

Summary report on the consultation of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy September 2022

Introduction & aims

This consultation was undertaken to help Epsom & Ewell Borough Council develop a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in order shape how homelessness services will be delivered over the period 2022 to 2027.

The aim of the consultation was to:

- Comply with statutory and legal requirement as set out in the Homelessness Act 2002 (Part 3, Section 8) which requires that before adopting or modifying a homelessness strategy the authority should consult with public or local authorities, voluntary organisations or other persons as they consider appropriate.
- Seek views on the strategy as a whole and whether: -
 - The homelessness review identified the key issues
 - The strategic vision and 6 key objectives were the right ones
 - The Action Plan is focused on the right actions and activities.
- Collect views and comments that could be used to help refine the strategy and action plan.
- Raise the profile of homelessness and rough sleeping issues in the borough and open ongoing engagement with stakeholders and service users.

Methodology

The Council carried out six weeks consultation between 12 July and 23 August 2022 with a range of stakeholders, service users, staff and residents.

These included:-

Homeless applicants
Residents
Staff
Housing Association partners including Rosebery, Transform, Mount Green & PA
Epsom CAB
Epsom Foodbank
Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network
Adult Social Care, Children Services, Mental Health Service
Surrey Adults Matter/Bridge the Gap
Drug & Alcohol Services
Hospital Discharge Co-ordinator
Probation Service
North Surrey Domestic Abuse Service
DWP/Job Centre +

Surrey Life Long Learning Partnership/ETHOS
East Surrey Outreach Service
Local Faith groups
Various community & voluntary sector groups

The consultation took the form of an on-line questionnaire, focus groups and a Member's briefing.

The on-line questionnaire and accompanying strategy documents were emailed to the stakeholders listed above. In addition, 250 homeless applicants on the Housing Need Register were asked to participate. A paper copy was available on request.

The consultation was publicised on; the Council's website; Epsom & Ewell Homechoice; Members update and via social media and a press release.

Three focus groups were held; one with Housing Services staff on 10 July 2022; one with Rosebery Housing Association on 7 September 2022 and another with the community & voluntary sector on 8 September 2022. A Member's briefing will be held on 24 November 2022.

The on-line questionnaire asked participants for their views on the strategy as a whole and whether they thought: -

- The homelessness review identified the key issues
- The strategic vision and six key objectives are the right ones
- The Action Plan is focused on the right actions and activities, and explained the work being undertaken across Epsom & Ewell to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping.

The questionnaire asked a series of 11 questions. Participants were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed or disagreed or disagreed. There was also an opportunity for participants to provide additional information in free text questions.

Participants had the opportunity to read the accompanying strategy documents and a summary was given prior to each question.

The Consultation Response and Results

There was a total of 17 on-line responses to the consultation questionnaire. While this was lower than hoped for it is consistent with the level of responses from some other local councils on their strategy.

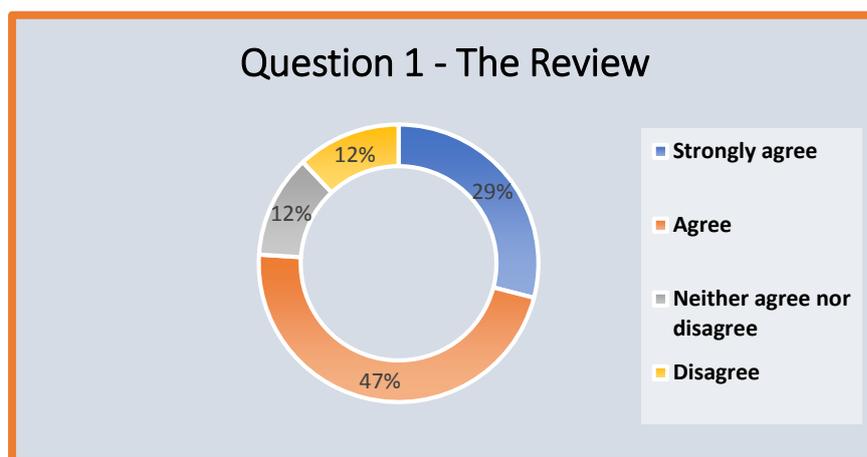
A summary of the on-line questionnaire responses to each question is outlined below. Percentages used in this report have been rounded and may not add up to exactly 100%.

The Homelessness Review

Question 1 - The Homelessness Review

Does the Homelessness Review, as a whole, reflect the issues and challenges within the borough of Epsom & Ewell in dealing with homelessness and rough sleeping?

76% of respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed that the Homelessness Review reflected the issues and challenges within the borough of Epsom & Ewell in dealing with homelessness and rough sleeping.



Our Strategic Vision

Question 2 - The Strategic Vision

Our strategic vision is to see: “The council and its partners working collaboratively to prevent homelessness, to proactively reduce and end rough sleeping, assist homeless households to find affordable housing solutions and ensure the right support is available to promote recovery and improve health and wellbeing.” To what extent do you agree with this vision?

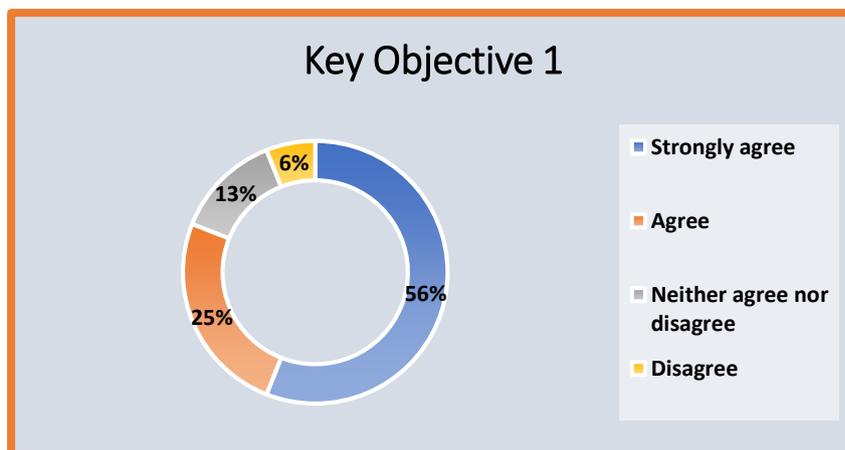
88% of respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed with the Council’s proposed strategic vision for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.



The Six Key Objectives

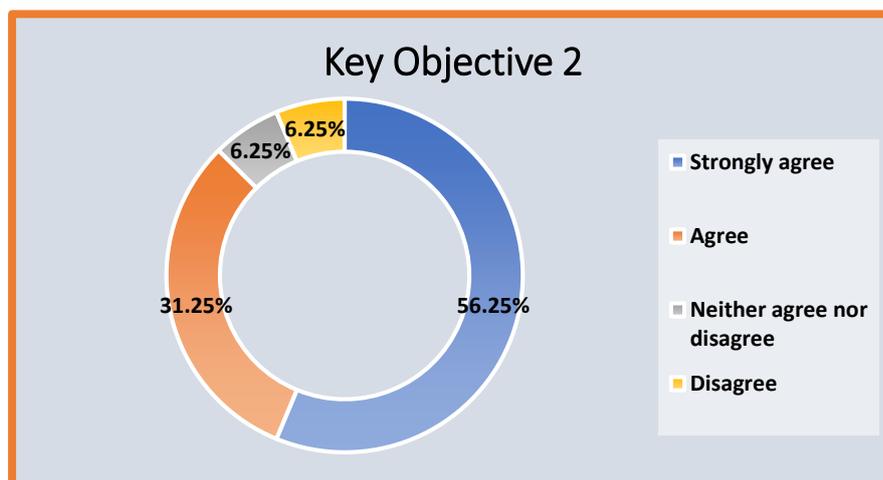
Question 4 - Key Objective 1 - The early identification, intervention & prevention of homelessness: To what extent do you agree with Key Objective 1?

81% of respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed with the early identification, intervention & prevention of homelessness being a key objective.



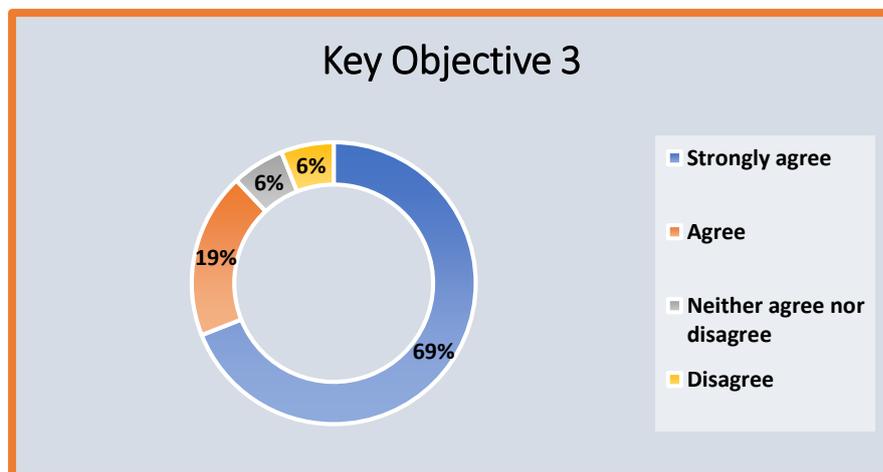
Question 5 - Key Objective 2 - Reduce Rough Sleeping: To what extent do you agree with Key Objective 2?

87.5% of respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed with the key objective of reducing rough sleeping.



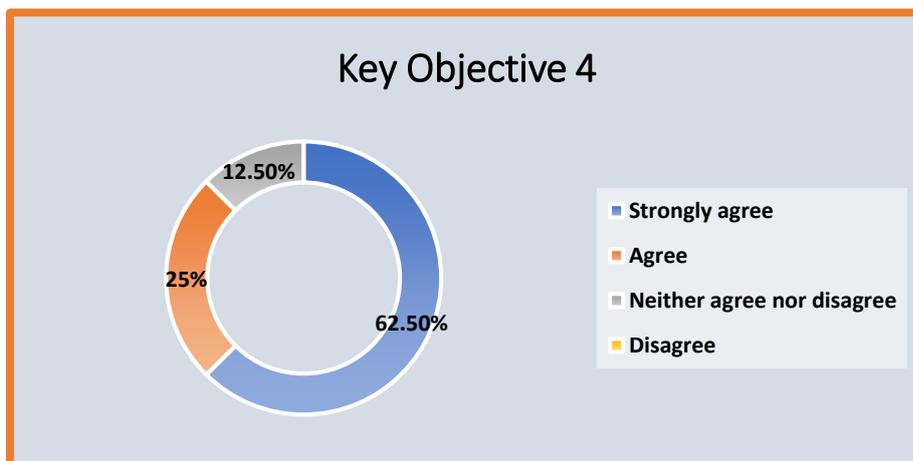
Question 6 - Key Objective 3 – Increase accommodation options within; Social Rented Housing; Private Rented Accommodation; Supported and move-on Accommodation and Temporary Accommodation within the borough: To what extent do you agree with Key Objective 3?

88% of respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed with this key objective.



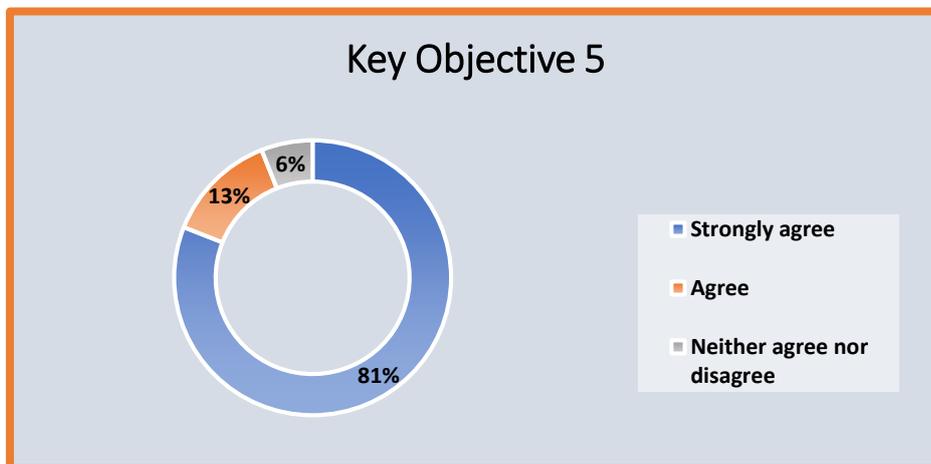
Question 7 - Key Objective 4 - Improve the Health & Wellbeing of homeless people: To what extent do you agree with Key Objective 4?

87.5% of respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed with the key objective of improving the health & wellbeing of homeless people.



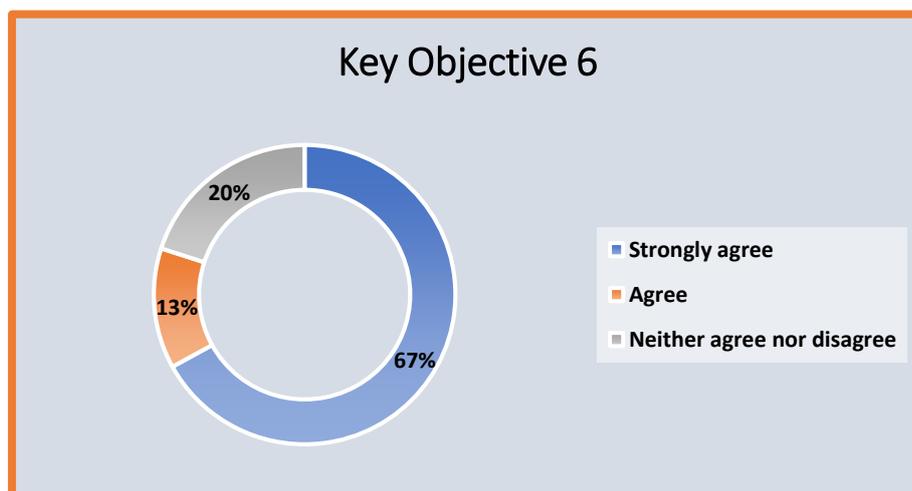
Question 8 - Key Objective 5 - Ensuring sufficient support is available for homeless people: To what extent do you agree with Key Objective 5?

94% of respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed with this key objective.



Question 9 - Key Objective 6 - Partnership working: To what extent do you agree with Key Objective 6?

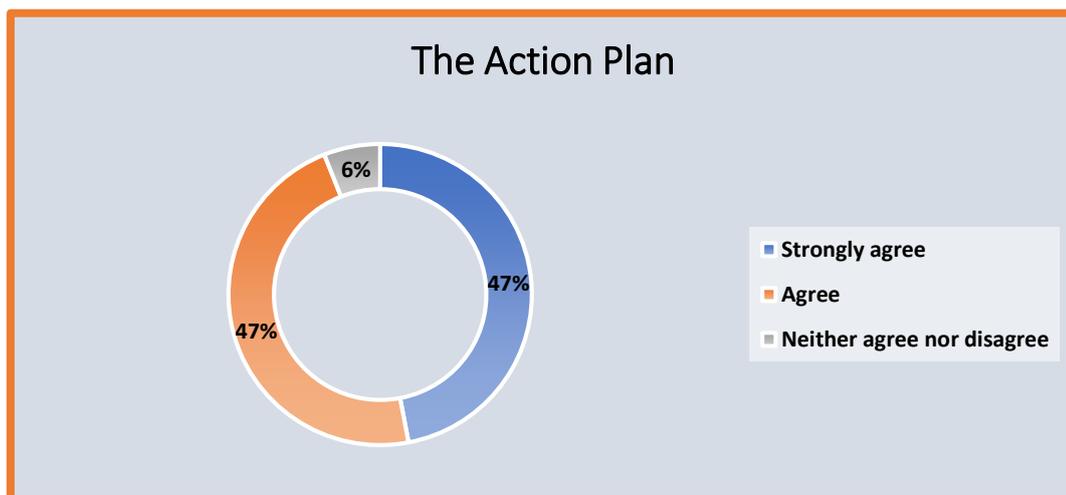
80% of respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed with the partnership working being a key objective.



The Action Plan

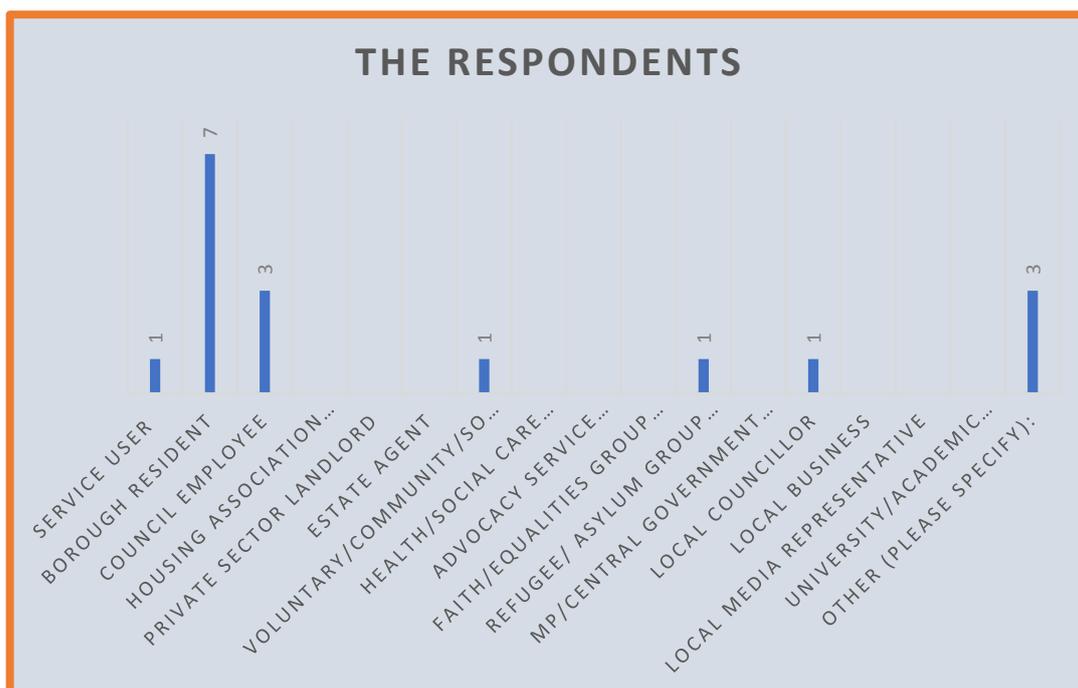
Question 10 - Does the Action plan as a whole explain the future planned work to be undertaken across the Borough to reduce and prevent homelessness?

94% of respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed that the Action Plan is focused on the right actions and activities, and explained the work being undertaken across Epsom & Ewell to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping.



Question 11 - Make up of respondents

The respondents were asked in what capacity they were undertaking the on-line questionnaire. The chart below outlines their makeup.



Free text questions

Overwhelmingly, the comments did not state alternative priorities/objectives, but rather provided more detail on issues they felt needed to be prioritised or emphasised within the strategy and action plan. The comments made were grouped together into a number of themes. A list of the themes raised is presented below along with the general comments:

Causes of Homelessness

- The main cause of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing, due to a chronic shortage of social housing and high private rents, leaving a large and growing number of local residents without any realistic housing options. While this is a national issue, this is particularly acute in this borough due to the relatively low proportion of social housing and the very high level of private rents. This situation is exacerbated by a social security system that does not provide adequate housing support to those on low incomes, particularly to those affected by the bedroom tax and the benefit cap, as well as the two-child limit.
- Tackle root causes of homelessness - such as drug/alcohol addiction and mental health issues.
- Low income, poverty and insecure employment contributes to homelessness.
- Affordability of accommodation & lack of supply.
- Homes for Ukraine, cost of living (notable in increase in referrals to Social Prescribing for housing) and lack of affordable housing in the borough.

Affordability of private rented sector

- There is not enough affordable private rent accommodation.
- There is a need to tackle the gap between LHA and private sector rents as Housing Benefit levels do not meet market rents and large shortfall.
- Offering more Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to cover the gap between market rents and the LHA.
- Lobbying for an increase in LHA rates.
- Private rented housing is too expensive and inaccessible for most people.
- Private rents should be capped.
- The Benefit Cap prevents many people being able to access private rented accommodation.
- Need to work more proactively with private landlords to increase the stock of genuinely affordable private rented accommodation for those on benefits.

- The Council should do more to make the private rented sector a realistic option for homeless households in the short-term, as well as expanding the supply of social rented accommodation in the medium- and long-term.

Supply Social Housing /Temporary Accommodation

- There is not enough social Housing for those in need and it takes too long for people to get house.
- The Council should play a more proactive role in matching under-occupying households who want to move to a smaller property with overcrowded families who want to move to a larger property.
- Need to develop more affordable housing/ housing association housing.
- Covert office to residential properties.
- Need for more and better-quality temporary accommodated that is located in the borough. This would especially help those with children, to maintain their support networks and continue to attend local schools.
- No family with children should be placed out-of-borough and away from their support networks for an extended and indefinite period of time.
- More supported accommodation that actually meets the needs of homeless people.

Support/Health & Wellbeing

- Keep homeless applicants better informed on the progress of their Homelessness and Housing Register applications.
- Households in temporary accommodation should have an allocated Housing Officer who meets with them regularly to review their housing situation.
- Need to have more personalise support as every family/person has different challenges.
- There is a lack of community support for homeless people with mental health issues.
- The need for adequate support services. Access to appropriate and timely drug, alcohol and mental health treatments.
- The Housing Services should treat homelessness people with kindness, compassion, respect & dignity. They should be listened to with empathy, especially when they first approach the housing department for support. Further staff training is needed to ensure that homeless people presenting to the Council's housing department are always treated with the respect and compassion they deserve.

- Address the health and wellbeing needs of homeless households. Increase the Wellbeing offer to all.
- Continue to support people into training & employment.
- The need for more education/awareness raising of homelessness issues and need to ensure information is readily available and well publicised

Resources

- Need for more staff resources to delivery early interventions to prevent homeless.
- More resources needed to delivery interventions at the earliest opportunity.
- Adequate resources need to be in place to ensure the action plan can be delivered. This is both finance and staff resource.
- More outreach services required.

Partnerships

- Partnership working with local charities to delivery services, including Data Sharing Agreements.
- Better coordination between statutory and voluntary services/charities to provide a joined-up approach.
- Landlord forums.
- Work with employers to provide accommodation
- Ask borough residents to be more involved
- Strongly support the aims of the homelessness strategy and would be happy to work with the council towards achieving these aims. One particular area where we can support the council is by involving people with lived experience of homelessness in the design and delivery of your services.

The Action Plan

- The strategy's actions plan needs to be delivered sooner/quicker - 5 years is too long.
- The objectives listed in the Action Plan need to be SMART, with specific and measurable targets and deadlines, so that progress towards these objectives can be monitored. In many cases, the current list of objectives is too vague to be an effective instrument for change (e.g. "explore opportunities for...", "investigate ways to..."). It should be possible to look back at the strategy in a few years' time and be able to make an objective assessment as to whether or to what extent the objectives in the Action Plan have been achieved.

Focus Group feedback

Three focus groups were held; one with Housing Services staff on 10 July 2022; one with Rosebery Housing Association on 7 September 2022 and another with the community & voluntary sector on 8 September 2022. A Member's briefing will be held on 24 November 2022.

The strategy and action plan were generally positively received. The focus group with Rosebery Housing Association gave the opportunity to look at common workstreams within the action plan so we could explore joint working to delivery these. The Voluntary and Community sector found the review data useful in understanding the pressures relating to homelessness in the borough.

Through the use of the Homelessness forum, we will continue to regularly engage with partners and service users during the 5-year life of the Strategy and Action plan.

How the consultation feedback has helped to shape the strategy:

The consultation responses have informed the strategy and action plan in the following areas:

The Action Plan has already identified the workstreams outlined below and we will look to prioritise and initiate these within year one.

- Investigate ways to assist and / or incentivise social housing tenants under occupying larger family homes to downsize
- Proactively work with households in temporary accommodation to identify and secure suitable alternative accommodation and ensure that each household has a move on plan. Investigate options of having a dedicated Housing Officer to support homelessness households once in temporary accommodation
- Explore a trauma-informed / motivational interviewing approach to the delivery of homelessness services.

Conclusion

The consultation generally received very positive responses, with the vision, objectives & action plan priorities very well received by the respondents.

All six of the key objectives received at least 80% support, which represents an extremely positive reaction.

The specific actions of each priority were also very well supported, with 94% positive response, which suggests the Council is correct in its approach to addressing the identified issues.

The questionnaires responses and suggestions from the consultation, as well as feedback from the focus groups, will be used to refine the strategy and action plan.

We thank all those who took the time to respond to the consultation.