



Have your say

Budget 2023-24: Leisure Services

LEISURE SERVICES Budget Options



Consultation: 8 December 2022 – 15 January 2023

Report: 17 January 2023

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1.0 Executive Summary

The Sport and Recreation service provides a wide range of facilities and activities including swimming pools, gyms, fitness classes, football pitches, sports halls, and athletics tracks.

Providing these services is not a statutory responsibility, i.e., not something the Council has to do by law. However, we do recognise the importance of having these facilities, and what they mean to our communities.

The use of our leisure centres and the income they make has unfortunately never returned to the levels we saw before the pandemic. This, together with the unprecedented rises in energy prices means that Wirral's sport and recreation offer faces the same difficult challenges as the rest of the leisure industry.

This widening gap between the amount of income generated by the service and the cost of running centres means that we may need to make some tough decisions.

The proposals look to find savings through reducing the current Sport & Recreation service offer.

Public consultation was held on the Leisure Budget Options from 8 December 2022 to 15 January 2023 allowing people to provide their view of the options. The findings from the consultation are included in this report.

The findings will be considered at the Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee on the 25 January 2023.

1.1 Key Findings

- The questionnaire was responded to by 804 people. 593 responses came via the online portal and 211 paper copies were received.
- 87.9% of respondents are in disagreement with the statement 'The Council could consider discontinuing to provide Leisure Services.' 74.4% strongly disagreed with the statement. 9.0% of respondents were in agreement. (Question 1)
- Most respondents (60.4%) are in disagreement with the statement 'The Council could consider closing two pools.' The most common response to this statement was Strongly disagree (43.1%). 30.9% supported the statement. (Question 2)
- 59.1% do not believe that that council could consider reducing the number of leisure centres it manages and operates. 40.8% strongly disagree with the council considering a reduction in the number of leisure centres managed. 31.8% were in agreement. (Question 3)
- When asked for additional comments, the most common themes found in responses were: (Question 4)
 - Exercise / Health / Wellbeing, closure of leisure facilities would worsen the health and wellbeing of Wirral residents, mentioned in 39.8% of responses.
 - Accessibility, a reduction in the leisure offering may deny some access to facilities (18.0%).
 - Invest in Leisure, WBC should improve leisure facilities to increase demand (13.6%).
 - Better management of the current facilities would increase demand (13.6%).
 - Advertise, promotion is needed to increase awareness of WBC's leisure offering (10.5%).
 - Children would be denied access through facility closure (10.2%).
- Demographic analysis allowed the responses to be categorised by ward. The most represented ward was Oxtown (12.4%) and the least represented was Rock Ferry (0.6%).

2.0 Methodology

The consultation was carried out between 8 December 2022 to 15 January 2023. The approach used was an online public consultation through the 'Have your say' consultation portal at www.haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk

A budget consultation Hub was created within the platform which provided users with one single location through which to engage in individual service consultations and access a Budget Simulator tool <https://haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk/hub-page/budget-2023-24> Within the Hub there was a page dedicated to the Leisure Budget Options consultation.

An online questionnaire was provided for residents to engage with. Respondents were also able to request paper copies or for help completing the questionnaire, or submit additional comments via a dedicated email address, which was published on the 'Have your say' website alongside the online tool.

Following the consultation, the feedback will be considered at the Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee on the 25 January 2023.

2.1 Questionnaire

The consultation questionnaire was developed around understanding resident views on the options presented for reducing the cost of the leisure services. Key areas in the options included reducing the number of Leisure Centres operated by the Council, reducing the number of swimming pools open to the public and consideration of discontinuing to provide Leisure Services.

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 questions, a text coding approach was used based on the reoccurring themes. This data was then collated and summarised in the report.

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.
- Free-text questions that offered respondents the option to provide written feedback could have covered multiple themes. Therefore, with free-text responses were categorised using a coding system. The percentages given reflect the percentage of respondents who made the comment and as they may have made more than one comment, the total percentage may exceed 100%.

2.4 Direct Representations

Contact details were provided to enable organisation, groups, or special interest groups to directly submit their responses to the budget proposals.

2.5 Communication

To ensure the consultations were as accessible as possible, a social and digital sub campaign was carried out, which included regular messaging, targeted demographical and geographical communications, resident e-newsletters, and regular theme specific stories, linking with the narrative, and urging residents and stakeholders to take part in the consultation. communication channels included (but not limited to):

- Social media messaging across a variety of platforms.
- Dedicated email address (for comments, ideas, request for paper copies etc).
- Paper copies in libraries and leisure centres.
- WirralView news channel – article and links.
- Links and details in weekly Resident E-Newsletter.
- Digital and social links to the 'Have Your Say' Hub.
- Online redirection through local news platforms.
- Council website notices.
- Internal / Staff communications.
- Local media briefing/ media management.
- Member briefing.
- Sharing of links and paper copy locations with CVF sector.

3.0 Results

3.1 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was responded to by 804 people. 593 responses came through the online portal, 211 paper copies were completed. No questions were mandatory so respondents could choose which questions to respond to.

3.1.1 Question 1: The Council could consider discontinuing to provide Leisure Services

In response to 'The Council could consider discontinuing to provide Leisure Services,' the most common answer was 'Strongly disagree', supported by 74.4% of the 800 responses. In total, 87.9% of respondents were in disagreement with the statement, and 9.0% supported the statement.

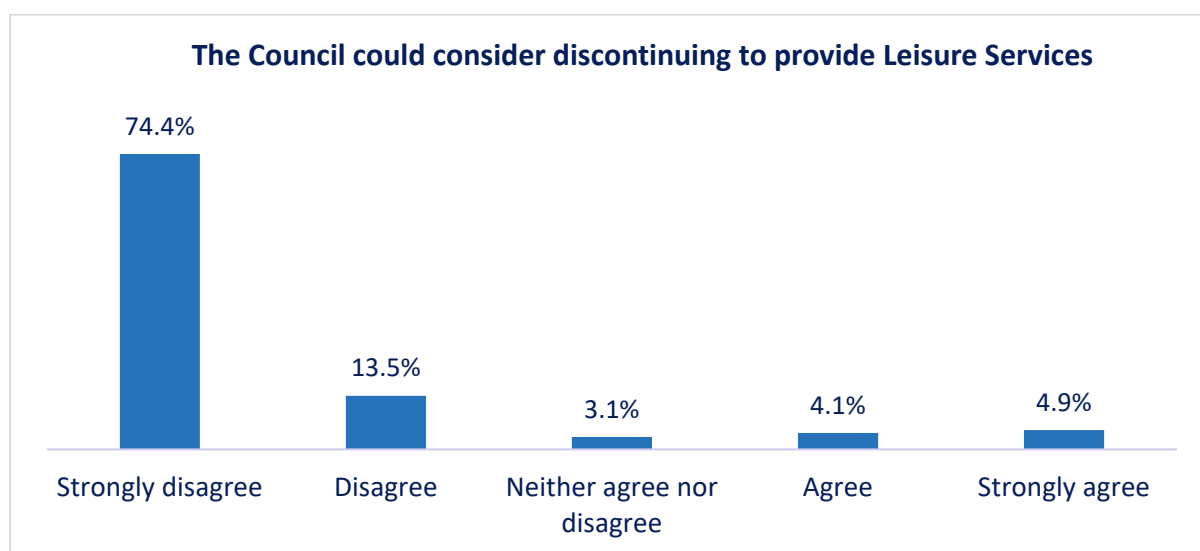


Figure 1: Chart displaying results to “the Council could consider discontinuing to provide Leisure Services”

The Council could consider discontinuing to provide Leisure Services	Total	%
Strongly disagree	595	74.4%
Disagree	108	13.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	25	3.1%
Agree	33	4.1%
Strongly agree	39	4.9%
Total	800	100.0%

Table 1: Table displaying the results to “the Council could consider discontinuing to provide Leisure Services”

3.1.2 Question 2: The Council could consider closing two pools

In response to 'The Council could consider closing two pools,' the most common answer was 'Strongly disagree', supported by 43.1% of the 796 responses. In total, 60.4% of respondents were in disagreement with the statement, and 30.9% were in agreement.

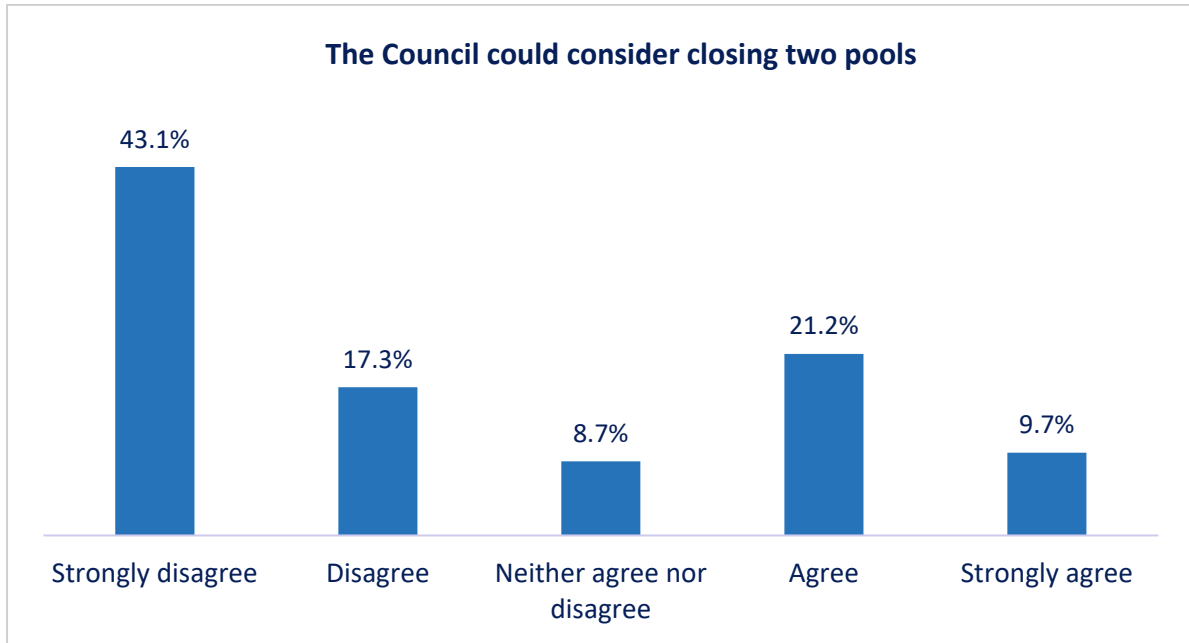


Figure 2: Chart displaying results to “the Council could consider closing two pools”

The Council could consider closing two pools	Total	%
Strongly disagree	343	43.1%
Disagree	138	17.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	69	8.7%
Agree	169	21.2%
Strongly agree	77	9.7%
Total	796	100.0%

Table 2: Table displaying the results to “the Council could consider closing two pools”

3.1.3 Question 3: The Council could consider reducing the overall number of Leisure Centres it manages and operates

In response to 'The Council could consider reducing the overall number of Leisure Centres it manages and operates,' the most common answer was 'Strongly disagree', supported by 40.8% of the 801 responses. In total, 59.1% of respondents were in disagreement with the statement, and 31.8% were in agreement.

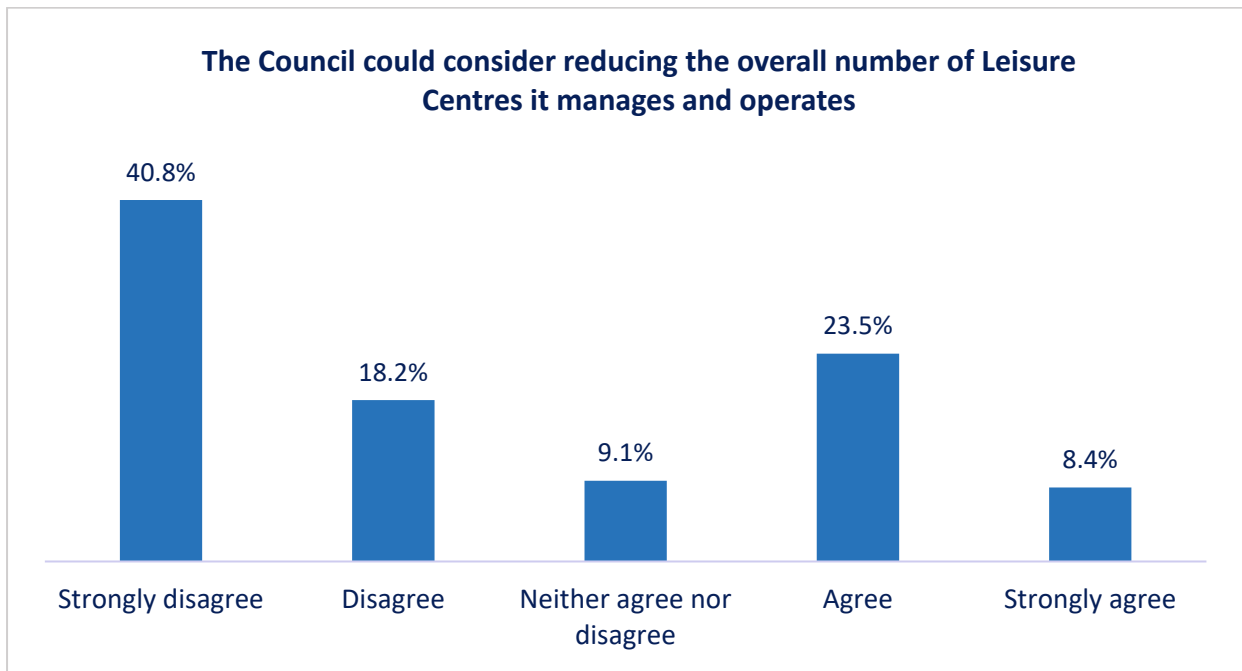


Figure 3: Chart displaying results to “the Council could consider reducing the overall number of Leisure Centres it manages and operates”

The Council could consider reducing the overall number of Leisure Centres it manages and operates	Total	%
Strongly disagree	327	40.8%
Disagree	146	18.2%
Neither agree nor disagree	73	9.1%
Agree	188	23.5%
Strongly agree	67	8.4%
Total	801	100.0%

Table 3: Table displaying the results to “the Council could consider reducing the overall number of Leisure Centres it manages and operates”

3.1.4 Question 4: If you have any comments

Respondents were asked if they had any additional comments regarding the leisure services consultation. 440 people responded to this question. Each comment has been categorised into themes in order to identify the over-riding sentiments amongst the comments.

Below are the top themes that emerged from the free-text comments as a percentage of the number of people who provided an answer to the question. As the percentage reflects the proportion of respondents who made the comment and that respondents may have made more than one comment in their answer, the total percentages may exceed 100%

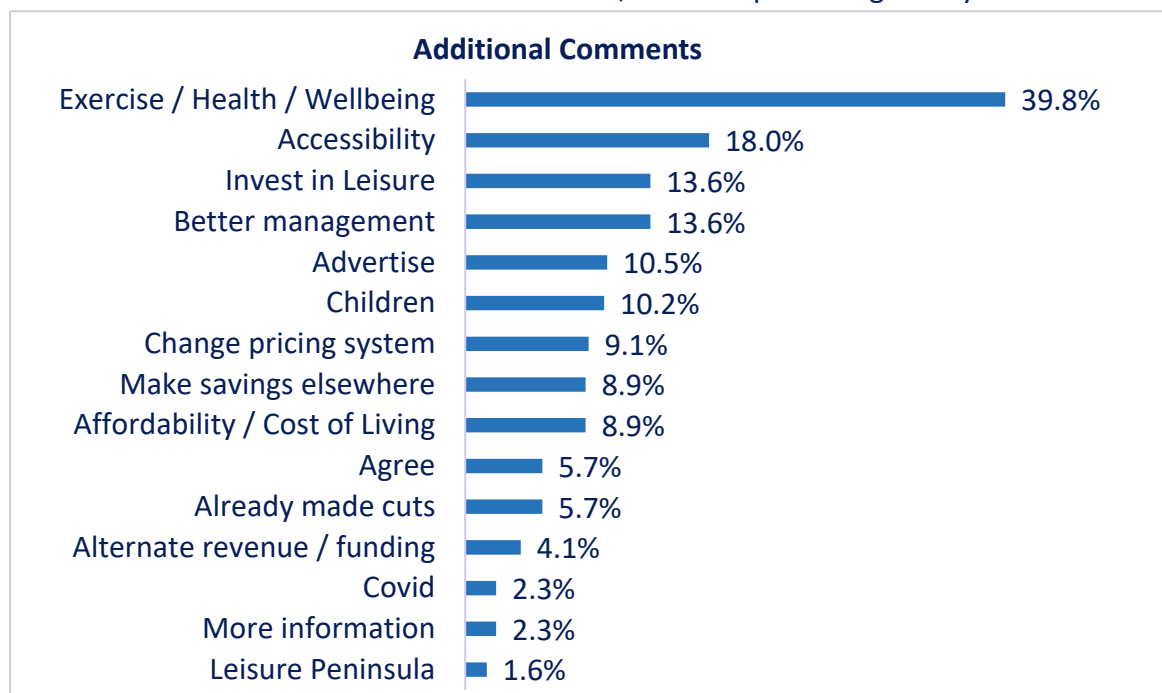


Figure 4: Chart displaying top additional comment themes

Additional comments categories	Total	%
Exercise / Health / Wellbeing	175	39.8%
Accessibility	79	18.0%
Invest in Leisure	60	13.6%
Better management	60	13.6%
Advertise	46	10.5%
Children	45	10.2%
Change pricing system	40	9.1%
Make savings elsewhere	39	8.9%
Affordability / Cost of Living	39	8.9%
Agree	25	5.7%
Already made cuts	25	5.7%
Alternate revenue / funding	18	4.1%
Covid	10	2.3%
More information required to make a decision	10	2.3%
Leisure Peninsula	7	1.6%

Table 4: Table displaying top additional comment themes

- **Exercise / Health / Wellbeing (39.8%)** of the 440 comments mentioned that a reduction in WBC's leisure services would have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of Wirral residents. Consequently, many argued that reduced access to exercise would result in increased future healthcare costs, so cuts to leisure services would be a false economy.
- **Accessibility (18.0%).** 79 respondents believe that a reduction in WBC's leisure services would reduce Wirral residents' access to leisure. This would particularly impact poorer residents, people without access to vehicles and residents with mobility issues. Many believed that if closures were to take place, accessibility should be considered, and the remaining leisure services should be easily accessible to all with regular and short journey public transport.
- **Invest in Leisure (13.6%).** 60 responses argued that the quoted 20% reduction in the demand for leisure is due to the state of the current facilities. It was argued that rather than close the leisure services, WBC should invest into improving the service offering which would increase the demand for leisure. Resultantly, the investment could pay for itself.
- **Better management (13.6%).** 60 responses believe that the current facilities could be better managed, instead of closed completely. Many comments mentioned that the leisure facilities are not open at convenient times, and that opening hours should be extended. Additionally, the services offered at the facilities could be tweaked to better cater to demand. For example, more gym classes offered outside of standard working hours. The contents of the classes could be changed to better meet demand. In summary, comments reflected a frustration that council Leisure facilities are not being run as private facilities would be.
- **Advertise (10.5%).** 46 respondents believe that to tackle the reduction in demand, the council should promote its leisure services. Many commented that they were not aware that the councils' facilities had returned to normal operations following coronavirus restrictions. A common suggestion was to offer discounted subscriptions to young people, and to make them aware of the leisure centres existence.
- **Children (10.2%).** Mentioned in 45 responses, a reduction in leisure services would deny Children access. As a result, many children may not learn to swim with lessons already in high demand. Respondents felt this is particularly important given the Wirral peninsula's coastline.

3.2 Direct Representations

One direct representation was received from an individual. The representation is included in Appendix 1.

4.0 Demographics and Site Traffic

4.1 Demographics

Registration was required to engage in the online 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. The same questions were included on the paper-copy questionnaires.

Most respondents (88.1%) classed themselves as local residents.

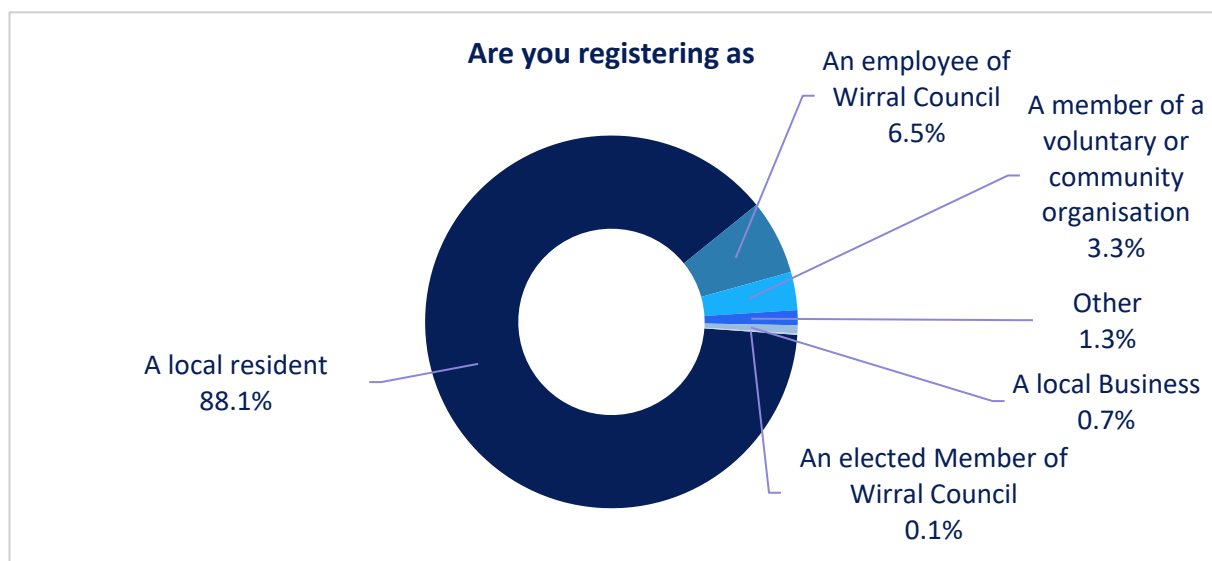


Figure 5: Chart displaying registering

The age group profile is illustrated below with the most common age groups being 55-64 years (23.4%), followed by 65-74 years (22.5%) and 45-54 years (19.2%). Under 24's made up 1.3% of respondents.

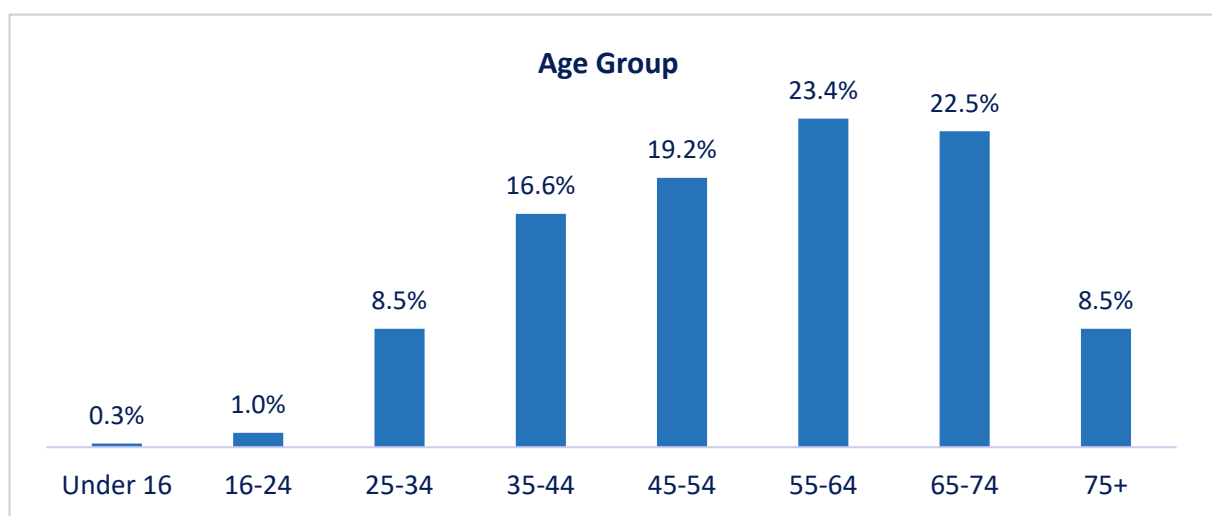


Figure 6: Chart displaying age groups

56.9% of respondents identified as female and, 40.6% male. 2.3% preferred not to say and 0.3% preferring to use their own term.

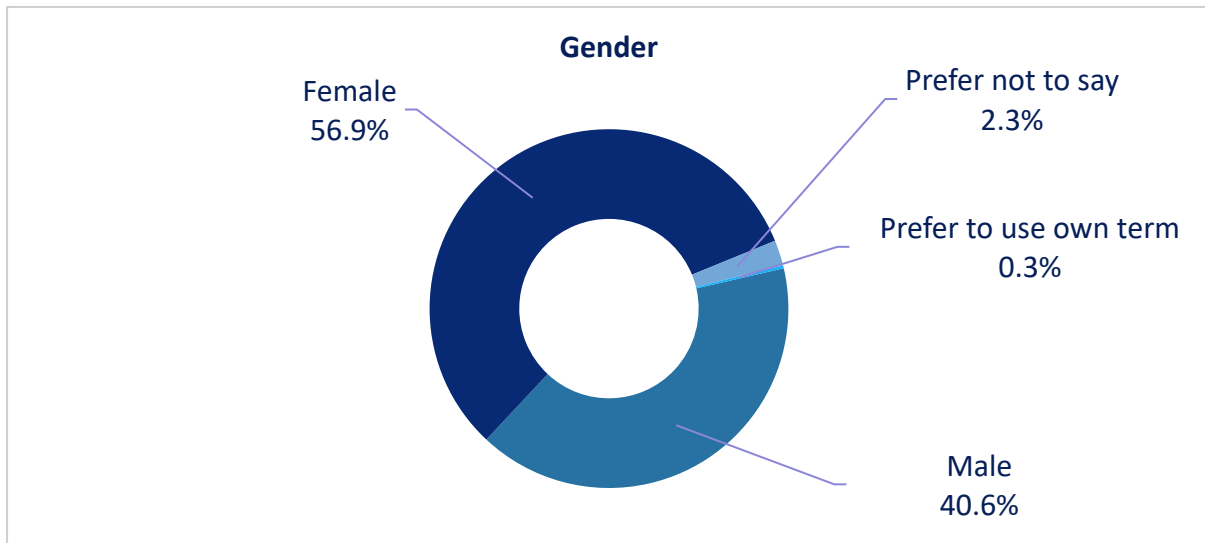


Figure 7: Chart displaying gender

85.9% of respondents were heterosexual, 1.3% were gay/ lesbian, 1.1% bisexual and 11.7% preferred not to say.

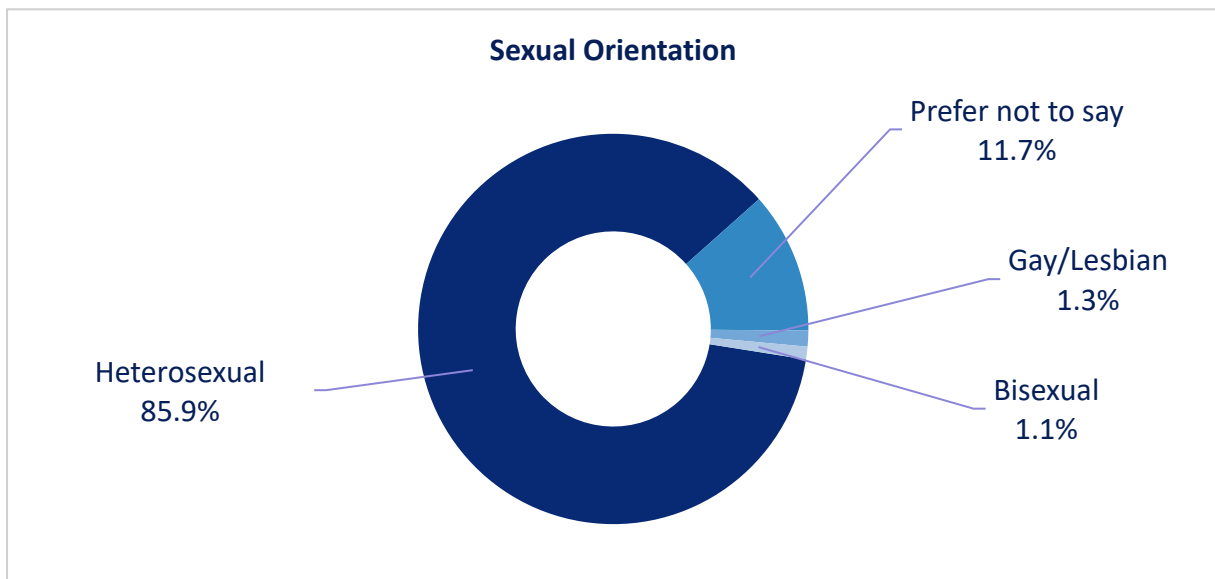


Figure 8: Chart displaying sexual orientation

83.0% said they did not have a disability whilst 10.5% of respondents said that they had a disability, 6.4% preferred not to say.

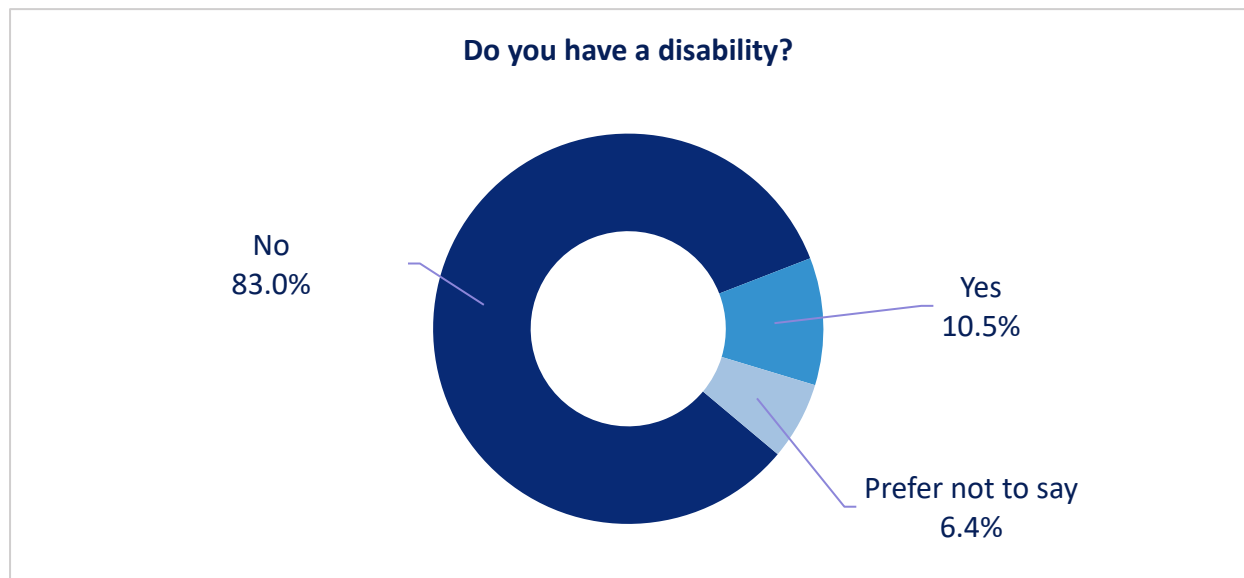


Figure 9: Chart displaying disability

The majority (95.1%) of respondents identified as White – English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British.

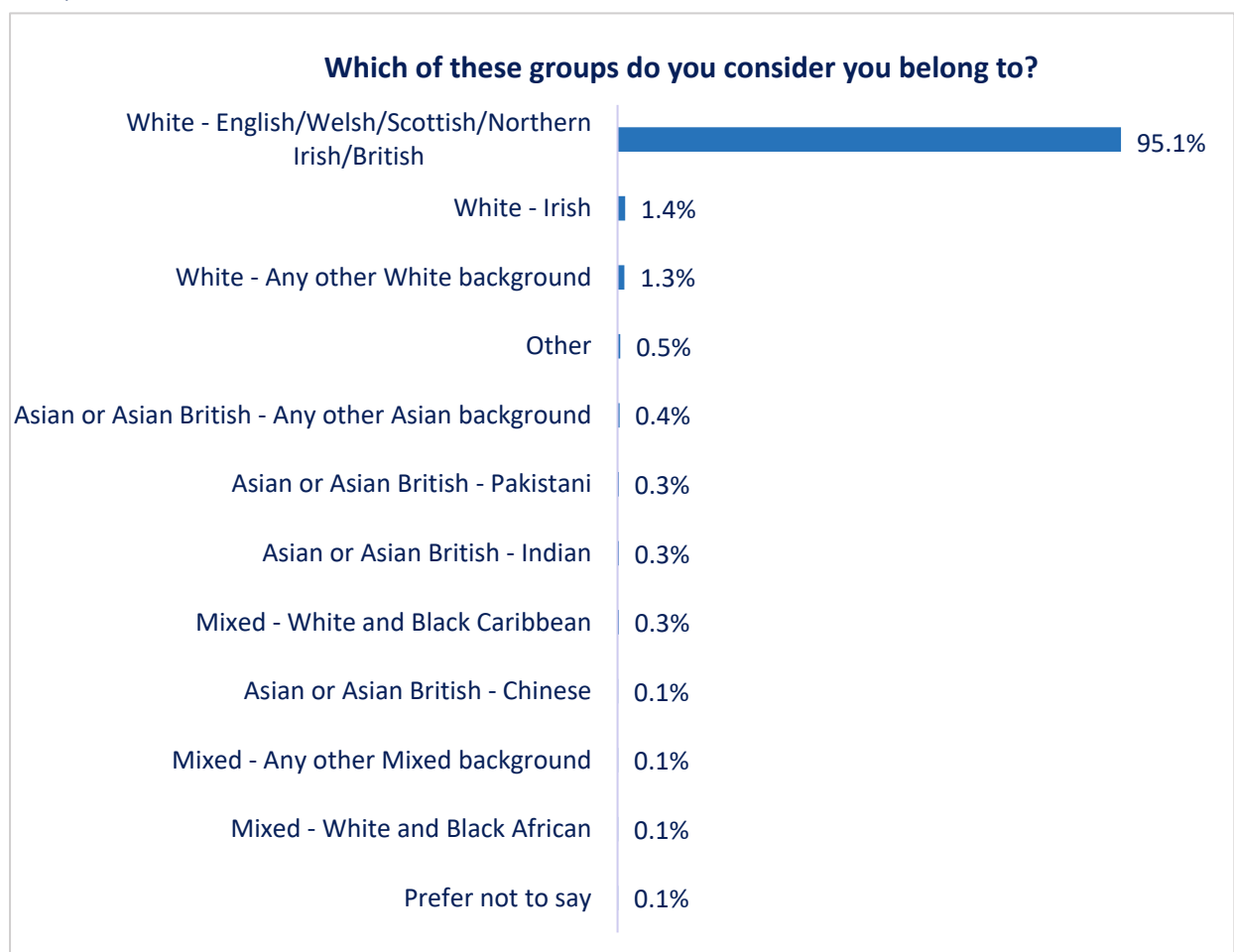


Figure 10: Chart displaying groups

The most represented ward was Oxton (12.4%) followed by New Brighton (10.6%) and Wallasey (9.5%). Each of the 22 wards received some representation.

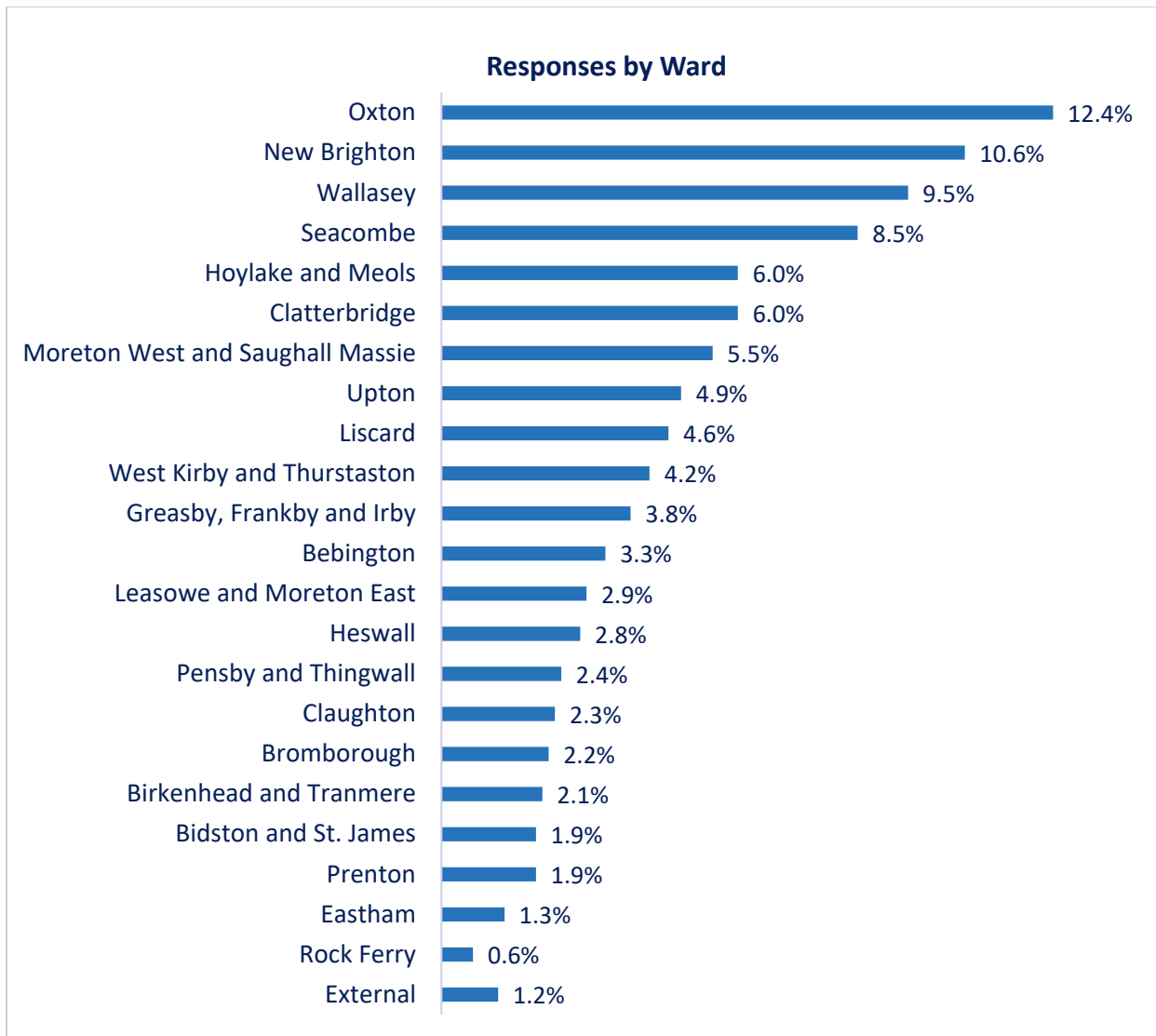


Figure 11: Chart displaying Wirral Ward representation

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. 1970 unique visitors viewed the consultation page of the Have Your Say website. Of these, 736 visited multiple project pages and 105 viewed a photo. 593 people in total 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 links clicked from social media sites (496) or direct visits where people typed the internet address into their web browser (1365). It should be noted that direct visits generated a much higher rate of engagement of 27.2%, meaning 27.2% of these visits resulted in completion of the survey, whereas Social Media visits had an engagement rate of 15.1%.

Traffic Source	Aware Visits	Informed Visits (%)	Engaged Visits (%)
Direct	1365	920 (67.4%)	371 (27.2%)
Social	496	291 (58.7%)	75 (15.1%)
Email	126	88 (69.8%)	48 (38.1%)
Search engine	132	97 (73.5%)	59 (44.7%)
.gov	13	11 (84.6%)	8 (61.5%)
Referrals	99	79 (79.8%)	32 (32.3%)
Total	2231	1486	593

Table 5: Site traffic sources

Appendix 1: Direct Representations

REPRESENTATION FROM AN INDIVIDUAL

I would ask the council to look at capping any increase on golf fees for 2023. Not only were two courses closed last year but in addition monthly payments rose to £39 for the two remaining courses, the Warren and Arrowe Park.

