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Document Title	Proposals to Increase Council House Rents – Consultation Exercise

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Additional information:

Authorised By	Wendy McGuire
Designation	Head of Housing
Date	30/01/24

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REPORT TO: Members' Library Service

MEETING DATE:

BY: Executive Director for Place

SUBJECT: Proposals to Increase Council House Rents – Consultation Exercise

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To note the results of the rent consultation exercise on the proposals to increase the Council House Rents in 2024/25.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are advised to note that meaningful consideration of the consultation results are a key element in setting rents for 2024/25 and beyond.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory obligation under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to consult with all tenants when making any proposals to increase rents. In doing so the Council must:

- consult all tenants and registered tenant organisations affected by the proposal(s), and
- have regard to the views expressed during the consultation exercise.

- 3.2 A summary of all the responses received from tenants who completed the questionnaire is shown in Appendix 1.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The consultation results will inform the Council's decision-making process in terms of any rent increase in 2024/25 and beyond.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 A full integrated impact assessment on equality groups has been undertaken and published on the Council's website.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – These results, together with ongoing budget development, will all be factors in determining the actual rent increase.
- 6.2 Personnel - None.
- 6.3 Other – None.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 None.

Appendix 1 – Summary of responses received during the Rent Increase Consultation Exercise 2024/25

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DESIGNATION	Head of Housing
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DATE	3 January 2024

Rent Level Consultation 2024/25

Report on the responses received from tenants during the Rent Level Consultation carried out in November 2023.

The council consults with tenants each year on any proposal to increase rents. This year, the council agreed during discussions and with East Lothian Tenants and Residents Panel (ELTRP) to consult on three possible options for increasing rents, 5%, 6%, 7%.

A letter and rent information sheet were developed, the letter explained what tenants rent money is spent on. It also outlined, the potential revenue each option would generate, what it would achieve in terms of our investment programmes and any capacity it would offer in the current financial climate. The information sheet gave more details about what rent money is spent on and included a questionnaire, which gave tenants the opportunity to give their views on what they think the rent increase should be next year. Tenants could respond, in a number of ways, by completing the questionnaire online, by post, by emailing, telephoning, or writing in.

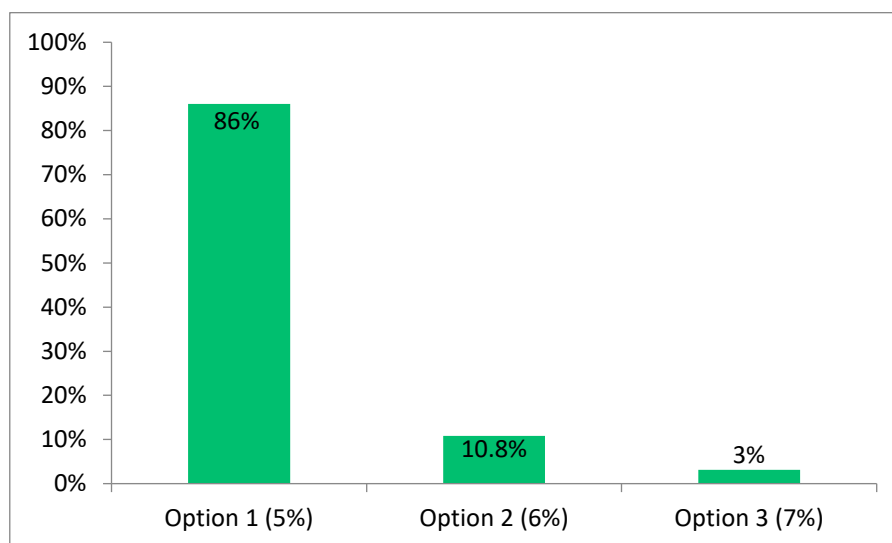
The consultation ran from 1st November to 15th December 2023 and during this time, a total of 1657 responses were received, the breakdown is shown in the table below along with a comparison to last year's response.

Consultation	Online responses	Postal returns	Total
November 2023 (for 2024/25 increase)	992	665	1657
November 2022 (for 2023/24 increase)	889	677	1566

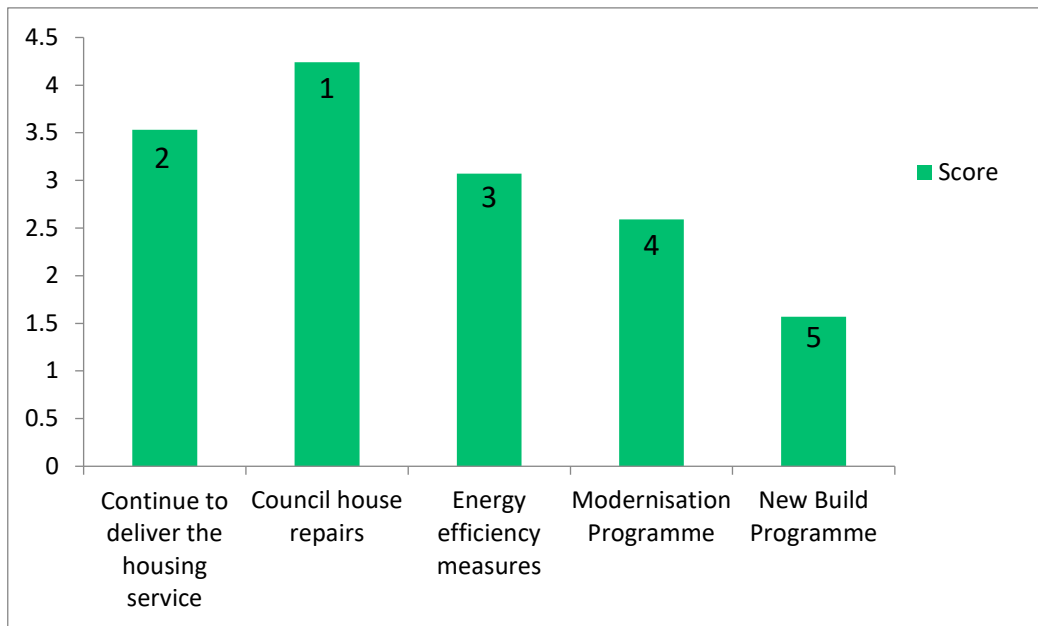
Overall, this year, there was an increase of 91 responses, with a slight reduction in the number of postal returns and over 100 more online responses). A small number of tenants telephoned and emailed the council with queries, or to respond to the consultation.

The consultation asked tenants a number a questions and below is a summary of the responses:

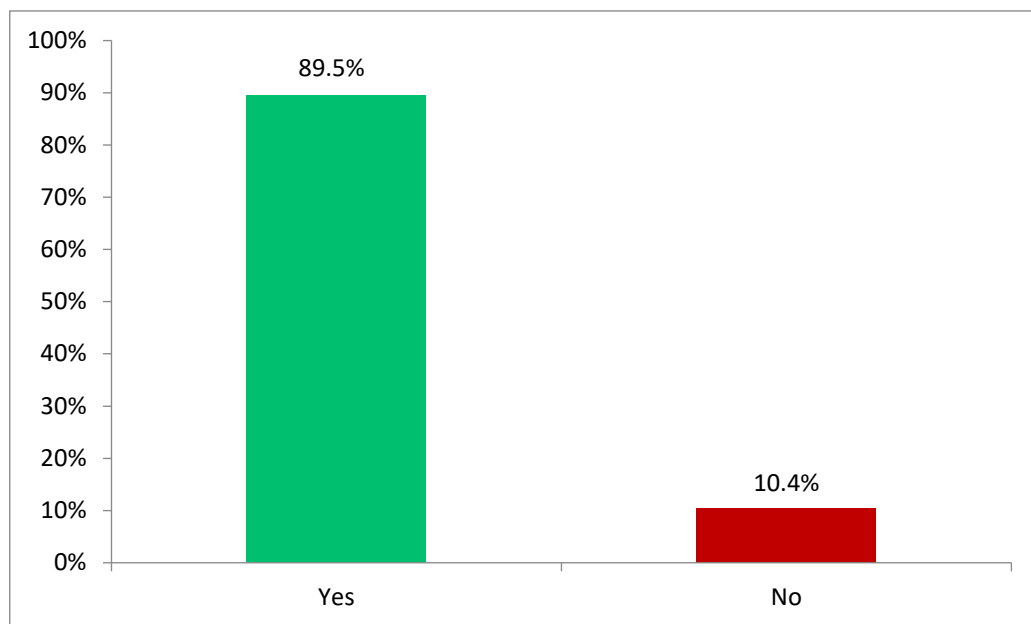
Question 1 - Please tell us what you think the annual rent increase should be next year, 5%, 6% or 7%.



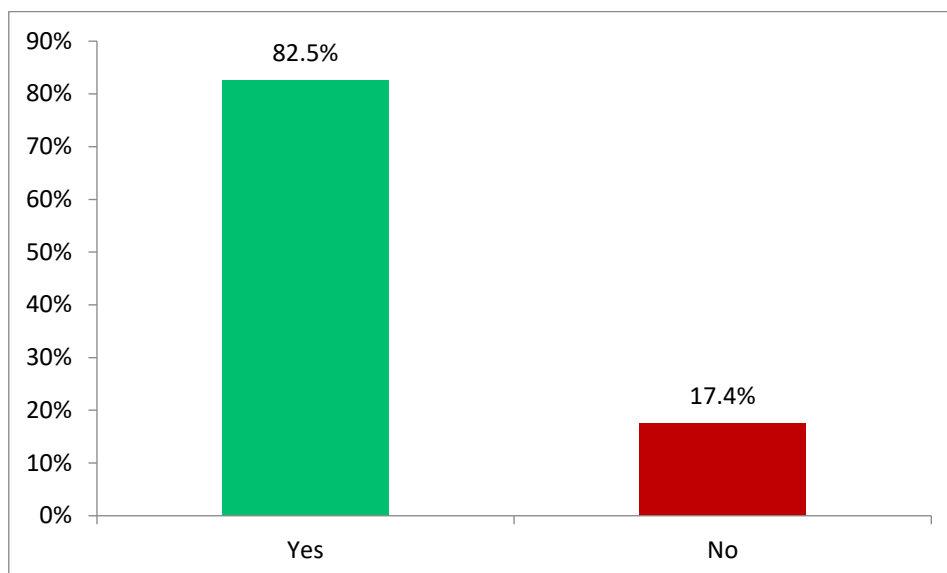
Question 2 - The money you pay in rent is used to pay for delivering the housing service, please tell us what services are most important to you. Please prioritise the services 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important to you and 5 the least important.



Question 3 - Are you satisfied with the level of consultation and information you get about the annual rent increase?



Question 4 - Do you think the rent you pay is good value for money?



Question 5 - This question asked tenants for suggestions about what improvements could be made to the housing service.

A total of 528 comments were made from tenants, most comments made were about Repairs (36% of those who commented), Modernisation Programme (11%), Staffing (10%). Other comments were about, void houses, rent increase, energy efficiency, positive comments, new build, financial climate, adaptations.

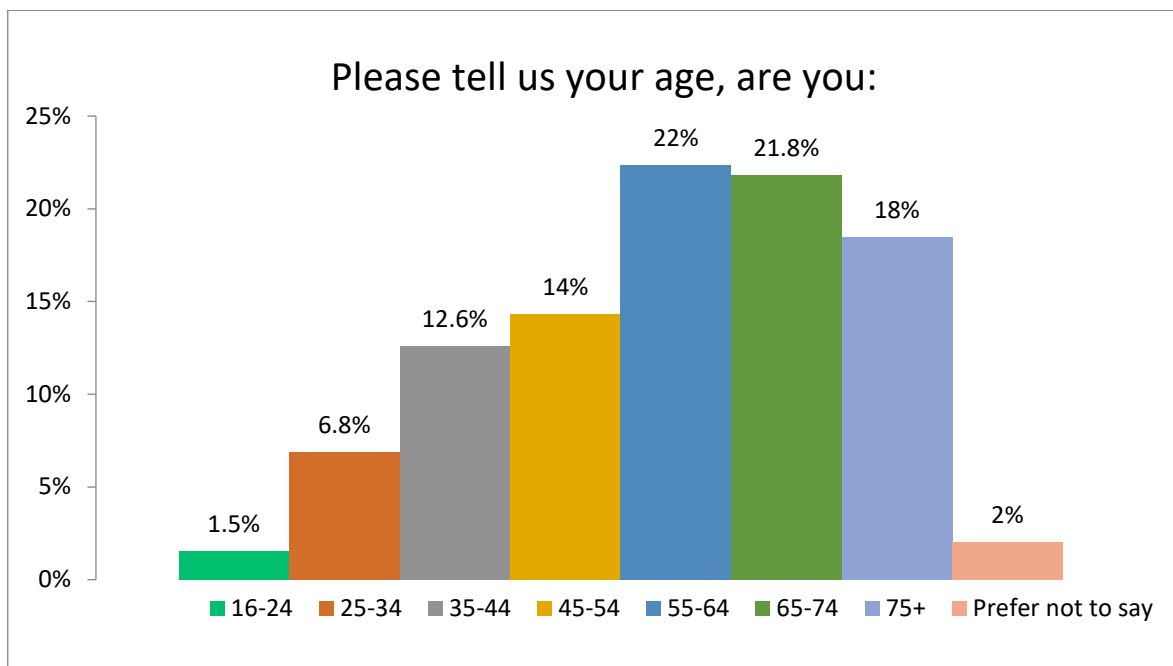
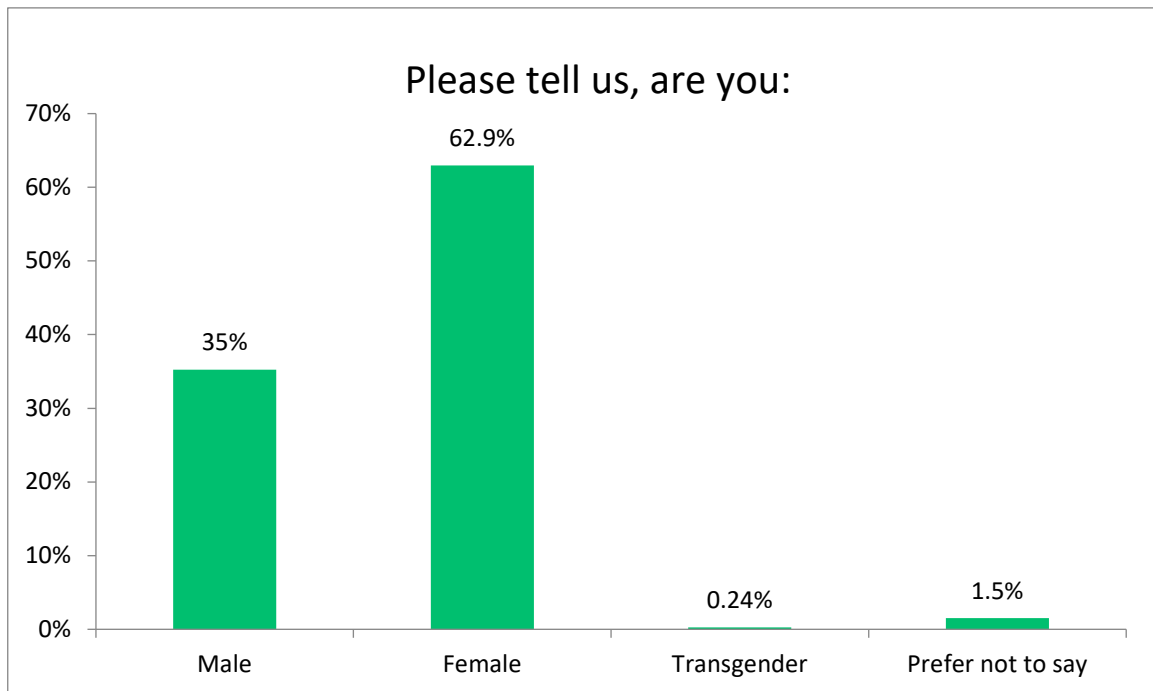
Examples of some of the comments made:

- ✓ Please improve repairs, making this a priority would be so helpful
- ✓ Keep people updated when waiting on repairs to be done
- ✓ I think it would be more cost effective to employ tradesman/women rather than using sub-contractors
- ✓ When repairs are reported they are done within a reasonable time
- ✓ Hire more Inspectors

- ✓ Modernise properties, my windows are so old, constant condensation every winter
- ✓ Use the funds to update and modify older homes and not just build new ones that are not as strong as the older homes
- ✓ By improving quality of homes – replacing windows/doors etc.
- ✓ Need updating i.e. new kitchens ours is over 15 years old, also solar panels should be considered
- ✓ By giving me my new bathroom. Been waiting years all my neighbours got done last Christmas I was the only one on my street that didn't get it.

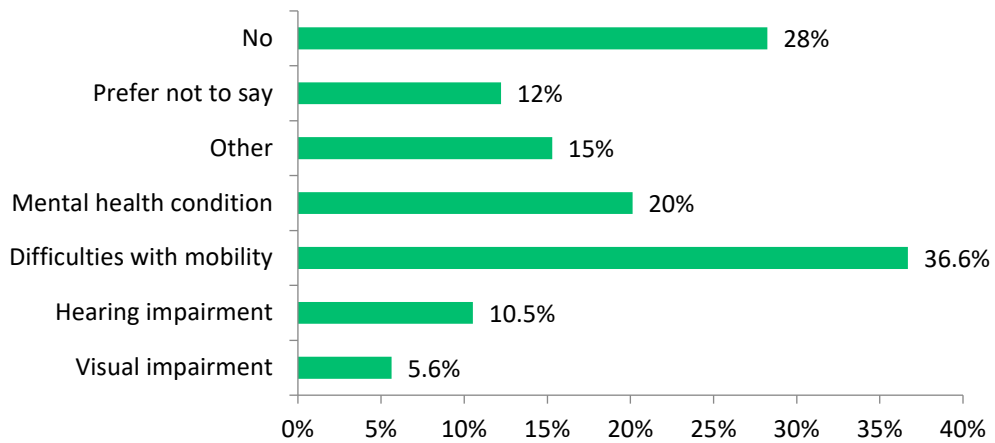
- ✓ Make it faster seems to be lack of staff
- ✓ Keep the budget money in East Lothian and improve services by employing more staff
- ✓ Re-allocate empty council homes quicker
- ✓ Quicker return on empty houses – lost rent / lost income
- ✓ I've always been very satisfied with all council services
- ✓ Just keep up the good work.

To make sure there is a wide a range of tenants' views captured and to ensure we are meeting tenants' housing needs we asked some questions to help us with our equalities monitoring. All individual responses are kept confidential.

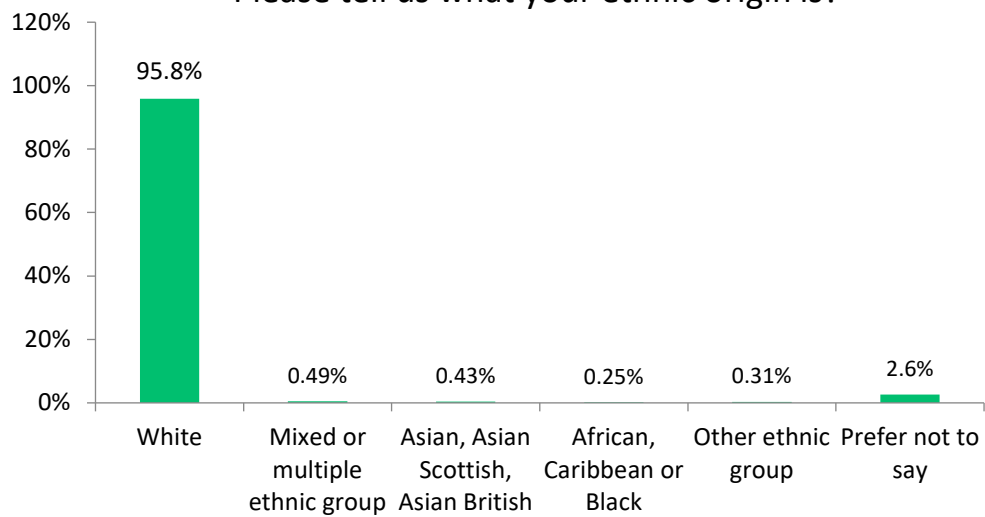


Please tell us if you have a health condition or disability which impacts on your day-to-day life?

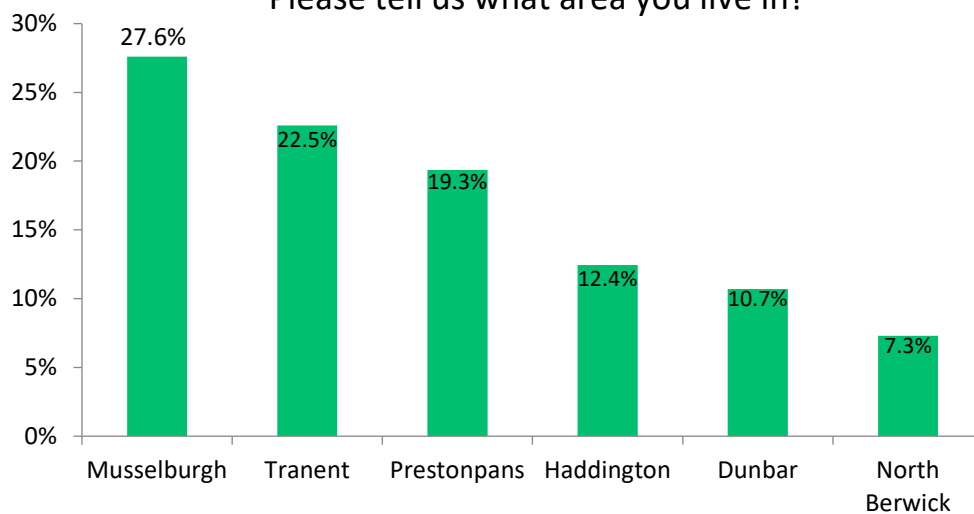
(please note some respondents ticked more than one box)

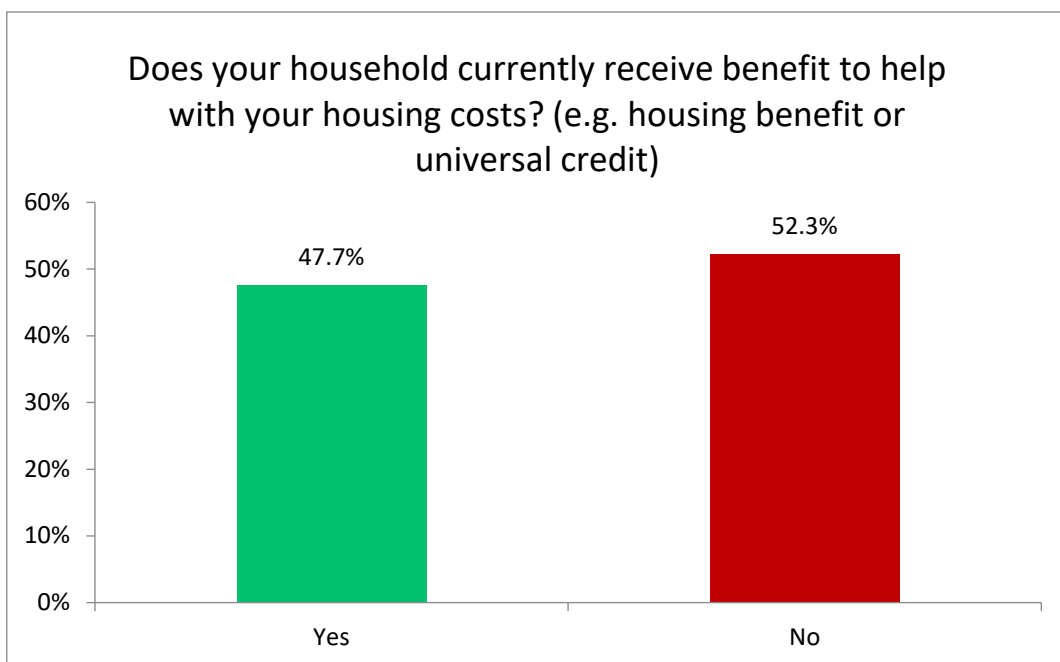
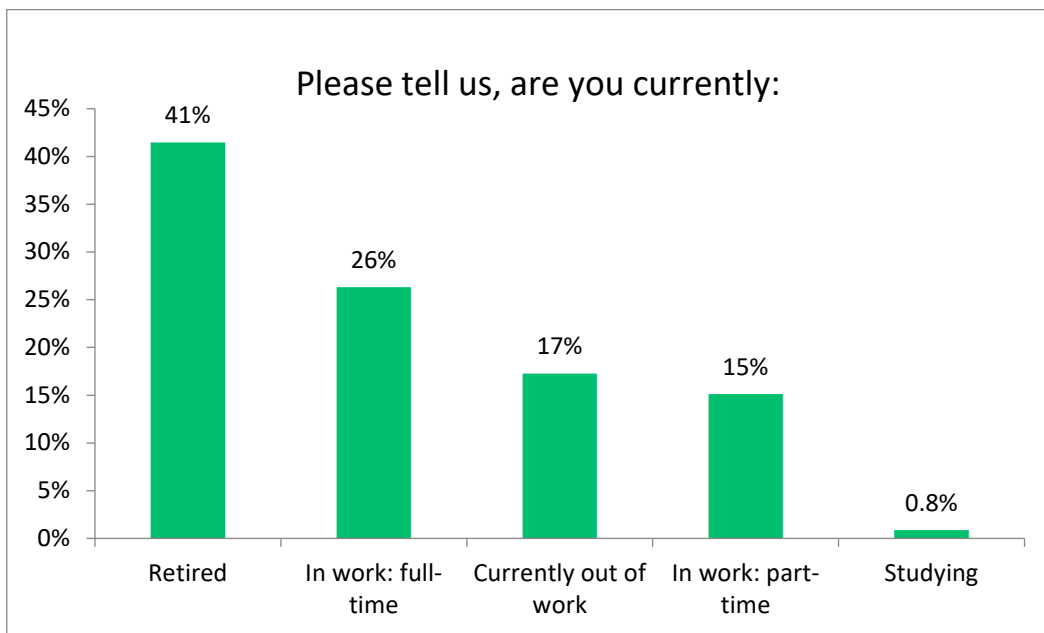


Please tell us what your ethnic origin is?



Please tell us what area you live in?





This report will be submitted to the Housing Revenue Account Consultation Group at the next meeting in January 2024 and will also be shared with Elected Members prior to the budget meeting in February 2024 when a decision on increasing rents will be made by the Council.