

Analysis of:

STRATEGIC TENANCY POLICY: QUESTIONNAIRES

Caroline Abbott
Housing Research & Policy Officer
Housing Strategy & Enablement, Adult Care Services

December 2012



INTRODUCTION

A questionnaire was published on Bury Council's website for all residents, stakeholders, elected members and housing associations to complete. In addition, questionnaires were made available at all seventeen libraries across the Borough, Six Town Housing reception, the Town Hall in Bury, Whittaker Street in Radcliffe and Adult Care's Connect and Direct at Textile Hall in Bury.

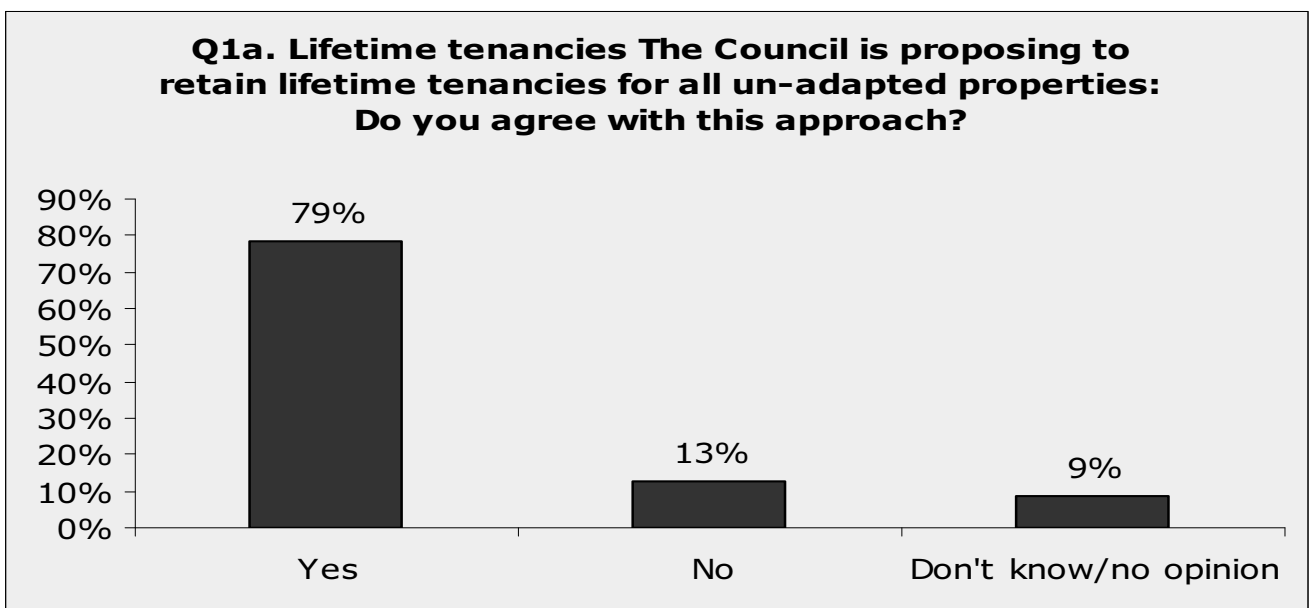
The overall objective of the survey was to gather views on the Council's draft Strategic Tenancy Policy.

The survey was made available from 23rd October and the consultation period ended on the 30th November. During this time **60** people completed the on-line survey in relation to the draft Strategic Tenancy Policy.

Questions were asked in relation to lifetime tenancies, adapted properties, under-occupation, over-crowding, homelessness, affordable rent conversions and higher rents for higher income earners. The results of the survey are detailed below:

ANALYSIS

Lifetime tenancies



The majority of respondents (79%) agreed with the proposal to retain lifetime tenancies for all un-adapted properties, 13% did not agree and 9% did not have an opinion.

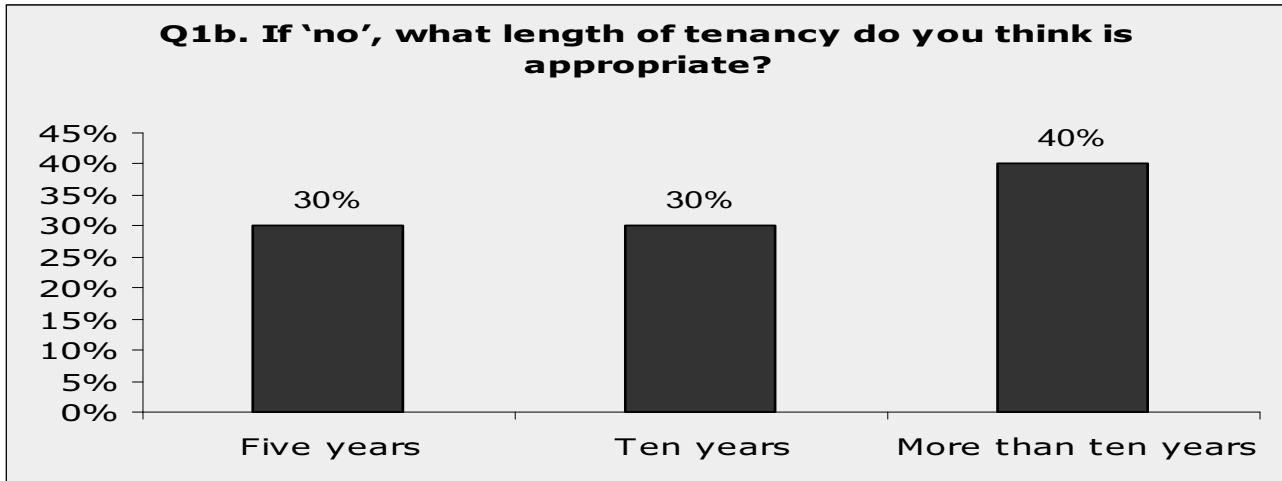
The table below details the comments in relation to this question.

Because some people live in 3 bedroom family homes and the waiting list is getting bigger and they should be moved to smaller properties.

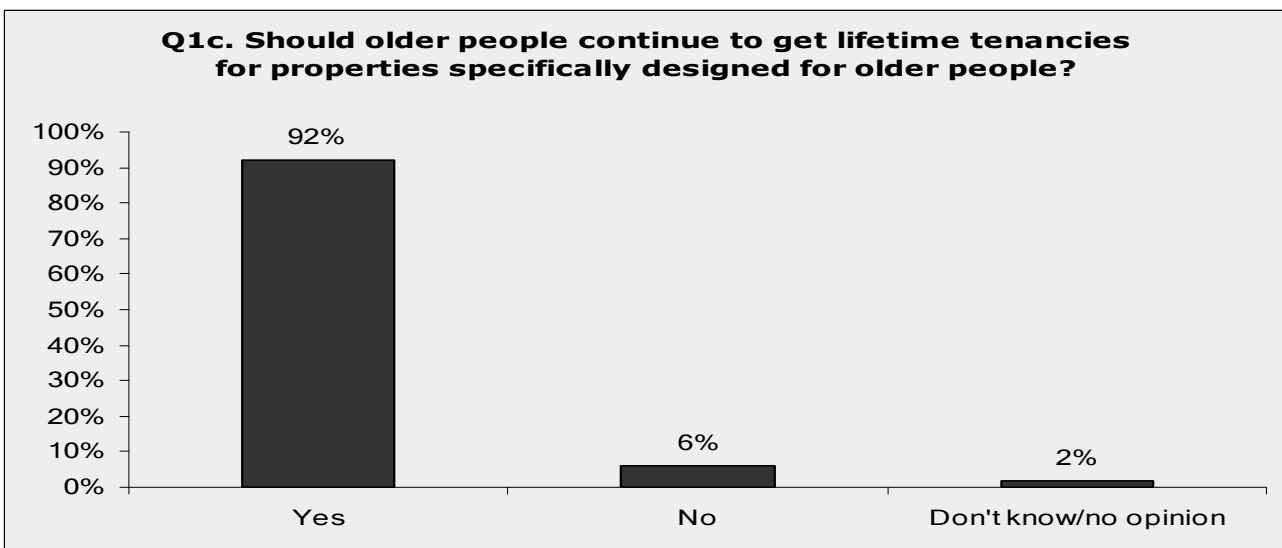
People's needs alter and relationships change.

Because Councils are not building any/enough houses. A review should be made at some point.

Social housing should be awarded on need and not historic basis.



Those that said no were then asked what length of tenancy they felt would be most appropriate. 30% said five years, 30% said ten years and 40% said more than ten years.



92% of the respondents agreed that older people should continue to get lifetime tenancies for properties specifically designed for older people, 6% did not agree and 2% did not know.

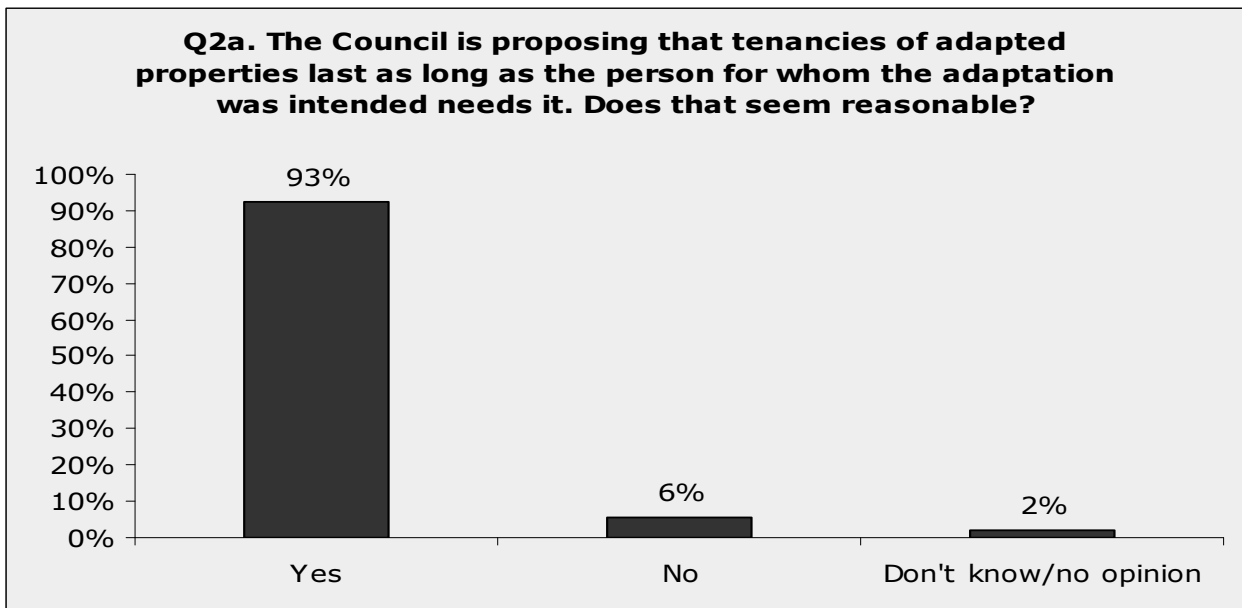
Respondents were asked to give further commentary to the answers given in relation to lifetime tenancies for older people. The comments made are detailed below:

Properties for older people should fit their needs.
Life is difficult enough for older people worrying about money, bills etc. Why give them extra worry.
Designated properties that are designed for older people i.e. sheltered housing should have the choice to stay in their home if it fits their needs without having to be moved.
They need to know they have a home and are not going to be moved.
Older people are vulnerable and have made connections in the area with neighbours and doctors, they do not like disruption. I have worked in housing in Manchester on re-furnished schemes and seen this from experience.
The Council should demonstrate its duty of care for the elderly by doing this. It would take away the stress of having to move somewhere else.
If they are adapted to suit the person, no reason why they can not stay there.
Sheltered bungalows and 1 bed flats.
I am an older person and I would be very distressed if 'by force' my tenancy had to be terminated unnecessarily.
People like to feel secure, especially when they are getting older.
Trauma associated with relocation to new areas.
Older people need to be secure and settled not subjected to a move again.
It is essential that the elderly have consistency.
It would be wrong to up root and move them at their stage in life.
Depends on circumstance.
When people get to that age they should have certainty about their living arrangements. Should not be making people, some of whom will be frail, worry about their home.
If they are designed for older people they should stay that way, why spend more money adapting them?
Older tenants should not be relocated against their wishes.
Yes they should as it's their home and should be able to live there until they are ready to leave.
Again, I think it should be based on need. Everyone should be reassessed after five years and if they still qualify are given another five years.
A lot of old people don't like to move from familiar places.

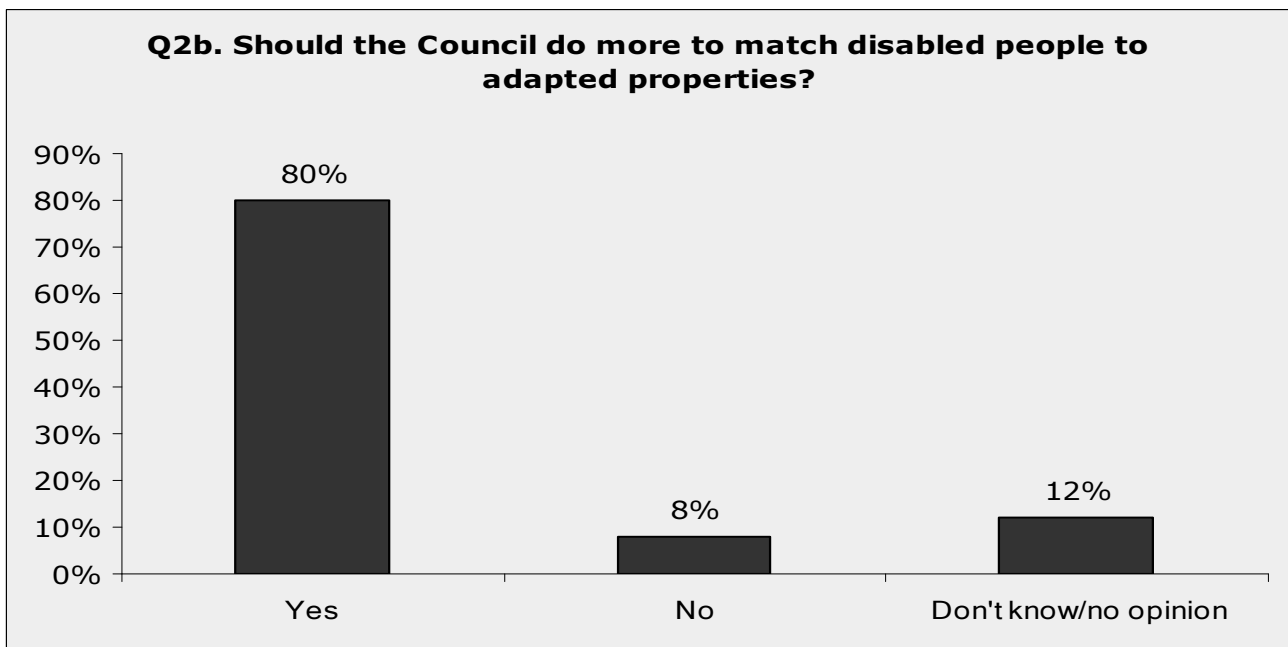
Our response:

- The majority of respondents supported the continuation of lifetime tenancies for un-adapted, general needs properties. However, a minority felt that fixed term tenancies would help to ensure that properties were used by customers with particular need of that property. The benefits of promoting a regular turnover of properties is acknowledged, however, it is felt preferable to continue to allow lifetime tenancies for un-adapted, general needs properties, but with improved and proactive advice and support to tenants needing to better match their property to their housing needs.

Adapted properties



The majority of respondents (93%) agreed that tenancies of adapted properties should last as long as the person for whom the adaptation was intended needs it, 6% did not agree with this and 2% did not express an opinion.



The majority of respondents (80%) said the Council should do more to match disabled people to the adapted properties, 8% felt the Council should not do more and 12% did not have an opinion.

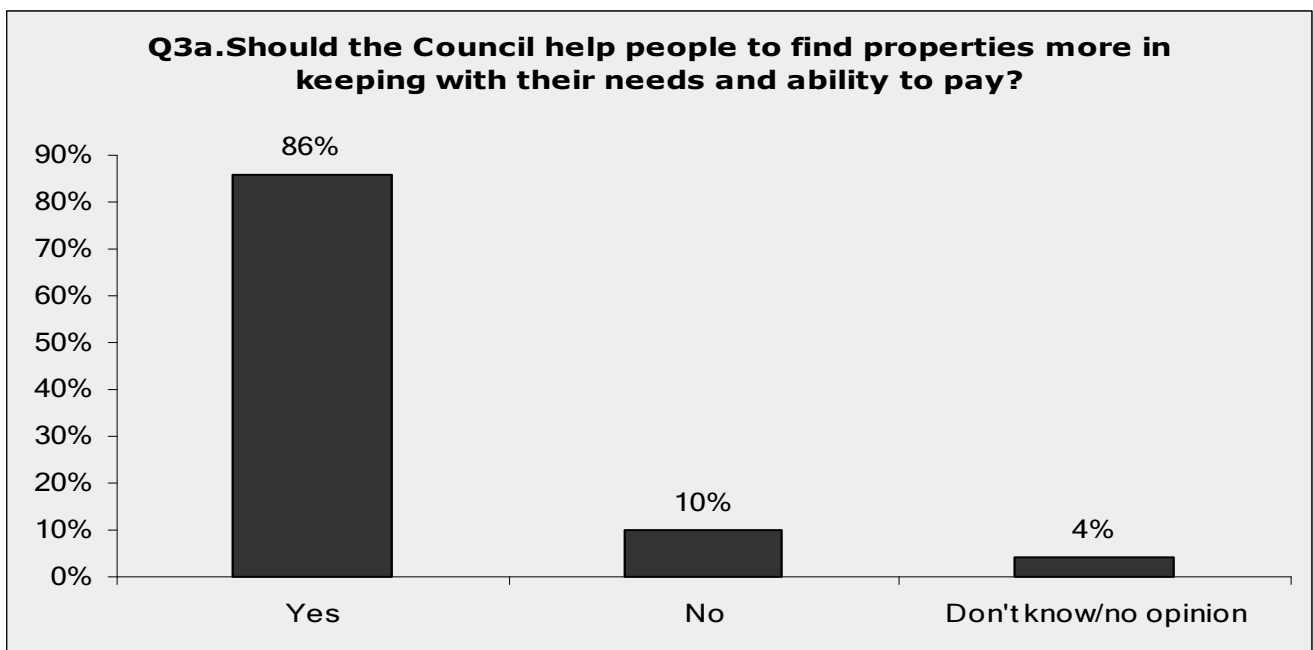
Respondents were asked to give further detail to the answers given in relation adapted properties. The comments made are detailed below:

Yes they should accommodate all disabled people to their needs i.e. young or elderly tenants. If they stopped sponsoring football then the money could be used for better adaptations.
By matching properties that are adapted to those who are needed then the Council should save money by not having to adapt additional properties.
Make sure rent arrears are collected and re-charges are paid. Start charging 2 weeks rent in advance. All future refurbishments should include basic adaptations in bathrooms.
My brother waited months for his house to be sorted to meet his needs and I think adapting houses should be priority.
Meet the needs of tenants. Secure housing and understand their needs.
The Council should consider the ways in which its disabled tenants would be able to live comfortably in their homes and not have to pay extra for simple adaptations. The Council should make this a priority rather than spend money on trips for its Councillors, twinning etc, which benefits nobody.
Should check and re-use stair-lifts if they are already in the property.
Check and leave stair-lifts if already in adapted property.
Share costs with tenant.
People on benefits who are under occupied should move to smaller properties as Bury Council is paying rent for families to have nice weekends at benefits expense.
Only if possible within the limits of budgets etc.
I think the Council is fair and already does enough to help people on the waiting list with Choice Base Lettings.
Rent properties to families that can afford to pay rent but less than that of private landlords, bringing extra income into the Council instead of giving free housing and Council Tax to families not prepared to work.
They need to monitor and double check the truth of the disability and if genuine advise on adaptations that the tenant could do. If disabled people are getting DLA that is what the money is for.
Small things like help to maintain the up keep with the garden etc.
Have a good knowledge of people's needs and an accurate list of facilities within properties.
Use an on line questionnaire so disabled people can help to match themselves.
It does not need improving as the Council already match disabled people to the correct properties.
Only if they still need the adaptation and they still qualify under the normal procedure.
Managing expectations of people applying for adaptations to encourage people to be more open to considering moving to existing adapted properties when applying for DFG. Consider advertising the properties where there can be no suitable potential tenant identified in the first instance so allow other people the opportunity to bid for them who may benefit from the adaptations but who the Council may not be aware of. Liaise with Occupational Therapy Team to ensure that working to the same agenda in terms of allocation of adapted properties and applications for DFG. Possibly looking at what is going on in neighbourhood authorities - in Oldham for example an accessible housing register is being established and RP's have agreed to send all adapted properties through to register for allocation.

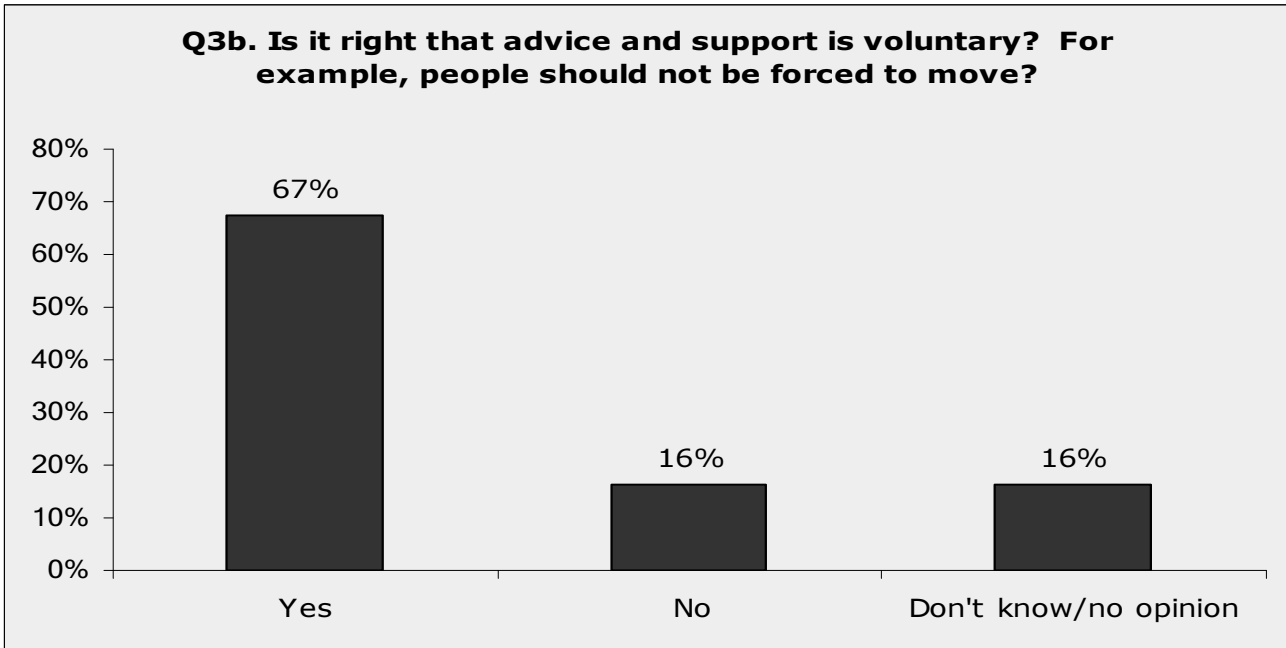
Our response:

- It was felt that the requirement for the remaining tenant or tenants to move out of an adapted property when the customer for whom the adaptations were provided no longer lives there was generally sound. However, each case should be reviewed on an individual basis, particularly in cases on minor adaptations or where the customer for whom the adaptations were carried out has moved out for an extended period of time but fully intends to return to the property as their principle home. The wording of the Policy has been amended to ensure each case is considered on an individual basis subject to agreed criteria and guidelines.
- It was also suggested that where customers for whom adaptations had been carried out have moved to another property, the remaining occupants should be allowed to remain in the adapted property to allow the former resident to return to visit. It was felt that this provision was unreasonable, particularly given the demand for adapted properties and the current procedure only allowing adaptations to be carried out at a customer's principle home.

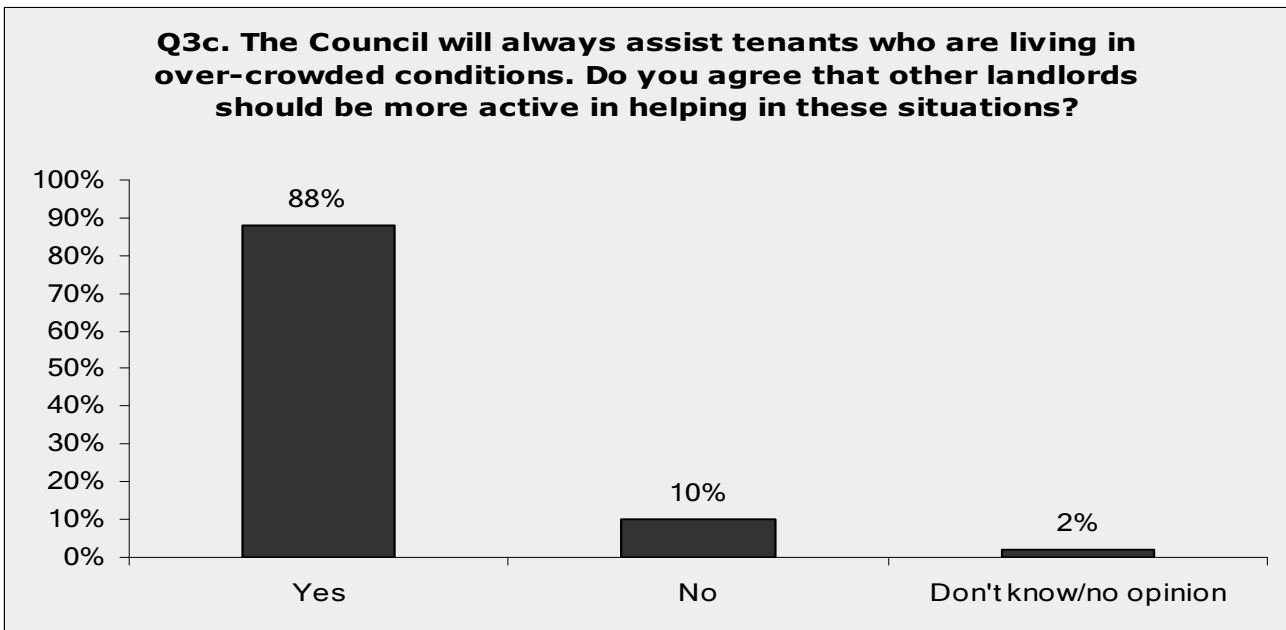
Under-occupation and over-crowding



The majority of respondents (86%) agreed that the Council should help people to find properties more in keeping with their needs and ability to pay, 10% did not agree and 4% did not know.



67% of the respondents agreed that advice and support should be voluntary and that people should not be forced to move. 16% of the respondents felt people should be made to move and 16% did not express a view.

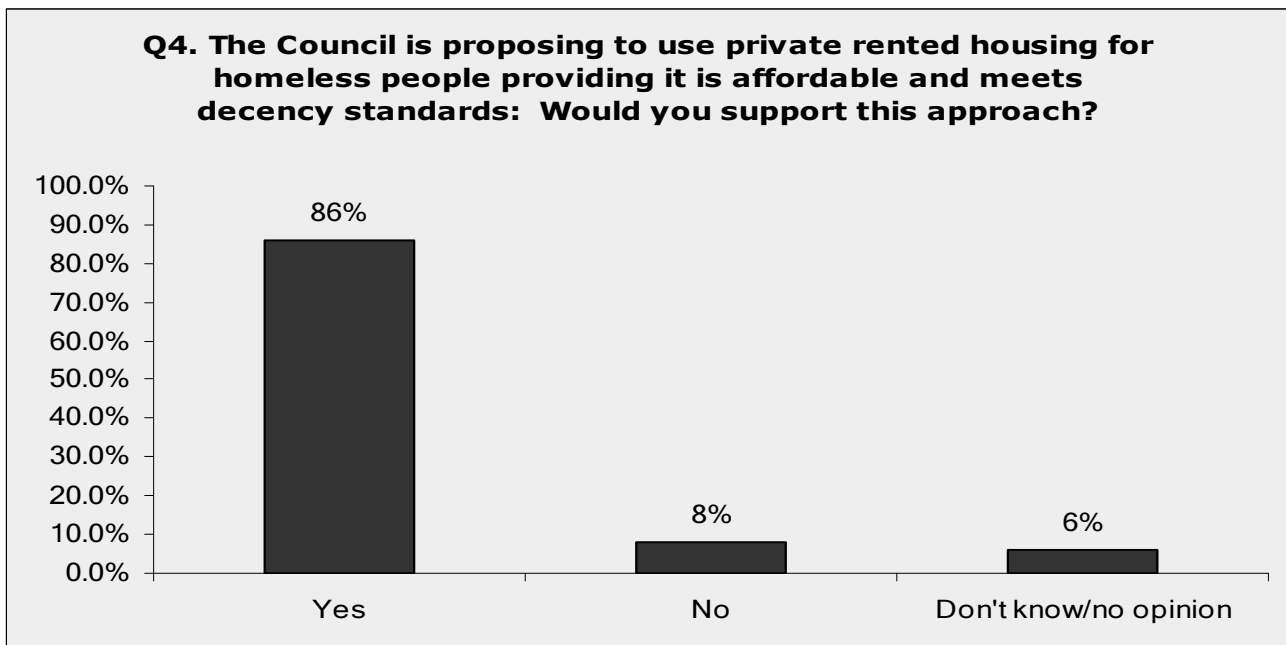


The majority of respondents (88%) agreed that landlords should be more pro-active in helping those tenants who are living in over-crowded conditions. 10% did not agree that the Council should be pro-active and 2% did not express an opinion.

Our response:

- The majority of respondents agreed that the Council should help people to find properties more in keeping with their needs and ability to pay and also agreed that advice and support should be voluntary and that people should not be forced to move.
- In addition, the majority of respondents agreed that landlords should be more pro-active in helping those tenants who are living in over-crowded conditions.

Homelessness



86% of the respondents agreed that the Council should be using accommodation in the private rented sector for homeless people providing the property is affordable and meets decency standards. 8% did not agree with using accommodation in the private rented sector and 6% did not have an opinion.

Respondents were asked to give further detail to the answers given in relation to Homelessness. The comments made are detailed below:

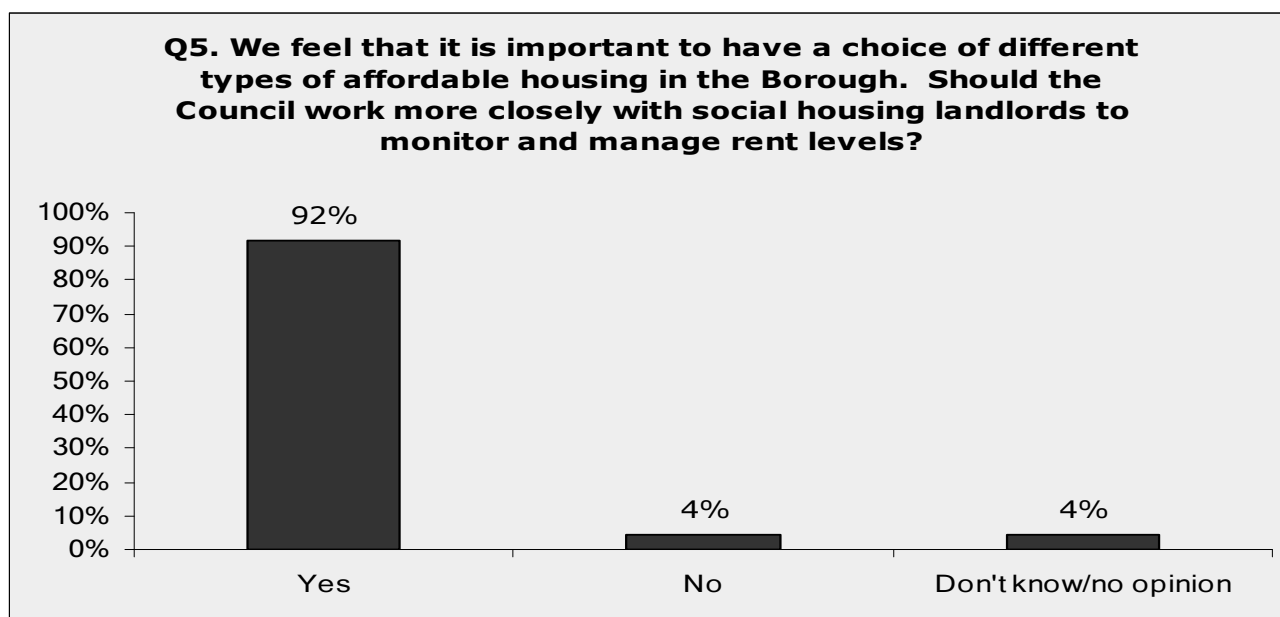
If they have a drug or alcohol problem because they are more likely to cause havoc in the property.
If people are older and have learning disabilities, mental health issues, drug or alcohol problems they should stay with the Council as they are vulnerable.
Council house rents are reasonably priced, whereas private accommodation is not regulated in the same way.
If you are homeless, any placement should be welcome.

Depends on the reason as to why they are homeless.
No, if genuinely homeless there are alternatives and the probation period should be carefully monitored.
Try living in private rented accommodation and you would not need to ask this question, regular income for the landlord with little or no checks undertaken by the Council.
The Council should be supported by other groups that also assist the homeless.
Private rents should be more in line with Council and Housing Associations.
Possibly older people / disabled applicants. The facilities required to meet their needs may not be available/readily accessible in the private sector.
Yes if they are unable to pay rent due to unemployment etc, private rented properties are considerably more expensive to rent.
No as there are many people who have families who have waited on the Council list for a long time and do not even get updated with properties first.
Not sure. The homeless people will have to be trustworthy if you are proposing to move homeless people into decent, private areas where people have their own houses.
Affordability and tenancy sustainment is important
If homeless by trashing previous council houses or bad rowdy or proven drug dealers then should be barred from any form of social housing

Our response:

- Use of the private sector for homeless applicants is an appropriate option, providing that there are strict checks to ensure the welfare of customers housed in this tenure.

Affordable rent conversions



92% of the respondents felt that the Council should be working more closely with social housing landlords to monitor and manage rent levels to ensure there is a choice of different types of affordable housing in the Borough. 4% did not agree that the Council should be monitoring and 4% did not know.

Respondents were asked to give further detail to the answers given in relation to affordable rent conversions. The comments made are detailed below:

The landlords are making money, yet when someone loses their job they get no help with mortgages at all, only Council Tax.
Private Landlords charge well over the odds for rent.
All the same types of properties in an area should be around the same rents as Council properties.
Rent, gas, electric and food prices are all rising and the wages stay the same so it is hard to pay for everything.
Private landlords are in the business to make money and don't always have the understanding of issues people face so are not always supportive to tenants, they need further regulations.
Council tenants are those who cannot afford mortgages, so they must never be in a situation where they are not protected from rent increases at a landlord's whim.
Private landlords let their properties for what the property is worth.
The Government use to have a system called 'fair rent system' so landlords could not over charge.
Re-introduce fair rent scheme.
Social housing landlords are dearer than the Council.
I feel people should live to their needs so tenants need to be matched to their housing needs.
Choice mainly- some people may be happier in alternative accommodation as opposed to being on an estate etc.
Different people have different circumstances.
Some rents are too high for people on a fixed income.
With over £8000 in debt, trying to keep my family together in private housing the Council still consider I have no need for accommodation and I remain in band 6 for 2-3years, if I leave my partner and children they would probably be housed, what is the councils definition of "hardship" mentioned in the proposed document?
So that tenants are all classed as equal and treated fairly with the Council and the landlords.
Without managing rent levels more people could be priced out of the housing market.
To keep costs down as much as possible so everyone can afford some type of housing.
If there are more houses to choose from then people would accept them, and move in. Therefore, the numbers for people needing housing will decrease with time.
If the rents are too high, then people are not going to be able to afford it.
Its common sense; if other property rents were in line with the Council's then people could afford to rent those, and it would put less of a strain on the Council's resources.
Providing its not Government led and a back door method of moving people who have lived in their property for many years, the answer is more affordable housing being built by a Government committed to the needs of ordinary people and not budgets, but that will take a change of Government I'm afraid and councils prepared to put tenants first and not budgets, but yes you can only work with the money allocated I know.

The Council however needs to appreciate that developing providers are tied contractually with the HCA to deliver a percentage of conversions and in our case does not have much flexibility in their application as many markets are depressed and do not lend themselves to conversion.

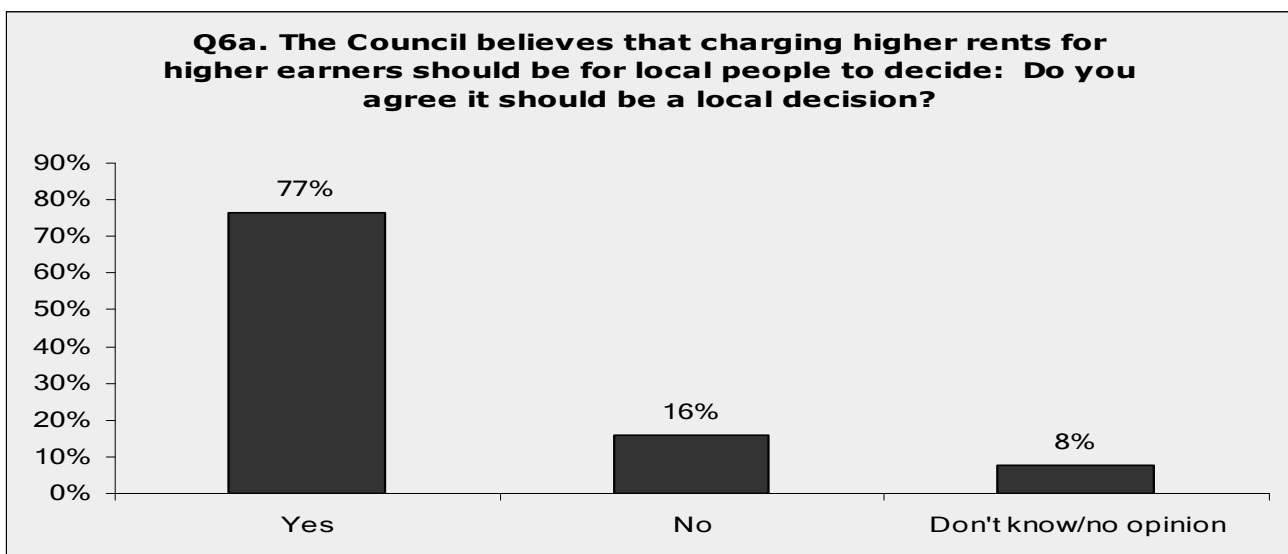
Many different challenges on Registered Providers in terms of managing the rent levels in line with their business plans and to restrict it could impact negatively on considerations to develop in Bury.

Many people are struggling and my rent, for example is over £60.00 for a one bedroom, upper floor flat with a small, communal yard and no garden. I think that it is expensive when some one bedroom properties are £50.00+ with gardens. I have read that thousands of people are settling in this country each year (immigration and emigration, Wikipedia) and that 54% of new births are of foreign people that have settled in this country. Many people who were born in this country are struggling to have what is rightfully theirs because that many people are settling in this country.

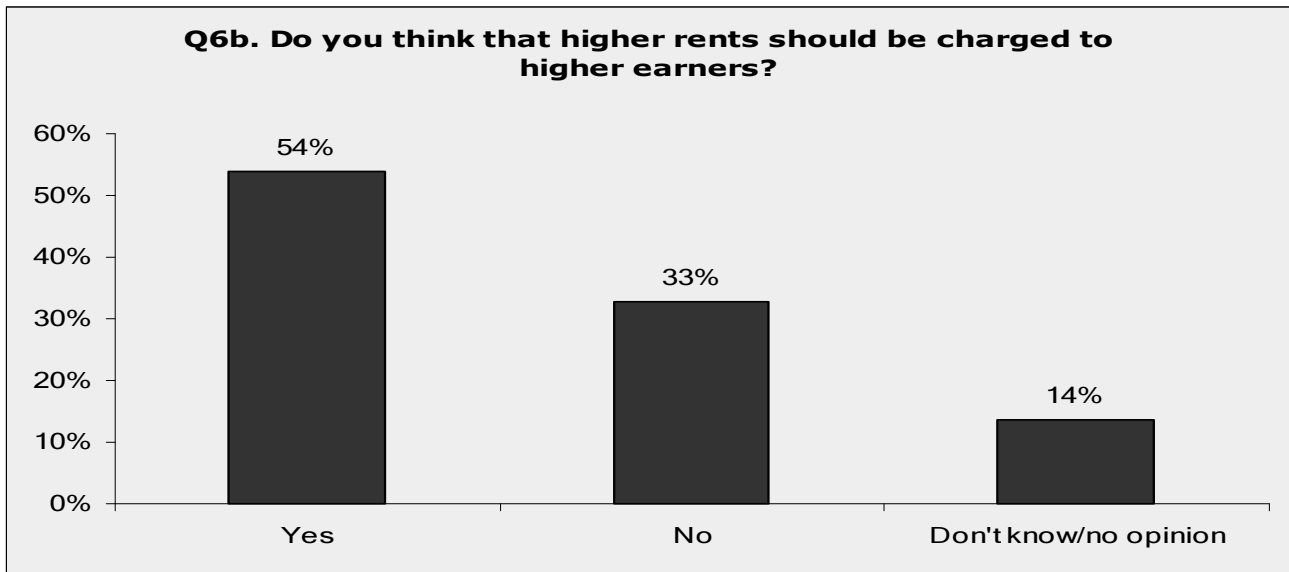
Our response:

- It is important to preserve the number of social rented properties in the Borough and minimise the number of conversions to affordable rent, thus providing a mixed choice of tenures to customers.

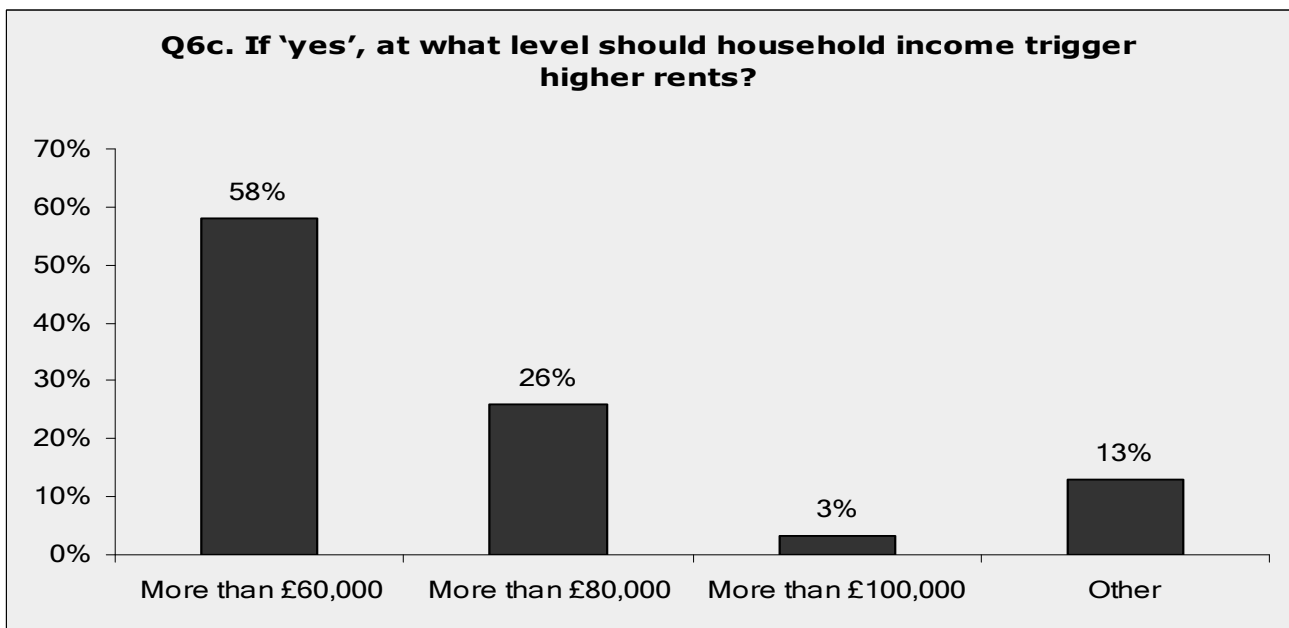
Rents for higher income earners



77% of the respondents agreed that the option to charge higher rents for higher earners should be a local decision, 16% did not agree and 8% did not know.



54% of the respondents agreed that higher rents should be charges for higher earners, whereas 33% did not agree and 14% did not express an opinion.



Those respondents that agreed higher rents should be charged to higher earners where asked what level should household income trigger higher rents. The majority of respondents (58%) said more than £60,000; 26% said more than £80,000; 3% said more than £100,000 and 13% said other.

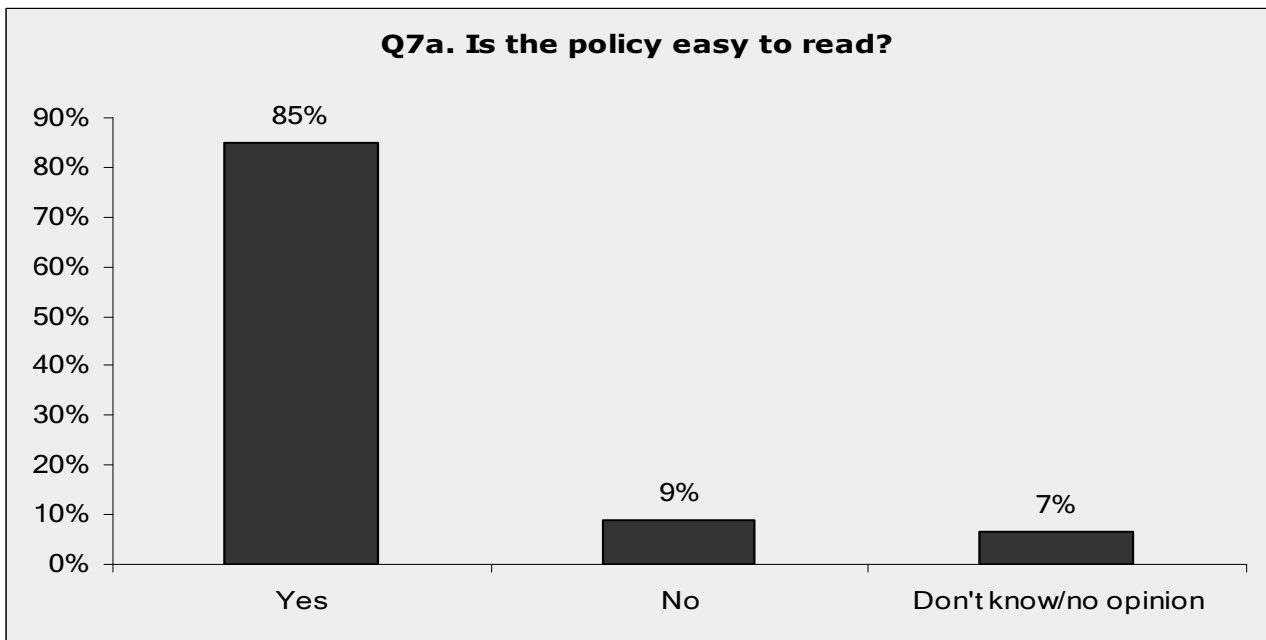
Respondents were asked to give further detail to the answers given in relation to rents for higher income earners. The comments made are detailed below:

If you are earn over £60,000 you should be able to buy your own house.
These houses are for low earners not for the rich who can afford their own houses. They prefer to get repairs done free by the Council.
Areas need a balance of low and high earners but usually higher earners in Council accommodation. Do not think local areas should be advised of what people earn as could cause friction on a private matter. The Council should decide who pays higher rent not the public. Equilibrium on estates needs maintaining.
There are many Council tenants who can barely afford their rent- they may be in low paid jobs and not be able to claim benefits, or they may be unable to find work at all.
People who earn a lot of money are more likely to move out of Council accommodation and buy. It creates a two tier system if people who earn more than charged more for Council property.
It could create resentment by those people who are better off.
Higher earners should buy.
They may lose their jobs or may only be on agency work or temporary work and may not be able to afford to live in that property.
I think the 'rent' whatever it is should be set at a fair level and the financial situation of a tenant should not be an issue. If it is, then do not let to high income tenants, let them go private.
They should buy a house.
Increased income should enable greater flexibility for future expansion.
I feel that people who are earning £1,000 plus a week should be able to cover the rent.
Very few people with high income in Council Housing.
At higher household income people should not need social housing at all, a re-assessment every 10 years could free up council housing for those who need it, but just because somebody has a decent job and worked hard you can not charge a different rent from the house next door.
More hassle than its worth.
Because people who earn more can afford to pay more, common sense really.
As they have the money to do so.
I think this because if they are earning that much money they should be able to support themselves and also their family therefore they should be able to keep on top of their rent.
Households with this level of income should not be reliant on council housing.
Charging the poorer less would cause them not to make an effort to earn.
People earning more than £30,000 can afford to rent privately or buy a property and should not even be living in social housing; therefore charge them a rent comparable with the private sector.
In majority of cases, households with this level of income could access alternative housing options. However, in the interest of sustained balanced communities, they should not be excluded from accessing the accommodation but this is a subsidised limited public resource so the subsidy should be reduced for the higher earners through higher rents.

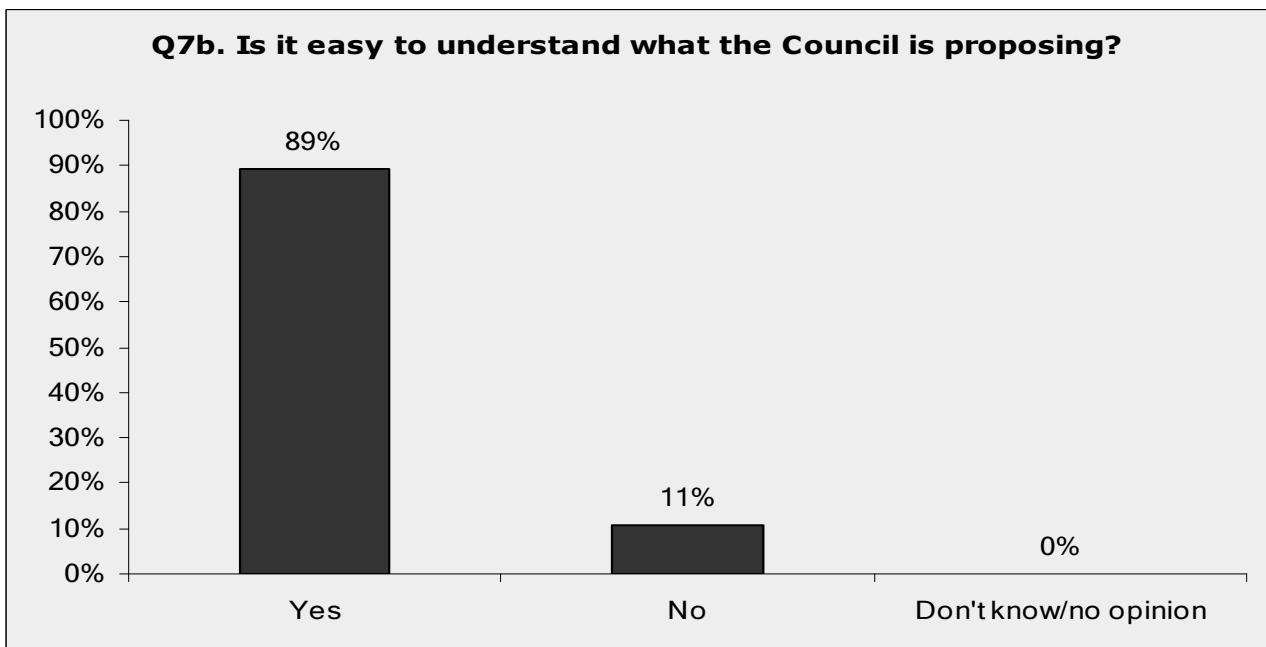
Our response:

- Any decision to link rent charged to income of the household should be determined locally. However, most respondents did not believe that there were actually many households with higher levels of income continuing to live in Council housing.

Format of the policy



85% of the respondents felt that Bury's draft Strategic Tenancy Policy was easy to read (85%). 9% did not think it was easy to read and 7% had no opinion.



89% of the respondents felt the draft policy was easy to understand in terms of what the Council was proposing and 11% did not agree.

Our response:

- The majority felt the draft Strategic Tenancy Policy was easy to read and they found the content easy to understand in terms of what the Council was proposing.

Respondents were asked for any additional comments to support the answers or additional points raised. These comments are listed below:

We feel that one person living in 3 bed family home, is depriving a family stuck in private homes that they cannot afford. The ones in under occupied properties should be given one bed flat depending on age as most of the tax payers who pay for those on benefits should have their living arrangements met to suit their needs would reduce benefit bill and the extra money to provide adaptations.

The process at this moment in time I find somewhat unfair as I have had to fight to get my disability taken into consideration despite being on DLA, and having a blue badge. Having to constantly go into Housing Options at Bury to find out what is happening. I have been on the list for 3 years to find people that live outside the Borough seem to get priority to people who live in Bury.

People should feel secure in rented property or otherwise they will not feel encouraged to improve and maintain the property and contribute to their community.

People in the past have always looked towards Council housing as a secure home for as long as they wanted it. A secure tenancy makes people feel more like maintaining and improving their property, their home is something they take pride in.

Homes provided for the elderly should remain for the elderly, so that care in the home could carry on as it has done in the past. Do not mix young tenants with older tenants in flats.

I feel we should stop paying for Bury Football Club as main sponsors as people who work for the Council have had 3 years freeze and are losing their jobs.

If you are made homeless due to being unable to pay private landlords your document implies that you have made yourself intentionally homeless and therefore will be given no assistance.

I feel that people should be able to try and help as much as possible and not just depend solely on the Council with certain things all the time.

Would prefer this in plain English.

My own opinion is that the allocation rules need to be looked into as I know of many people who are in great need of better housing than they are living in. There are also those who get preferential decisions.

I did not understand the question about voluntary advice. Single peoples' rents are high compared to family's rents. Lots of people are settling in this country, native people are going without what is theirs.

I think people are forgetting the whole purpose of social housing; it should be for people in need. Regular assessments should be made to make sure people are still in need, which the property is still suitable for their needs and crucially, those they are looking after that property (not rewarded with new doors because they got kicked in). The amount of money the council spends every year on repairs due to negligence must be

enough to build a few new properties. I would like to see the council reward tenants that look after their property or penalise those that do not.

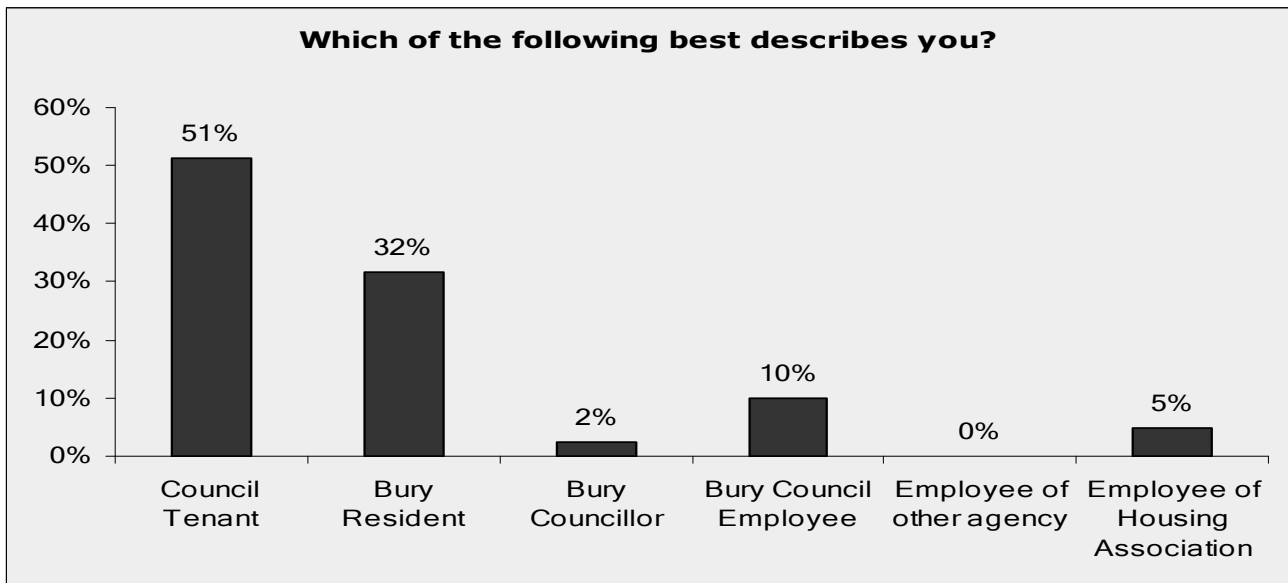
Said enough do not make the old and infirm pay for an incompetent Government.

Please note that Your Housing Group is currently reviewing its tenancy strategy and consulting with its board members and residents. As a result at this point in time it has not established a view upon future use of flexible tenancies – hence we were unable to provide responses to a number of questions. At present all tenancies being offered are lifetime. It has however adopted the principles that flexible tenancies would not be offered for vulnerable or older people.

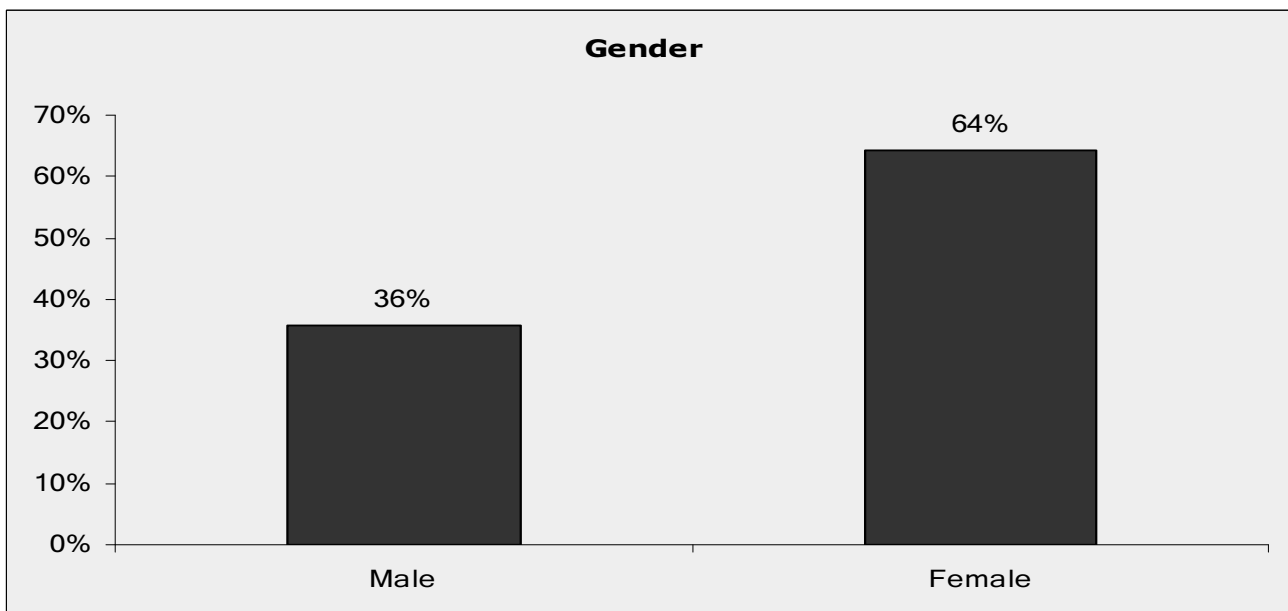
In relation to question 11 about landlords assisting with overcrowding - the answer put was no because of the word 'more'. As a registered provider we are already committed to working with the local authority to tackle housing need through the nominations agreement. We look to send through larger properties for nominations to assist with re-housing larger families and ease overcrowding.

DEMOGRAPHICS

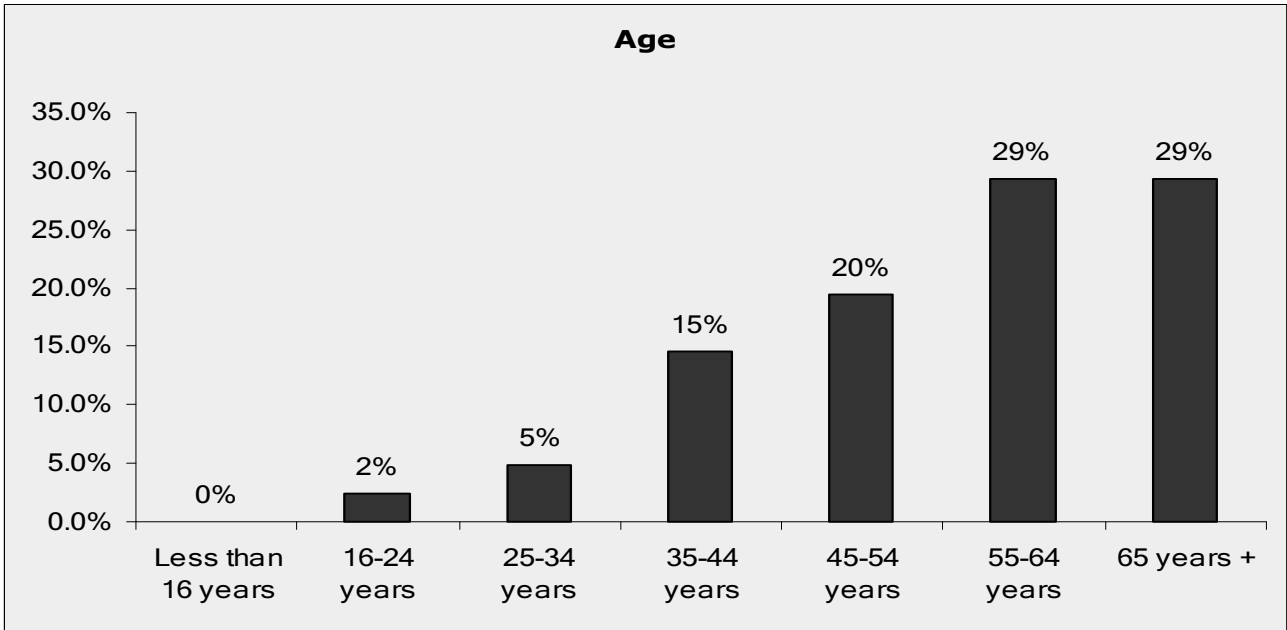
This sector of the analysis details the demographic breakdown of the respondents to the on-line survey.



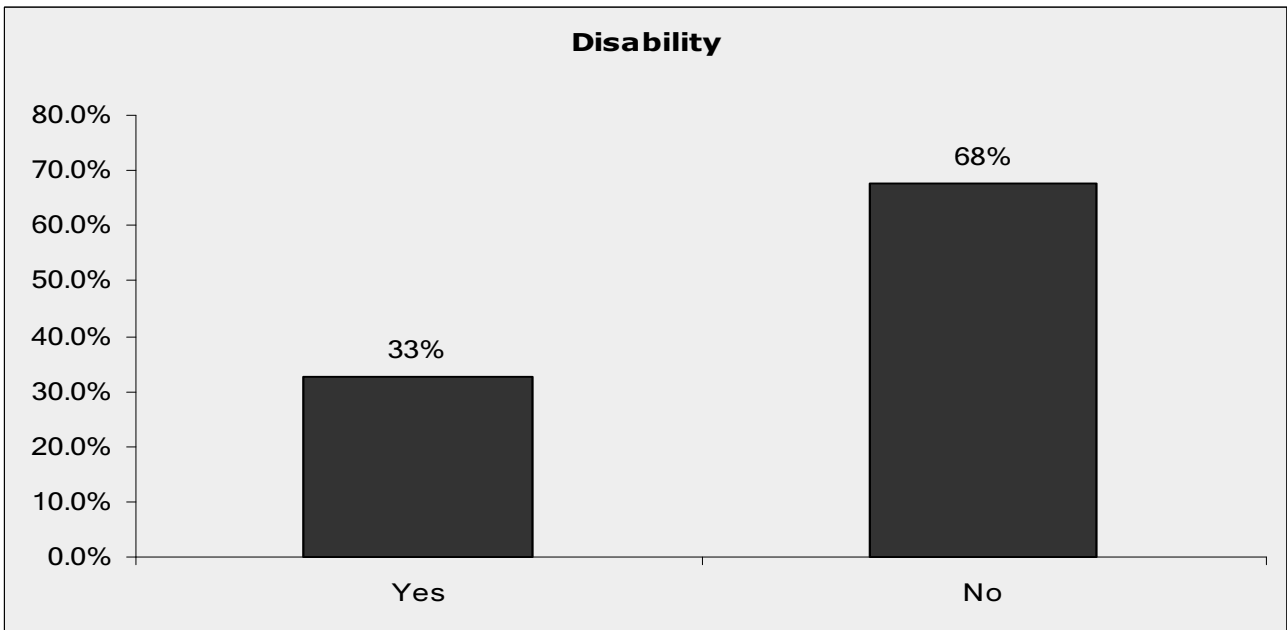
51% of the respondents said they were a Council Tenant, 32% said they were a Bury resident, 2% said they were a Bury Councillor, 10% said they were a Bury Council employee and 5% were employees of a housing association.



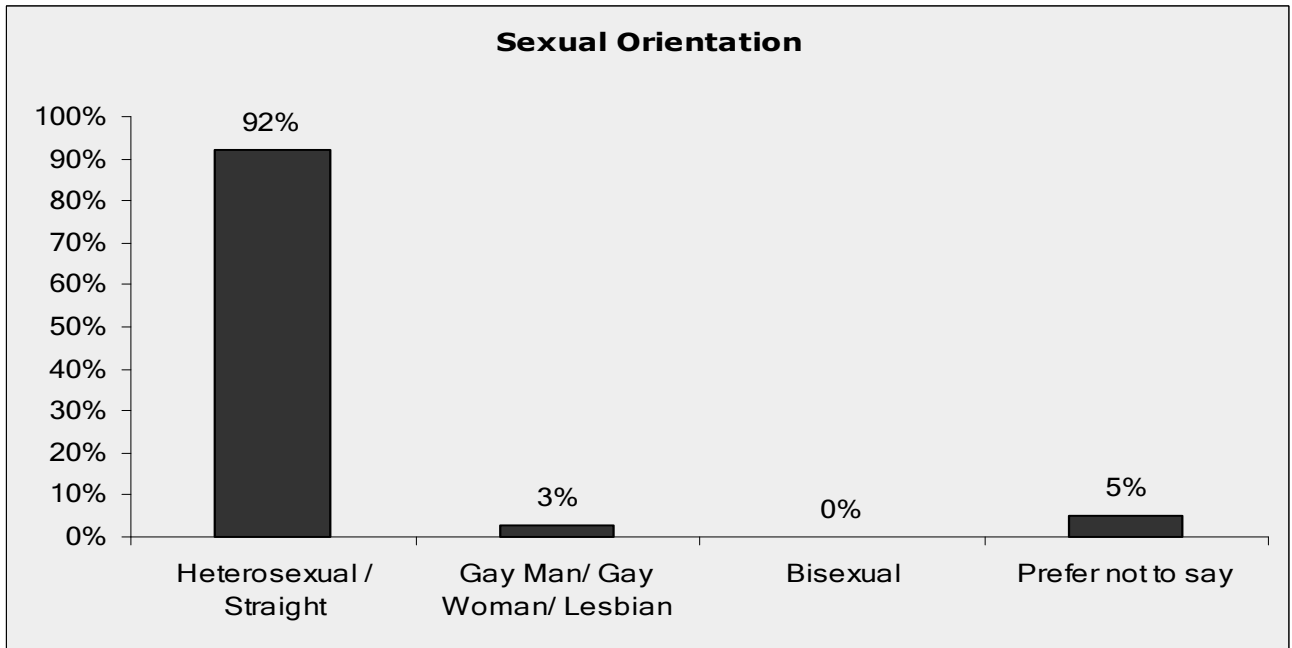
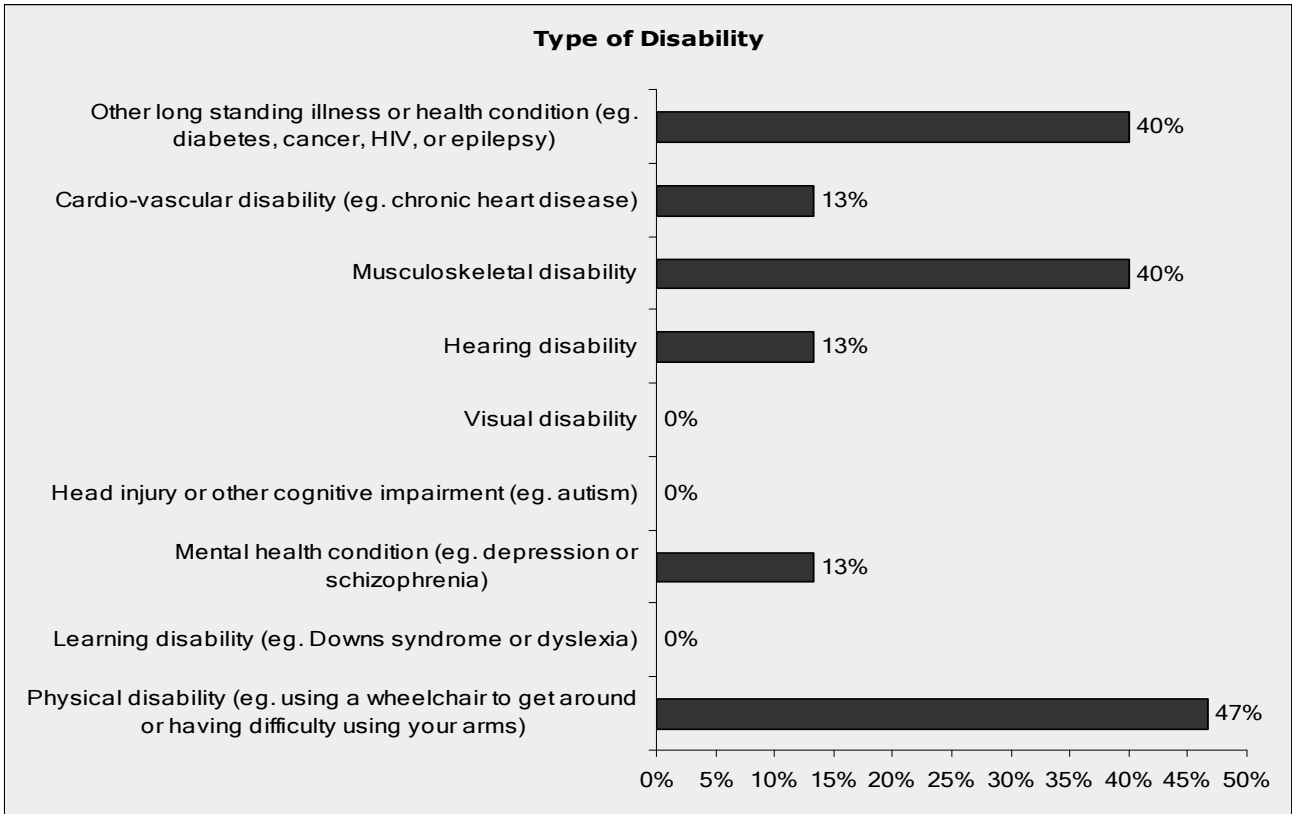
The majority of respondents were female (64%), 36% were male.



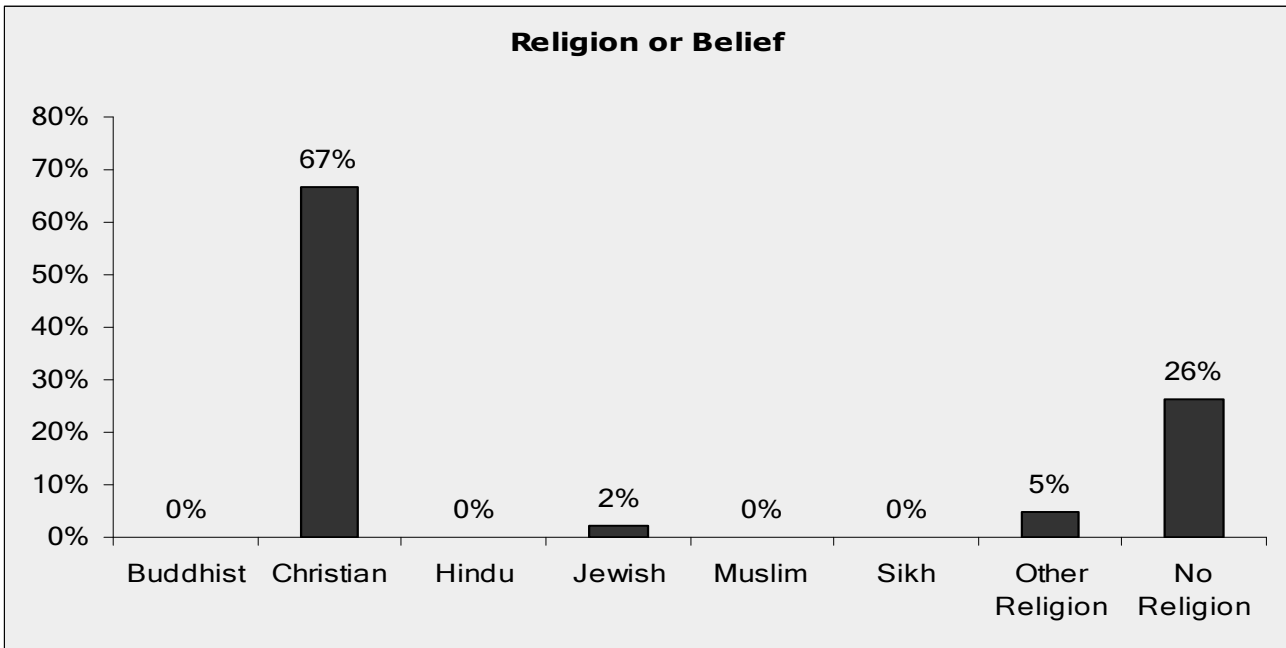
The majority of the respondents were aged 55 and over (58%).



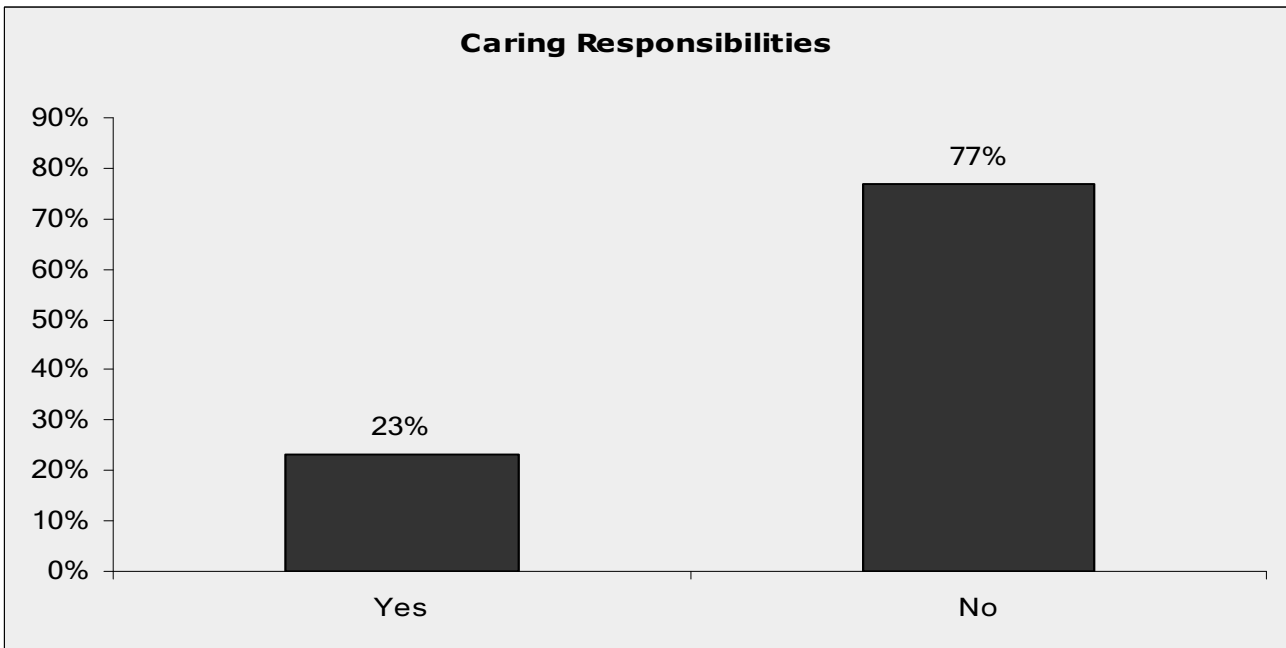
33% of the respondents said they had a disability. The next graph details the types of disabilities identified, with the majority stating a physical disability (47%), a long standing illness (40%) or a musculoskeletal disability (40%).



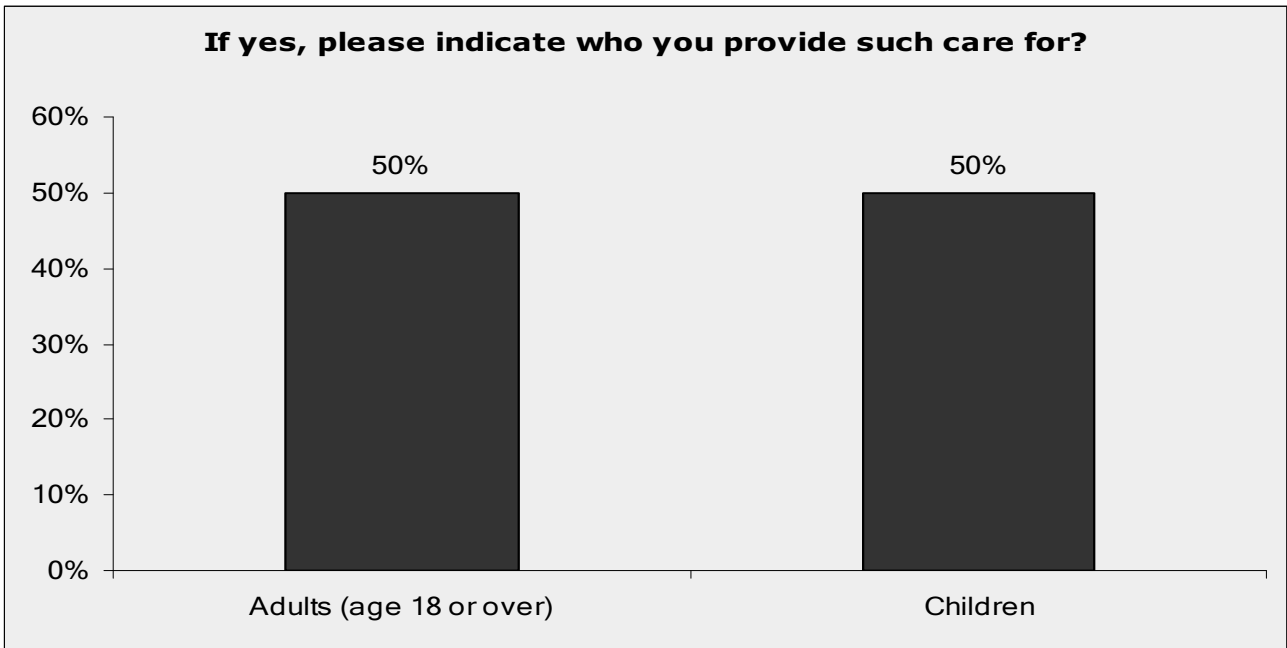
The majority of respondents said they were heterosexual (92%), 3% were gay and 5% preferred not to say.



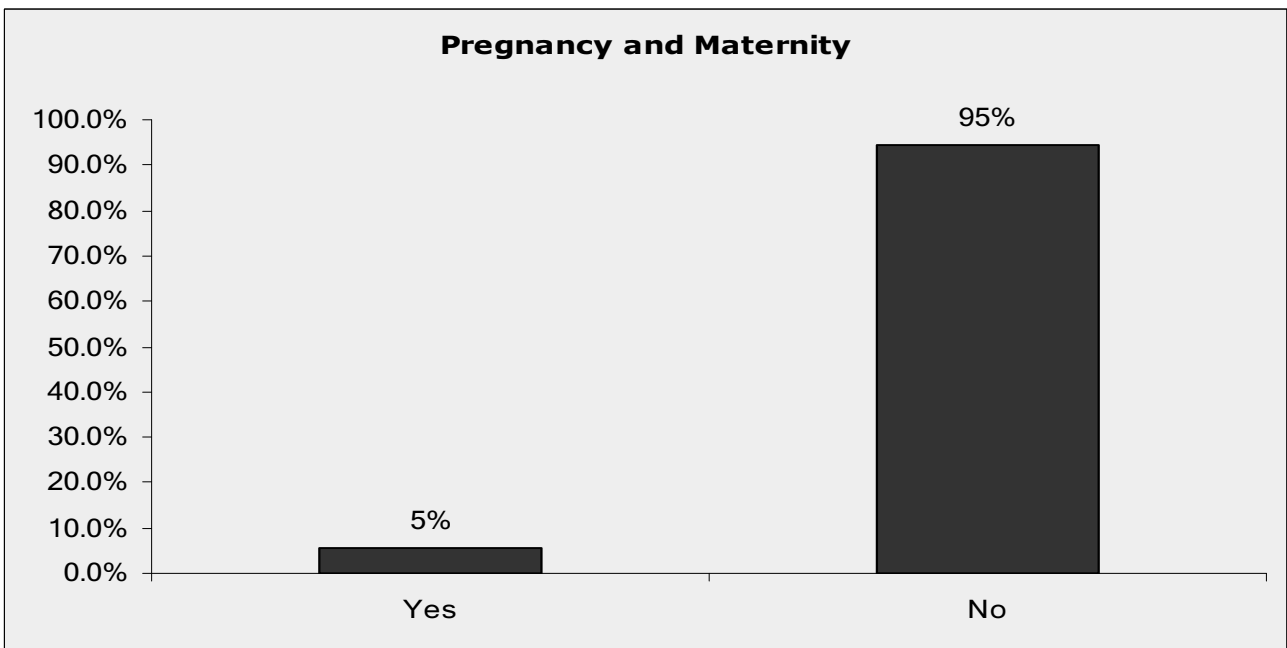
67% of the respondents said they were Christian. 2% were Jewish, 5% stated another religion and 26% did not specify a religion.



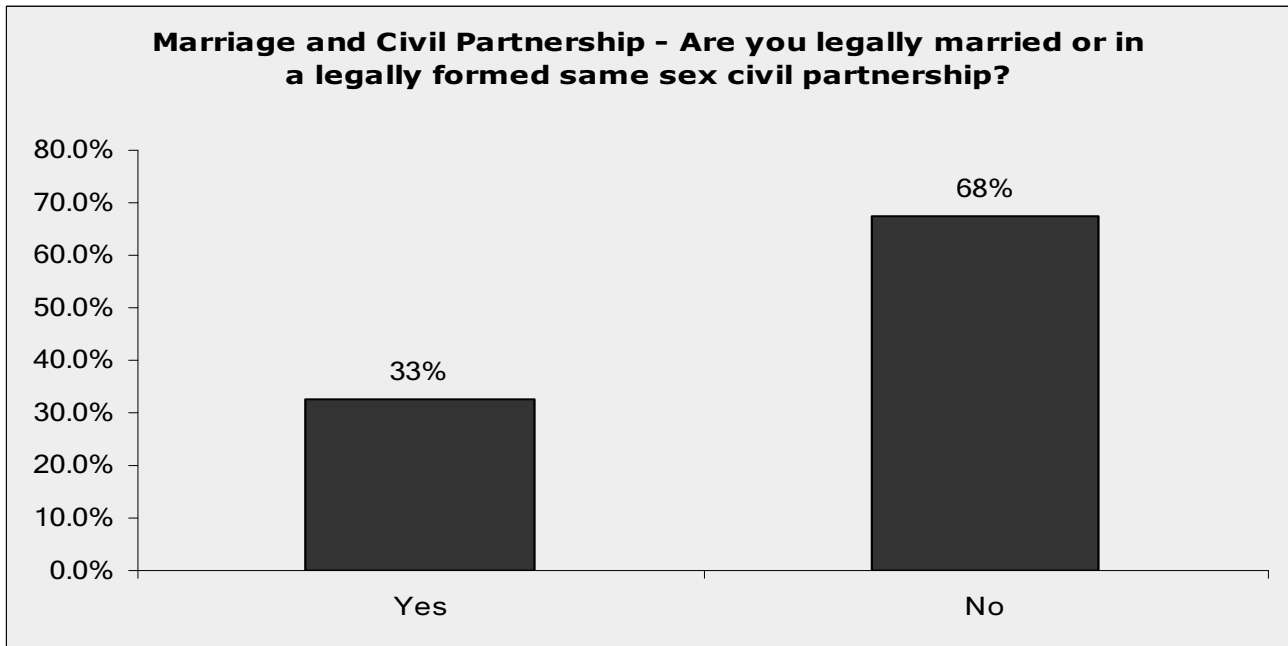
23% of the respondent identified a caring responsibility. 77% did not state they had a caring responsibility.



Those that identified a caring responsibility were asked to indicate who they provide care for. Half of the respondents said adults and the other half said children.



5% of the respondents said they were pregnant or on maternity leave.



33% of the respondents said they were married or in a legally formed same sex civil partnership.

Our response:

- The majority of respondents were Council Tenants or Bury residents. Only a small percentage were employed by Bury Council or a housing association, which was surprising as the policy will influence how housing associations work in the future.
- There were more females that replied than males, and the majority stated Christianity as their religion or belief.
- There was a good range of age groups that responded to the questionnaire from 35 years old and above. Only a small percentage were aged 35 and under.
- A third of respondents identified a disability with the majority stating a physical disability.