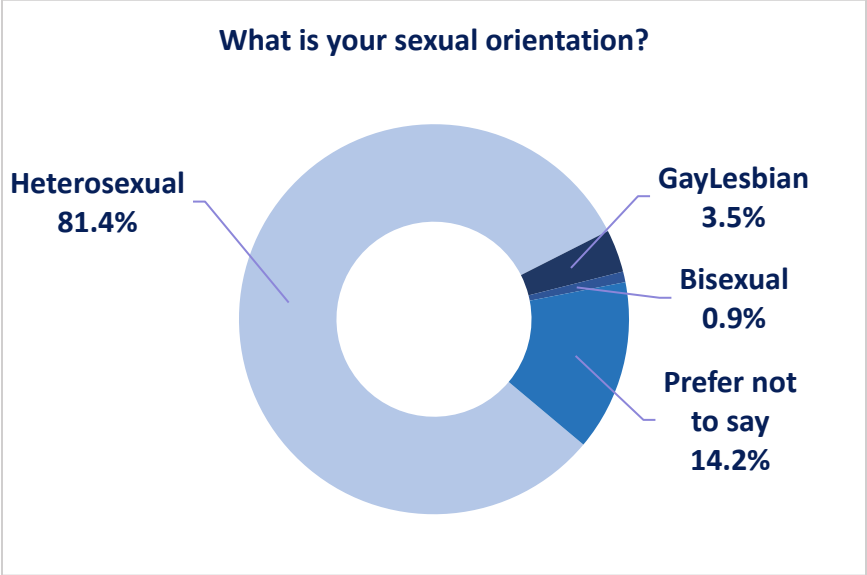


Figure 15: Sexual orientation of respondents

4.2 Have your say - Site Traffic

Reviewing the site activity, visits, and how people visit the site can be useful to evaluate if people are aware of the site, as well as to ensure engagement activities are deployed effectively, and to a wide range of different people – enhancing public engagement in the future.

Site registration allows us to confirm the number of engaged participants through the completion of a quick poll; 504 people completed the survey online.

1,112 visited the Europa Pools Consultation page of the Have Your Say site, of these 47 downloaded a document and 240 people completed the questionnaire.

These figures cannot be viewed as definitive as they are based on site tracking through ‘cookies’ and there are a number of factors that can impact on this. These include that cookies may be disabled or deleted, individuals may access the site multiple times through different devices or different browsers. However, the figures can be used to gauge how much interest has been generated in individual projects through the rate of engaged participants.

The route that people access the site is known as the traffic source. The ‘Have your say’ portal allows analysis to be carried out on traffic source, and if they lead to engagement in the site tools such as the questionnaire. This analysis allows a greater understanding of which communication and promotional tools to use to optimise engagement.

For this project a range of traffic sources have been reviewed and summarised in the table below. Most visits to the site were either visits via direct visits (440 visits) where people have either pasted or typed the URL in to their browser, or from links in emails (297). Direct visits generated a rate of engagement of 25.0%, meaning 25.0% of these visits resulted in completion of the survey, and email visits had an engagement rate of 15.8%.

TRAFFIC CHANNEL	AWARE VISITS	INFORMED VISITS (%)	ENGAGED VISITS (%)
DIRECT	440	220 (50%)	110 (25%)
SOCIAL	197	104 (52.8%)	35 (17.8%)
EMAIL	297	119 (40.1%)	47 (15.8%)
SEARCH ENGINE	40	19 (47.5%)	8 (20%)
.GOV SITES	3	1 (33.3%)	0 (0%)
REFERRALS	247	92 (37.2%)	40 (16.2%)

Table 11: Site traffic sources

Appendix 1: Direct Representations

This appendix includes feedback directly sent to the contact email address:
budgetconsult@wirral.gov.uk

I write to express my utter dismay at Wirral Council's proposal to permanently close Woodchurch and Europa Fun Pools.

I know cost savings have to be made, but how can the council consider closing such facilities in deprived areas? Woodchurch facility is used by local schools and could be well utilised by swimming schools if properly managed. Europa Fun Pools, if priced correctly, should easily 'wash its face' financially and offers an important exercise opportunity in a very deprived area, one which also constructively occupies young people keeping them away from the dangers of hanging around on the streets. This current proposal is beyond any logical reasoning that I can understand.

How can councillors sleep at night when they have approved spending huge amounts of money (outside of the related government grant) forcing a sea wall on West Kirby for the purpose of protecting private property in a relatively affluent area (and when most residents don't want it anyway), and yet close important facilities for health, development, and opportunity in deprived areas of the borough?

Is that how 'levelling up' works?

I urge a review of council priorities to stop vanity projects and ensure ALL expenditure is focused on our communities that most need investment and development. We should be actively supporting young people getting active and having constructive outlets for their free time, not taking these important facilities away from them.