

Council Plan 2020-23 Public Consultation Feedback Report

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Overview

Public consultation sought views from local residents, businesses and wider stakeholders about the draft council Plan 2020-2023 between 7th January 2020 and 7th February 2020.

The consultation comprised of an online survey, with paper copies and alternative accessible formats available on request, and was widely publicised through social media and communications with the public. Feedback was sought on the Plan as a whole, along with specific questions relating to the proposed themes and key actions, including suggestions for additional commitments the council should include.

This report describes the methodology and presents the findings of the Plan consultation, including quantitative data and analysis of survey responses received including free text comments.

This report will be considered by Cabinet and Full Council in making their decisions about the Council Plan.

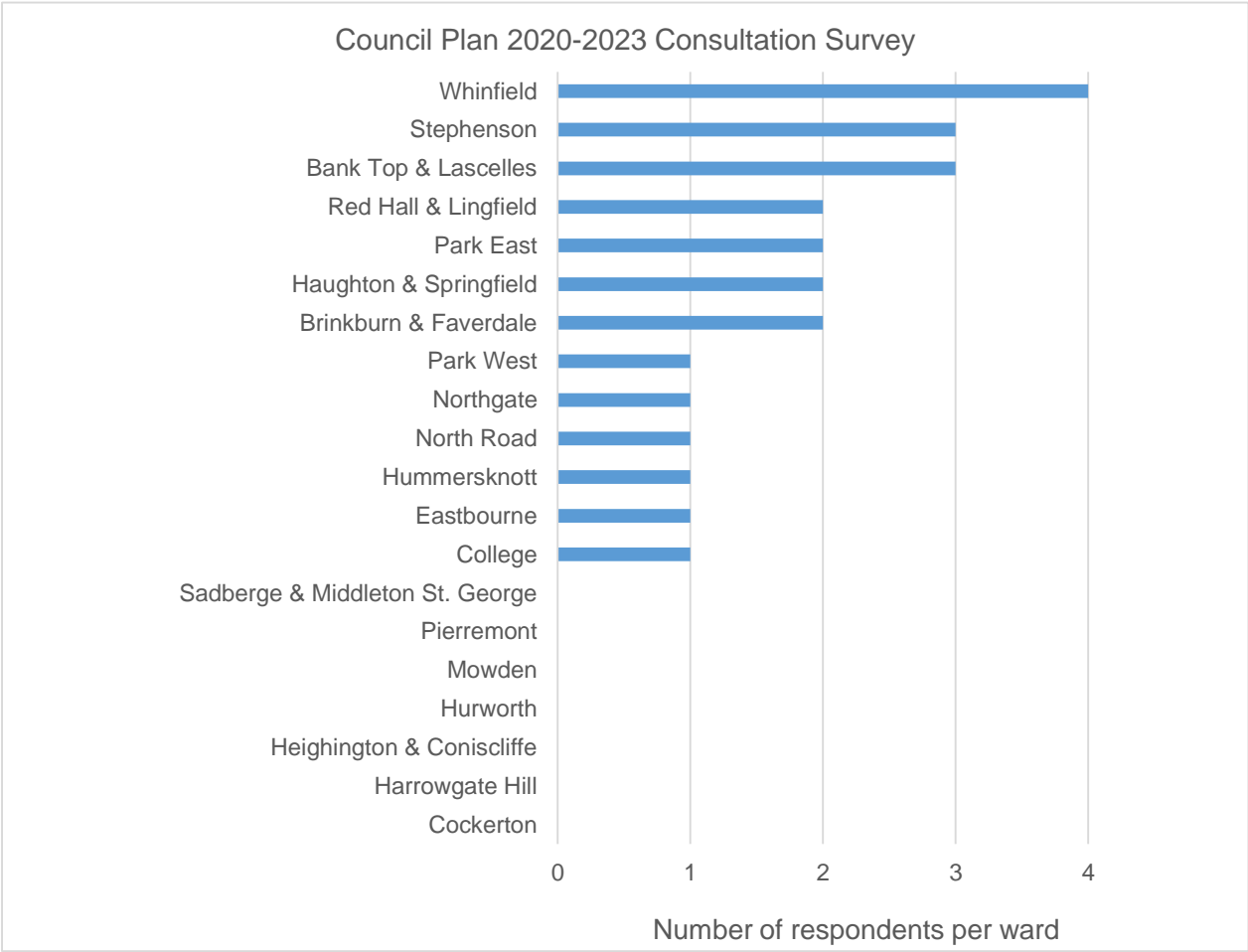
Key Findings

63 responses were received to the Council Plan survey, with 100% of respondents completing the survey online.

Characteristics of respondents

Geographic distribution

26 (41%) of survey respondents gave their postcode. Of these, at least one response was received from residents living in thirteen wards as shown in the below graph.



Protected Characteristics

32 (51%) respondents answered one or more of the equalities monitoring questions. The findings of this section should therefore be treated with caution as they only reflect the characteristics of just over half the total number of respondents.

Sex

Of the 32 (51%) respondents who gave their sex, 66% were female and 34% were male, suggesting females may have been overrepresented and males underrepresented in the survey responses.

Age

Of the 32 respondents (51%) who gave their age:

- 0 were aged under 18 years
- 2 (6%) were aged 18-24 years
- 4 (12%) were aged 25-34 years
- 7 (22%) were aged 35-44 years
- 11 (34%) were aged 45-59 years
- 8 (25%) were aged 60-75 years
- 0 were aged over 75 years

These findings suggest residents aged under 18s and over 75s may have been underrepresented in the survey responses. The proportion of survey responses from residents aged 35 to 75 was higher than these age groups' collective share of the Darlington population, suggesting this groups views may have been overrepresented. Responses from people aged 18-34 closely matched these age groups' proportion of the borough population.

Disability

Of the 32 (51%) respondents who answered this question, 1 (3%) considered themselves to have a disability. This is a smaller proportion than the proportion of Darlington residents who are estimated to have a disability (17%), suggesting residents with disabilities may have been underrepresented in survey responses.

Race

Of the 32 (51%) of respondents who answered this question, 31 (97%) identified themselves as White – UK, higher than the 94% of the borough population estimated to belong to this ethnic group suggesting this group may have been overrepresented in survey responses.

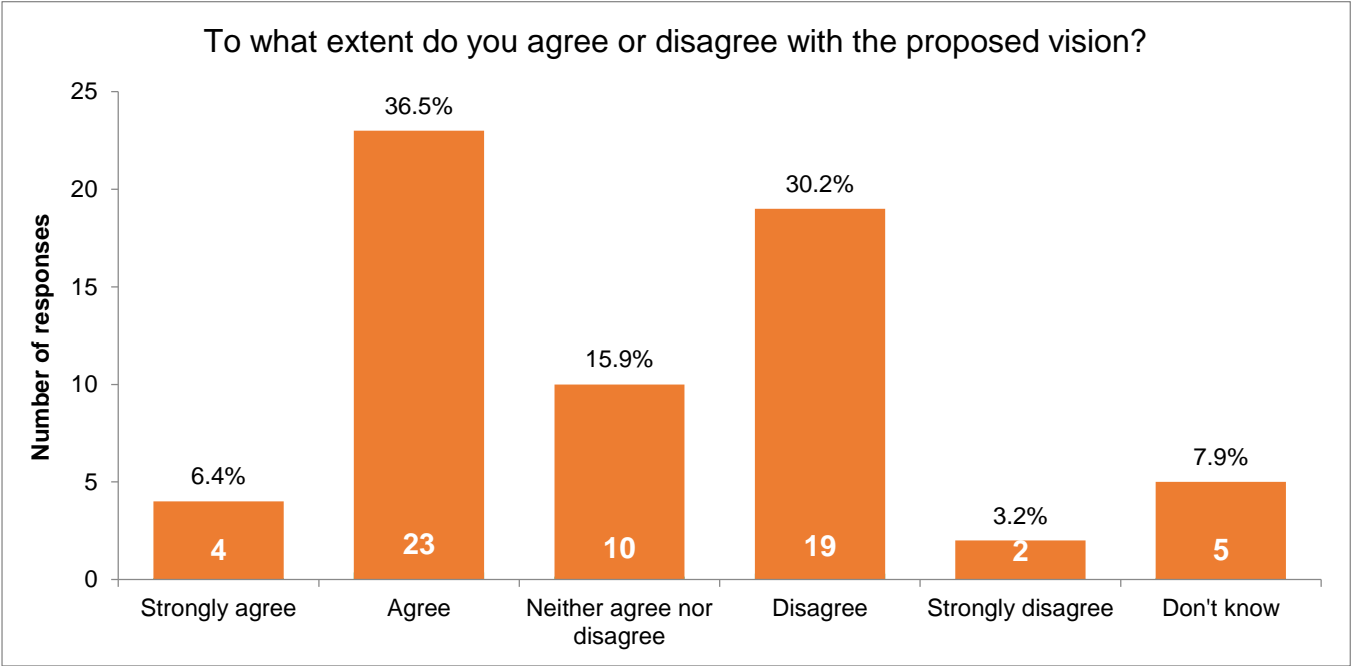
Vision

Survey respondents were asked to give their views on the draft vision outlined in the Plan:

“Darlington is a place where people want to live and businesses want to locate, where the economy continues to grow, where people are happy and proud of the Borough and where everyone has the opportunity to maximise their potential”.

Of the 63 people who responded to the Council Plan consultation:

- 27 (43%) respondents agreed with the proposed vision,
- 21 (33%) disagreed with the proposed vision,
- 10 (16%) of respondents neither agreed or disagreed with the proposed vision,
- 5 (8%) respondents didn't give a view



There were also 22 free text responses to this question (35% of respondents) which are categorised below¹:

Issues to include

There were 19 comments suggesting additions to the vision, including:

- protecting the environment (5)
- proportionate housebuilding (4)
- the quality of the public realm, including the town centre (3)
- better highways (2)
- more venues for children and young people (1)
- inclusion, support, equality and diversity, including acknowledging more vulnerable groups (1)
- residents' quality of life (1)
- local radio (1)
- supporting and improving communities (1)

Agreement

There were 3 comments in support of the proposed vision:

¹ The number of categorised comments is more than the number of free text responses because some responses included multiple points

- things feel positive (2)
- anything is better than nothing and ideas add up (1)

Disagreement

There were 4 comments against the proposed vision:

- not rooted in fact (1)
- vague (1)
- just the council trying to justify itself (1)
- rarely come to fruition (1)

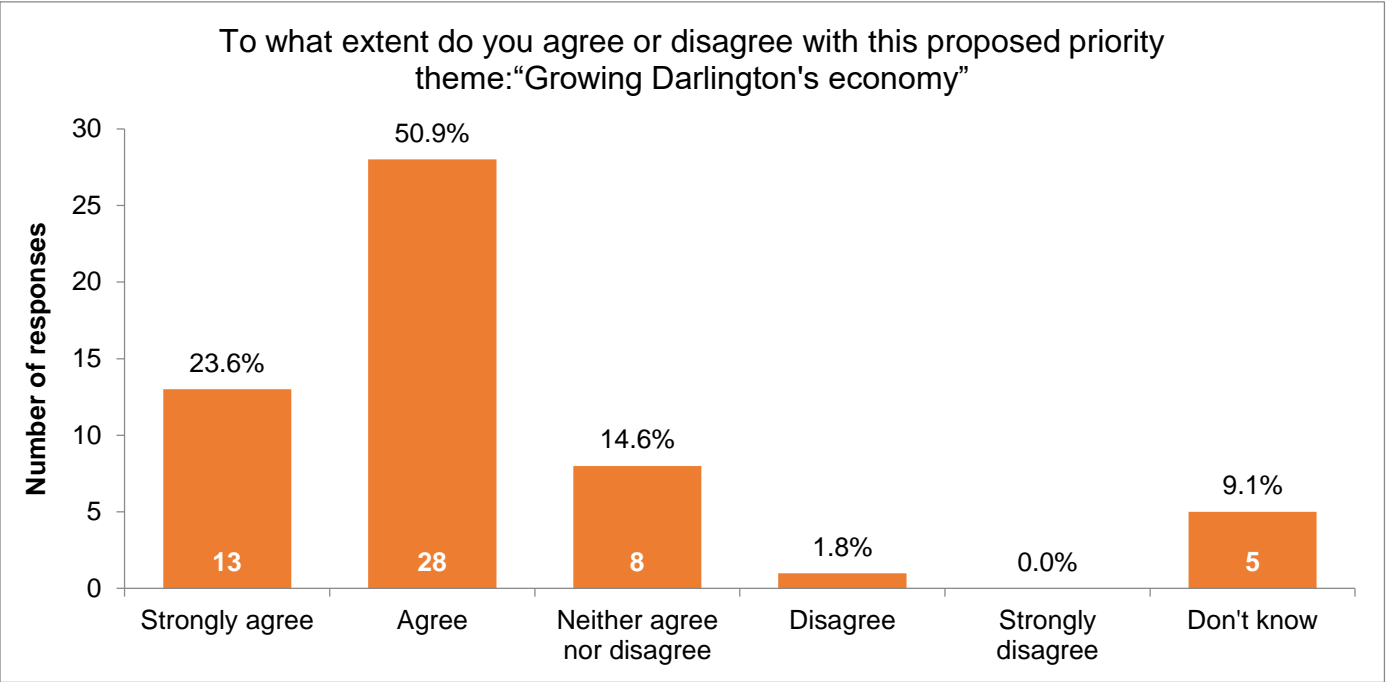
Priority Themes

Growing Darlington's Economy

Survey respondents were asked their views on the proposed priority theme: 'Growing Darlington's economy' using a five point scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

Of the 63 people who responded to the Council Plan consultation, 55 (87%) gave a view on this theme. Of those:

- 41 (75%) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed theme
- 1 (2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed theme
- 8 (15%) neither agreed or disagreed with the proposed theme
- 5 (9%) didn't know



There were also 16 free text responses to this question (25% of respondents) which are categorised below:

For/Against

- agree (4)

Suggestions

- Need to attract people to Darlington (2)
- Need more / diverse businesses (2)
- Need good employment opportunities (1)
- Prioritise tourism and rail heritage (1)
- Lower business rates for retailers (1)

Qualifiers

- Must be in conjunction with the environment (2)
- Need to balance the needs of the whole community (1)
- Must be managed and sustainable (1)
- Only in ways that benefit everyone (1)

Other

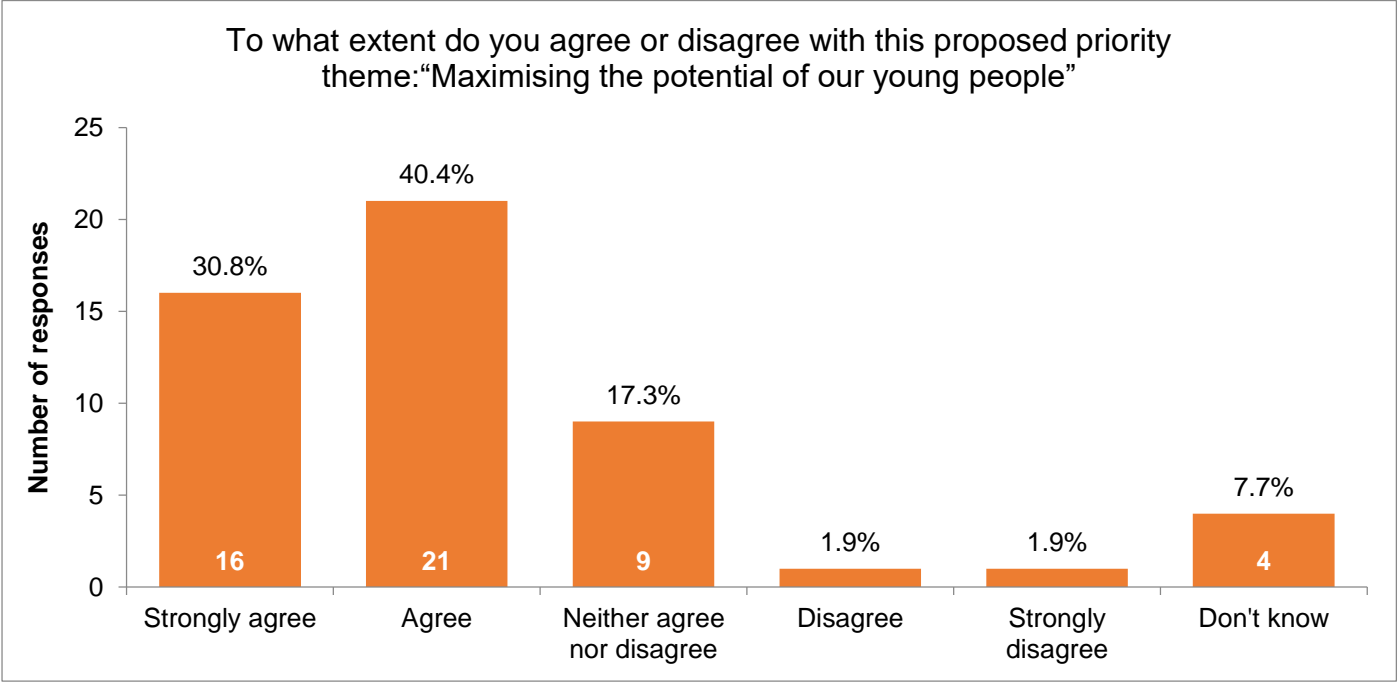
- Doubt the council has the required skills (1)
- Darlington is not the third leading retail centre in the north east (1)

Maximising the potential of our young people

Survey respondents were asked their views on the proposed priority theme: ‘Maximising the potential of our young people’ using a five point scale from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’.

Of the 63 people who responded to the Council Plan consultation, 52 (83%) gave a view on this theme. Of those:

- 37 (71%) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed theme
- 2 (4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed theme
- 9 (17%) neither agreed or disagreed with the proposed theme
- 4 (8%) didn’t know



There were also 15 free text responses to this question (24% of respondents) which are categorised below:

For/Against

- Agree (5)

Suggestions

- Provide the education, skills and opportunities to succeed (5)
- Improve schools (2)
- Provide suitable leisure offer to keep children and young people occupied (2)
- Provide a central resource listing all groups/events etc. across the borough (1)
- Listen to young people including hard to reach groups (1)
- Motivate young people (1)
- Provide more for 25-35 year olds (1)
- Ensure young people feel well served by their community (1)
- Encourage young people to stay and contribute to Darlington (1)
- Encourage young people to be eco-friendly (1)
- Provide affordable housing for young people (1)
- Ensure young people have a safe place to grow up in (1)

Other

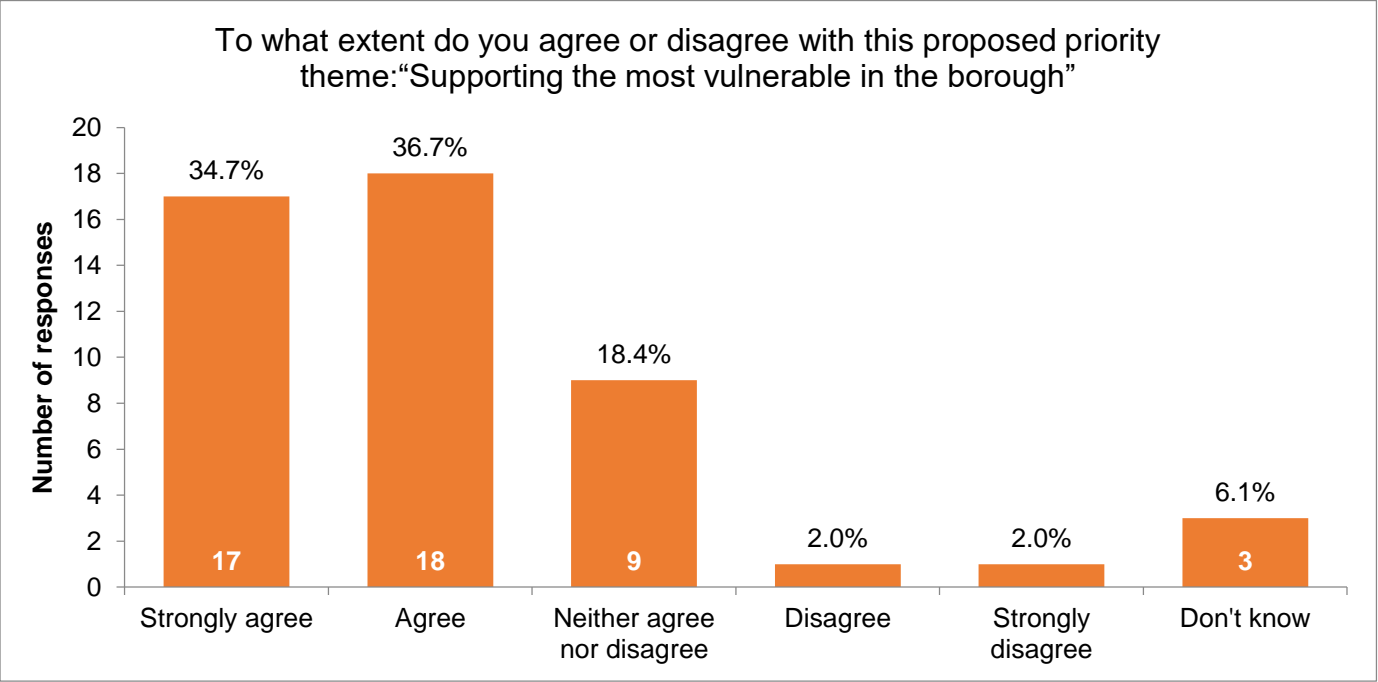
- Doubt the council will achieve anything (1)

Supporting the most vulnerable in the borough

Survey respondents were asked their views on the proposed priority theme: ‘Supporting the most vulnerable in the borough’ using a five point scale from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’.

Of the 63 people who responded to the Council Plan consultation, 49 (78%) gave a view on this theme. Of those:

- 35 (71%) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed theme
- 2 (4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed theme
- 9 (18%) neither agreed or disagreed with the proposed theme
- 3 (6%) didn’t know



There were also 11 free text responses to this question (17% of respondents) which are categorised below:

For/Against

- Agree (6)
- Disagree (1)

Suggestions

- Don’t leave anyone behind (1)
- Support older people, offenders and homeless people (1)
- Liaise with support services (1)
- More affordable housing (1)
- Raise living standards and health and wellbeing (1)
- Encourage people into employment and to be independent (1)

Other

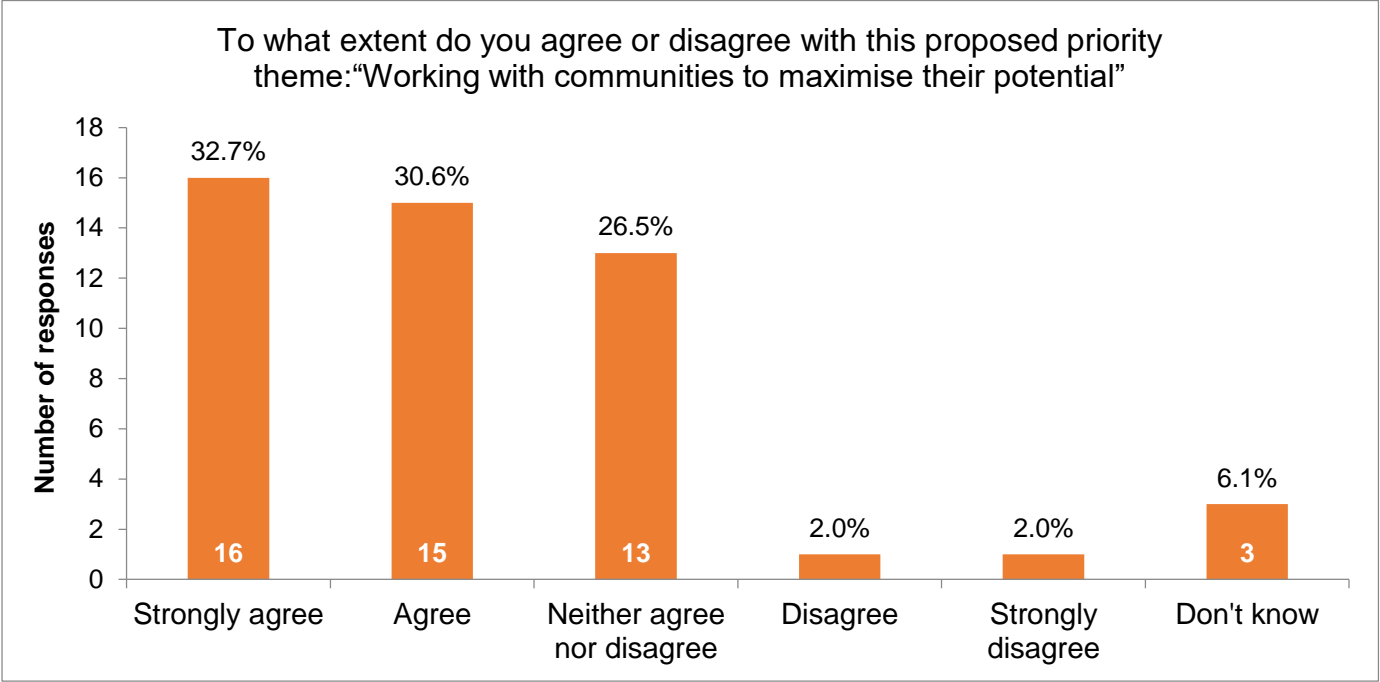
- The way the council go about this is absurd and not helpful (1)
- I have a disabled relative who gets little support (1)
- Do not trust the council to define who the most vulnerable are (1)
- Will likely only be meeting cost pressures in adult social care (1)

Working with communities to maximise their potential

Survey respondents were asked their views on the proposed priority theme: ‘Working with communities to maximise their potential’ using a five point scale from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’.

Of the 63 people who responded to the Council Plan consultation, 49 (78%) gave a view on this theme. Of those:

- 31 (63%) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed theme
- 2 (4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed theme
- 13 (27%) neither agreed or disagreed with the proposed theme
- 3 (6%) didn’t know



There were also 4 free text responses to this question (6% of respondents) which are categorised below:

For/Against

- Agree (1)
- Disagree (1)

Suggestions

- Improve frontline services (1)
- Protect green spaces (1)

Other

- The only community who ever benefits is the West end (1)

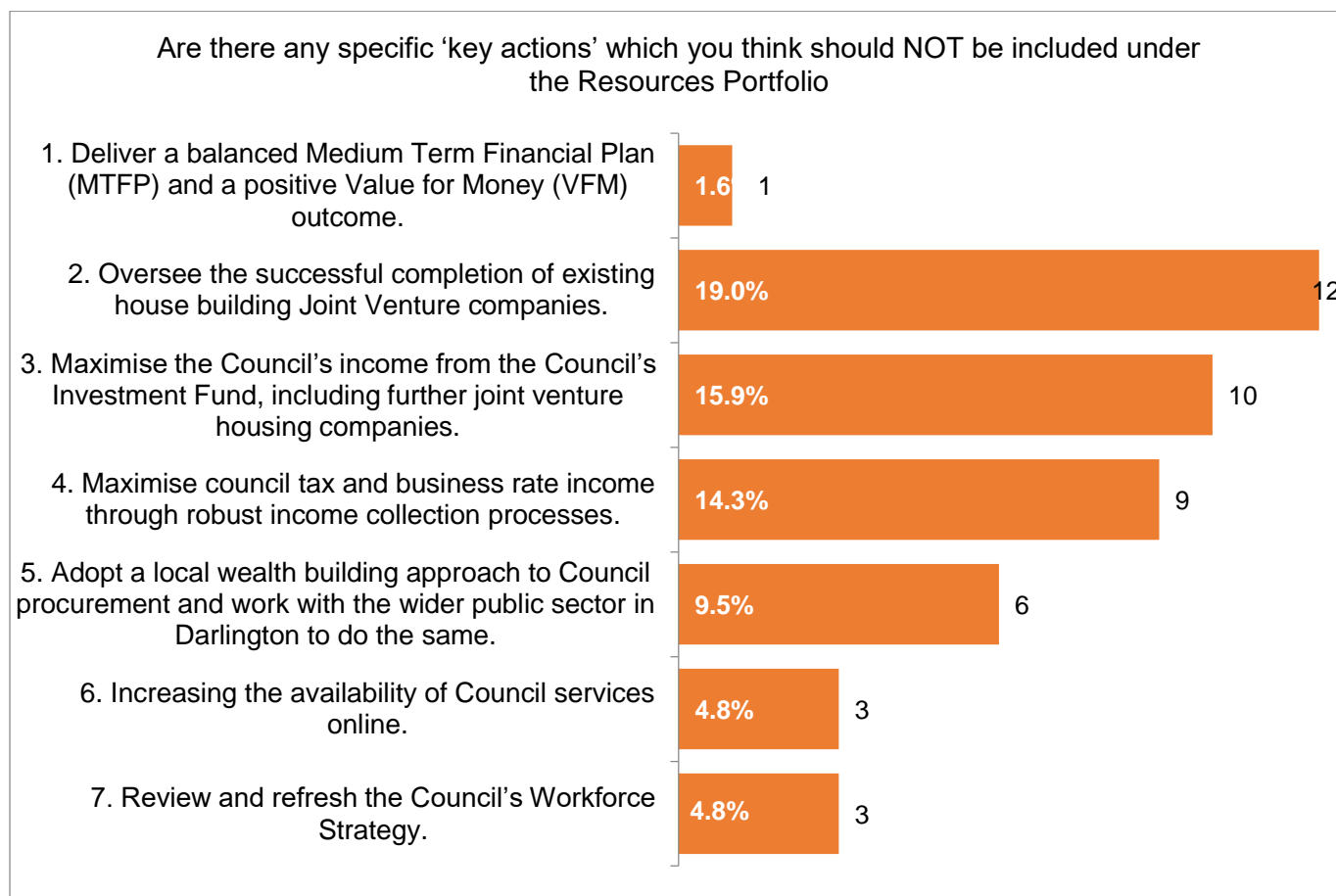
Key Actions

Key actions which respondents think should not be priorities

The survey asked respondents to identify any key commitments which they think should NOT be among the council's highest priorities. Responses are categorised by cabinet portfolio areas below:

Resources

23 (37%) of survey respondents identified one or more of the proposed Resources key actions which they thought should not be corporate commitments, as follows:



There were also 9 free text responses to this question (14% of respondents) which are categorised by commitment number below:

Action 1

- Is an ambition all councils have rather than an action (1)

Action 2

- Insufficient in-house skills (1)
- Joint venture companies should not be mentioned (1)
- Not a necessity and needs more consultation (1)

Action 3

- Insufficient in-house skills (1)
- Do not need more new housing (1)
- Don't want more council income invested in more houses (1)
- Not a necessity and needs more consultation (1)

Action 4

- Can lead to excessive handling of vulnerable people (1)
- Should be picked up through operational improvements rather than a Council Plan priority (1)

- Don't want taxes increased (1)
- Not thinking innovatively how to increase income (1)

Action 5

- Not the business the council should be in (1)

Action 6

- Not everyone can or wants to access online services (1)

Stronger Communities

11 (17%) of survey respondents identified one or more of the proposed Stronger Communities key actions which they thought should not be corporate commitments, as follows:



There were also 3 free text responses to this question (5% of respondents) which are categorised by commitment number below:

Action 8

- Waste of time and money (1)

Action 10

- Not something the council should be involved in (1)

Action 14

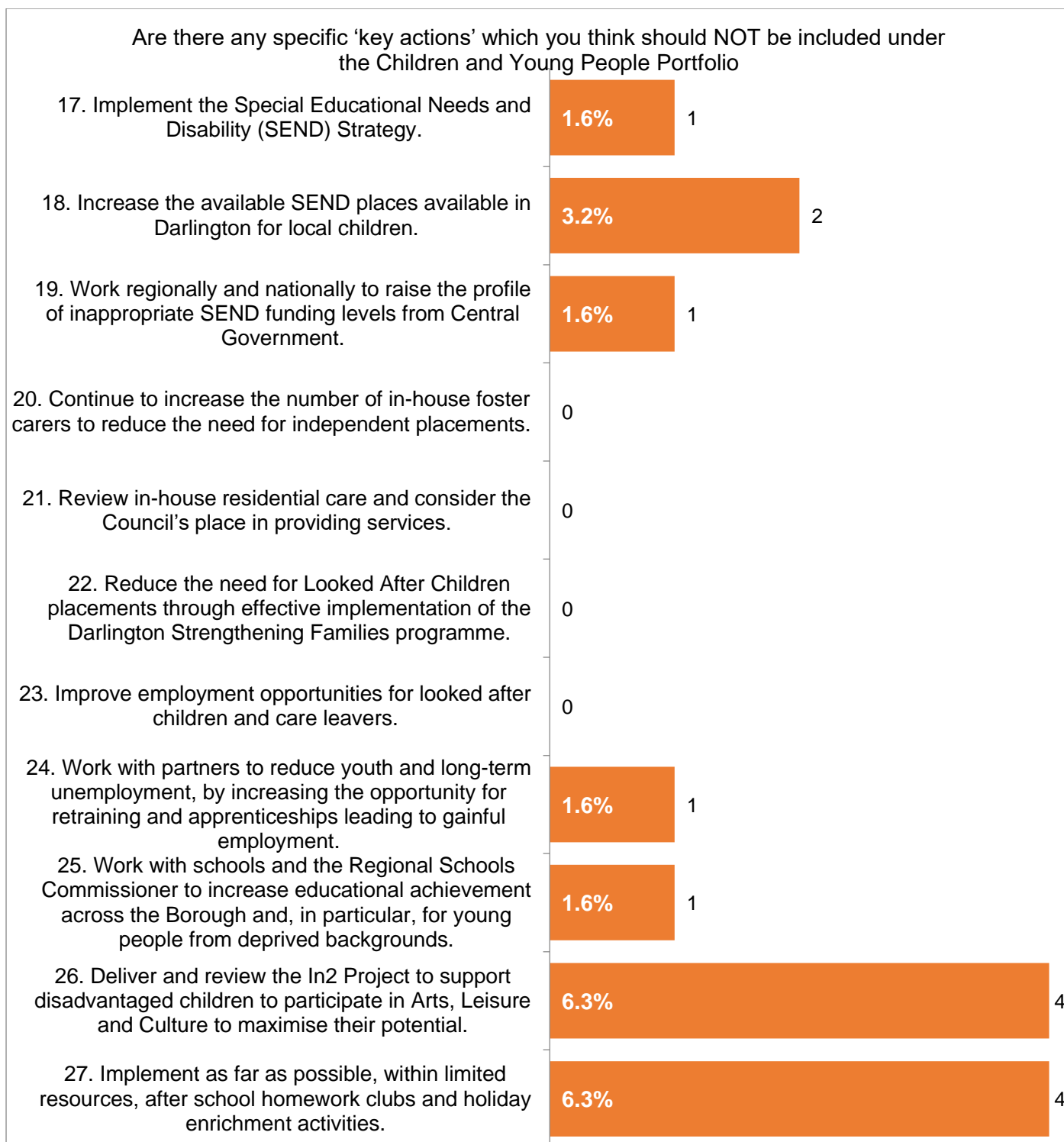
- Needs to be clear any enhancements would not infringe on personal liberty or privacy (1)

Action 16

- Does not fit in (1)

Children and Young People

10 (16%) of survey respondents identified one or more of the proposed Children and Young People Portfolio key actions which they thought should not be corporate commitments, as follows:



There were also 4 free text responses to this question (6% of respondents) which are categorised by commitment number below:

Action 24

- Apprenticeships need to offer a living wage (1)

Action 25

- Emphasis on educational success is based too much on grades and puts too much pressure on students (1)

Action 26

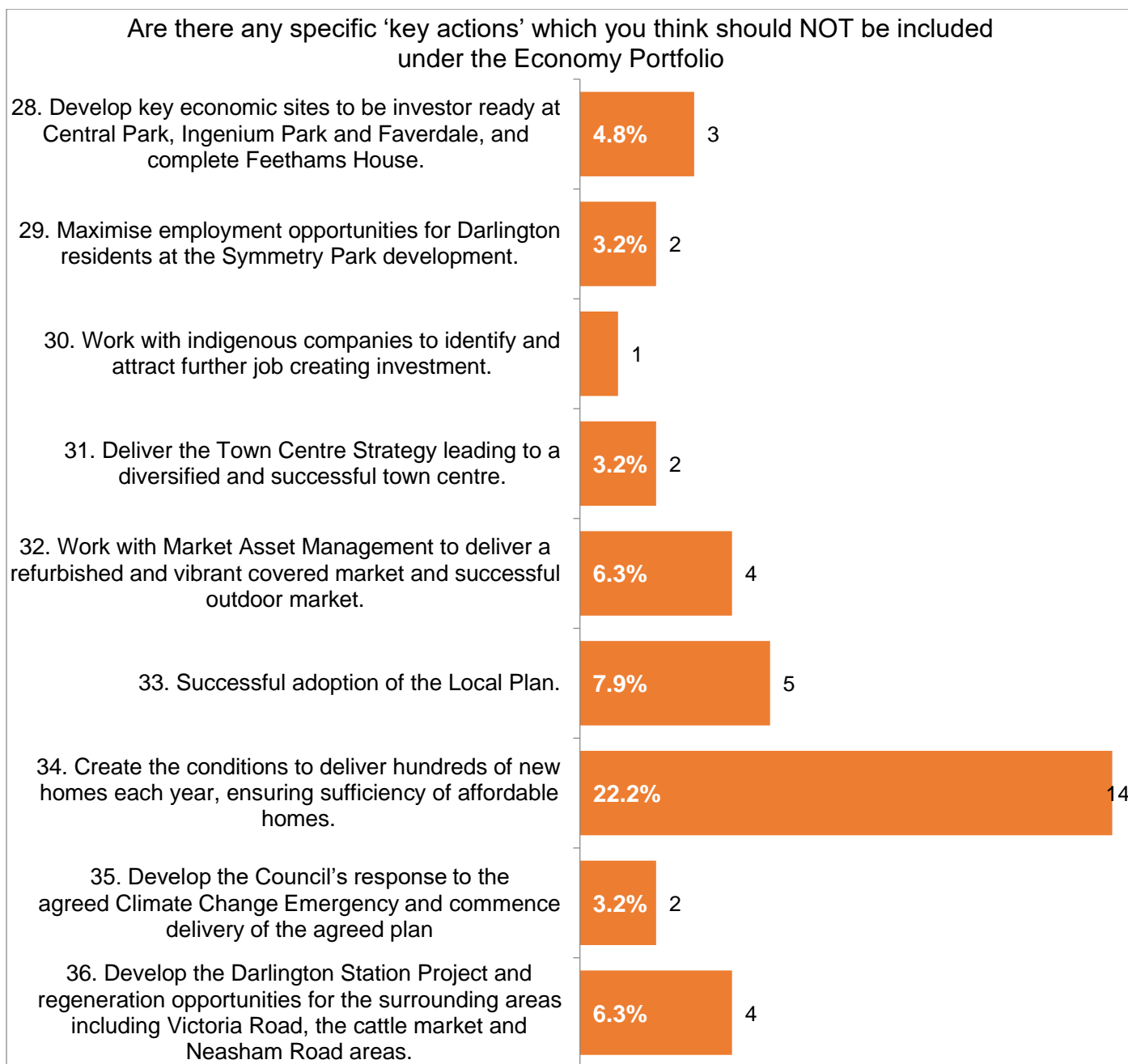
- Parent/caregivers should do more (1)
- SEND is more important (1)

Action 27

- Parent/caregivers should do more (1)
- Children should do homework at home (1)
- Holiday enrichment activities is a good thing (1)
- Environmental opportunities should be created (1)

Economy

18 (29%) of survey respondents identified one or more of the proposed Economy Portfolio key actions which they thought should not be corporate commitments, as follows:



There were also 12 free text responses to this question (19% of respondents) which are categorised by commitment number below:

Action 28

- More should be done to make existing derelict sites good again (1)

Action 29

- Not sure how achievable it is to prioritise Darlington residents (1)
- The road systems need reviewing when developments happen (1)

Action 31

- The Town Centre Strategy is inadequate (1)

Action 32

- The market has had enough money spent on it (1)

Action 33

- The Local Plan is inadequate and does not address the right priorities (1)
- Need to ask residents for their views (2)
- Don't know what it is (1)

Action 34

- We don't need hundreds of new houses each year (3)
- More council homes and less affordable (1)
- Too much building on green field sites (1)
- More needs to be done to improve existing stock, repurpose commercial stock and replace low quality housing with sustainable homes (1)
- Makes Darlington a more unpleasant place to live (1)
- Are these needed? (1)
- Finish current housing developments before starting new ones (1)
- A full housing plan review should take place (1)

Action 35

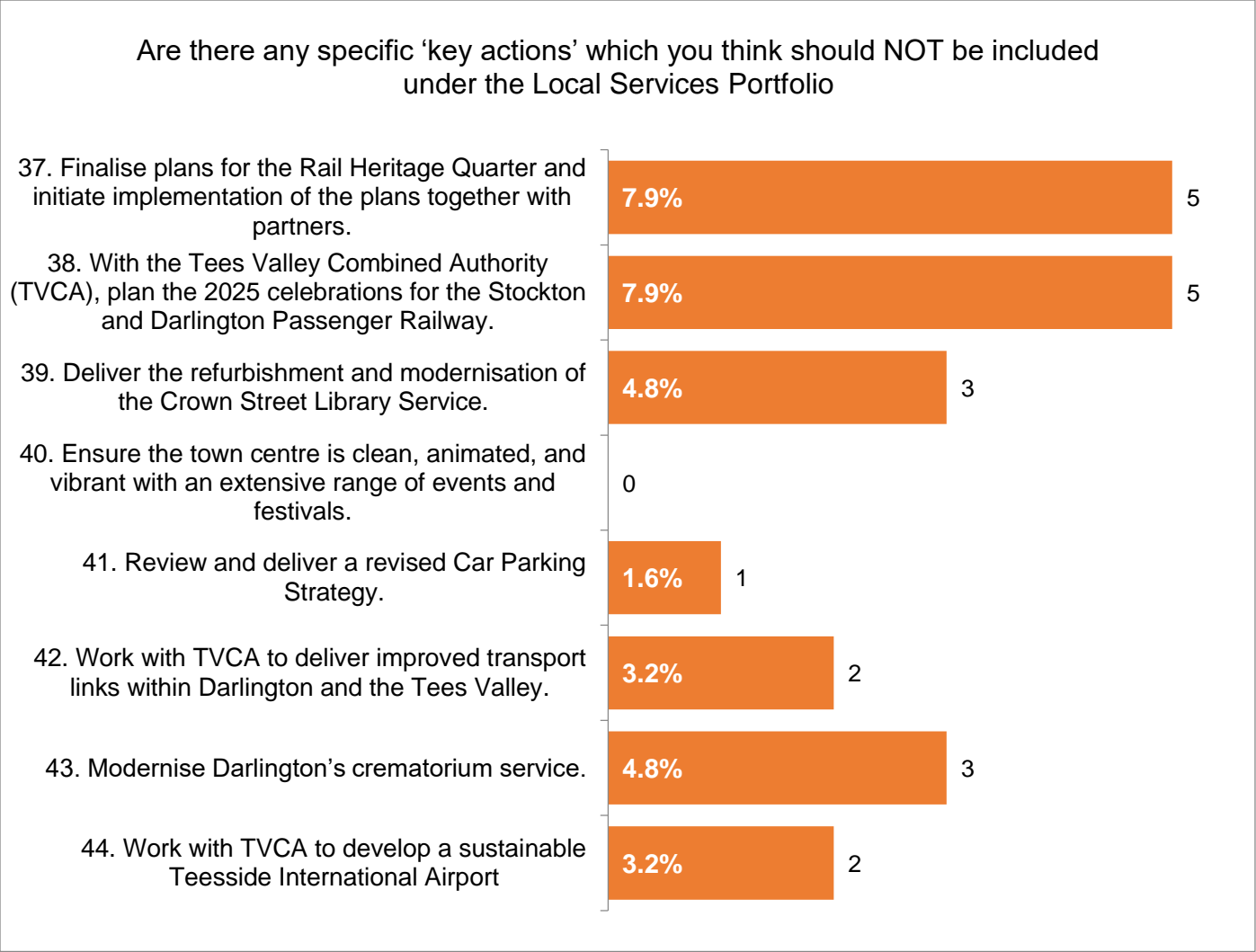
- Stop jumping on bandwagons (1)

Action 36

- Cleaning the back lanes would be better (1)

Local Services

11 (17%) of survey respondents identified one or more of the proposed Local Services Portfolio key actions which they thought should not be corporate commitments, as follows:



There were also 6 free text responses to this question (9% of respondents) which are categorised by commitment number below:

Action 37

- Should be under the Economy portfolio (1)

Action 40

- Should be revised to say all borough (1)

Action 41

- Work towards a car free town centre unless disabled (1)

Action 42

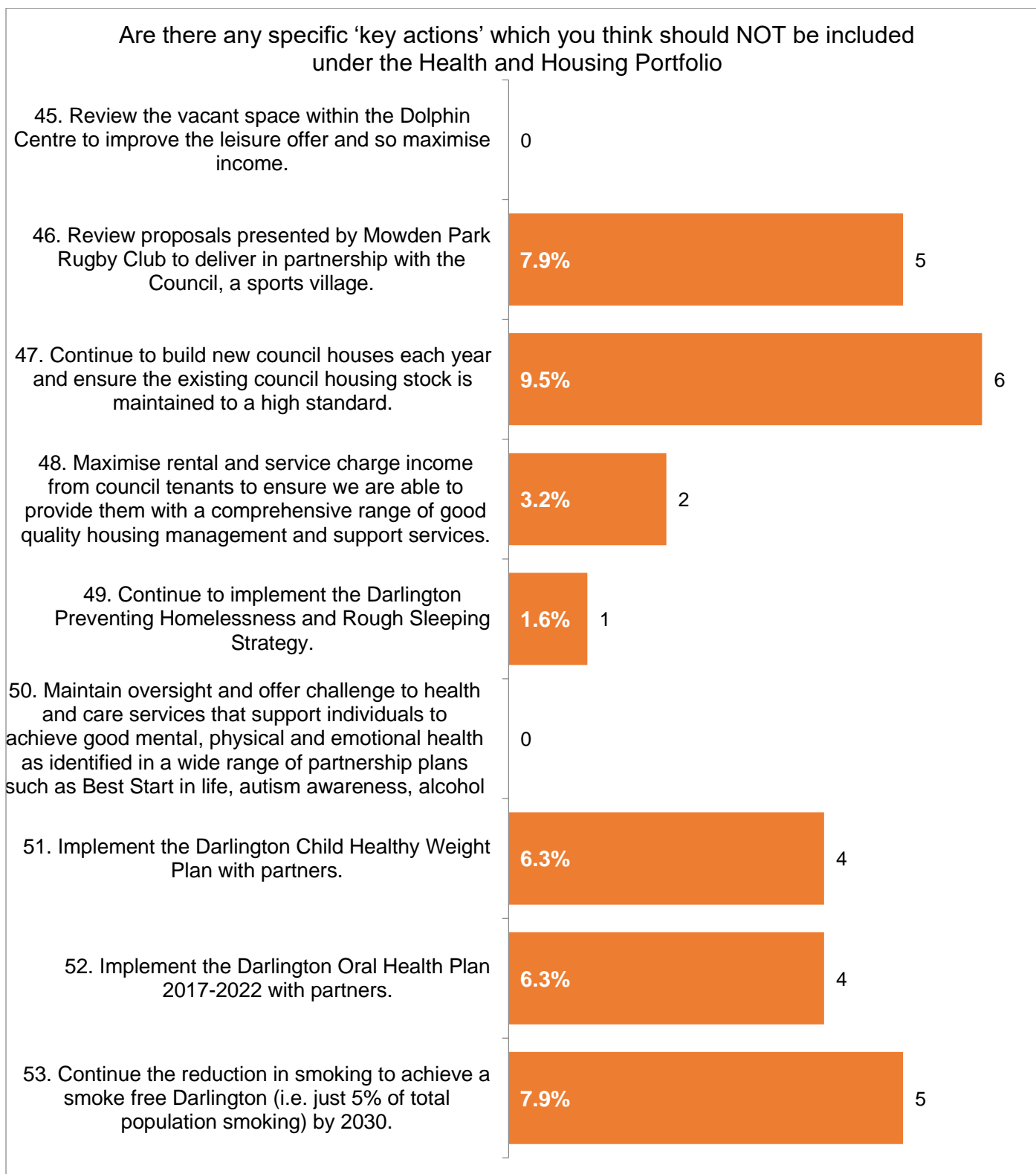
- Should reduce traffic not encourage more (1)
- Not at the expense of residents' quality of life (1)

Action 44

- Has reduced the amount of money for other schemes to support local economy (1)

Health and Housing

15 (24%) of survey respondents identified one or more of the proposed Health and Housing Portfolio key actions which they thought should not be corporate commitments, as follows:



There were also 9 free text responses to this question (14% of respondents) which are categorised by commitment number below:

Action 46

- Not a priority(1)
- Need to see the plans first (1)

Action 47

- Focus on empty properties first (1)
- Too many houses are being built (1)

Action 49

- Need more information (1)
- Shouldn't tell people not to give money to homeless people (1)

Action 51

- It's the parents' responsibility (1)
- What will the council's input be as delivered by partners (1)

Action 52

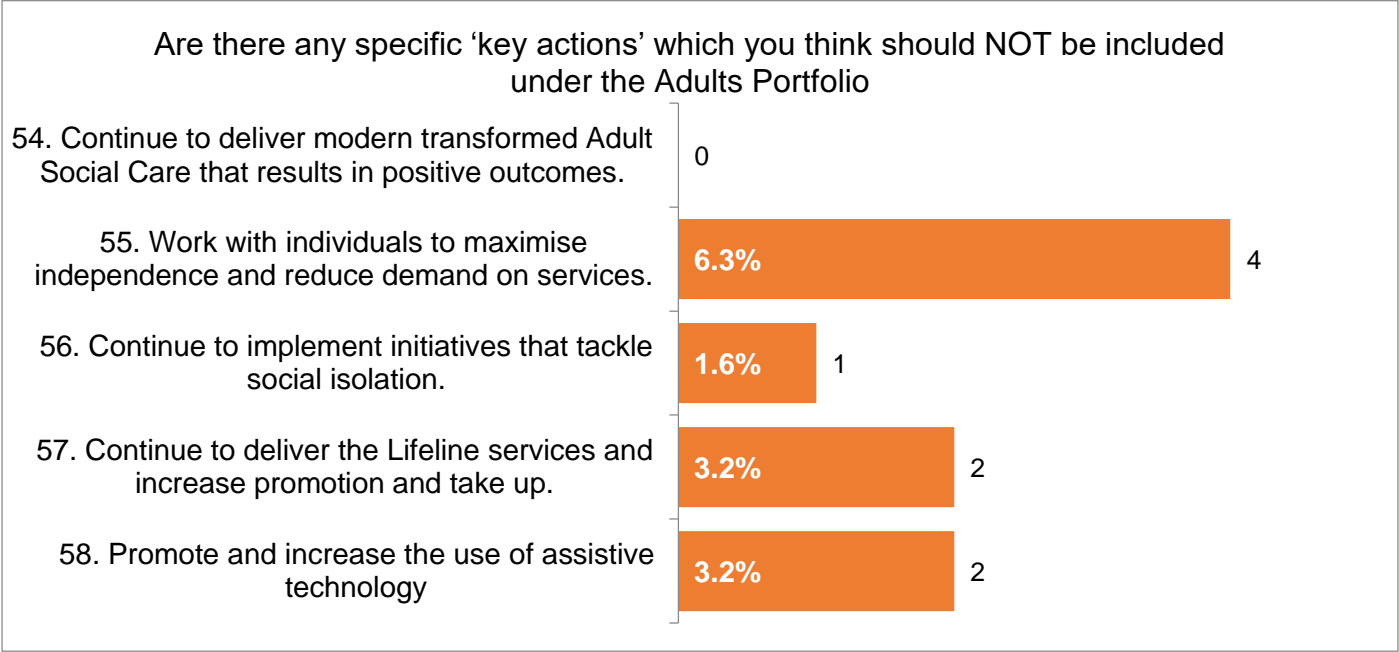
- What will the council's input be as delivered by partners (1)

Action 53

- People should have the choice (1)
- Waste of council time and money (1)
- What will the council's input be as delivered by partners (1)

Adults

8 (13%) of survey respondents identified one or more of the proposed Adults Portfolio key actions which they thought should not be corporate commitments, as follows:



There were also 6 free text responses to this question (9% of respondents) which are categorised by commitment number below:

Action 55

- Within reason and without creating hardship (1)
- Would like to see how the council thinks demand will change in the future (1)
- An innovative approach is required (1)
- Not the best way to phrase it (1)
- Third sector services should increase to support this (1)
- Is this to save money? (1)

Action 57

- Should this be delivered by the Director of Economic Growth? (1)

Other key actions the council should include

Respondents were asked if they think there are other key actions the council should include in the Council Plan 2020-2023. 25 (40%) of respondents gave a view on this question, of which:

- 15 (60%) thought additional key actions are needed;
- 10 (40%) thought no key additional key actions are needed.

The 15 (24%) respondents who felt additional key actions are needed specified these in free text responses which are categorised below:

Resources

There were 3 suggested key actions received relating to Resources:

- More robust oversight of external service providers (1)
- Improve council staff productivity (1)
- Improve and protect frontline services (1)

Stronger Communities

There were 3 suggested key actions received relating to stronger communities:

- Support events that build strong communities (1)
- Work with services that support offenders (1)
- Tackle antisocial behaviour (1)

Local Services

There were 16 suggested key actions received relating to Local Services:

- Protect, maintain and promote green spaces (4)
- Improve traffic management / reduce congestion (3)
- Repair and improve roads (2)
- An integrated public and private transport system (1)
- Tackle speeding (1)
- Introduce cycle lanes and park and ride (1)
- Replace residents' stolen recycling bins (1)
- Improve street cleaning (1)
- Invest in the Head of Steam (1)
- Use neighbourhood venues to promote arts and culture across Darlington (1)

Economy

There were 8 suggested key actions received relating to Economy:

- Ensure oversight of and consult on major projects (2)
- Review housebuilding plans (2)
- Airport development (1)
- Make cattle market relocation a success (1)
- Broadband for all (1)
- Rural economic development options (1)

Miscellaneous

There was 1 suggested key action received which didn't relate to a specific portfolio area:

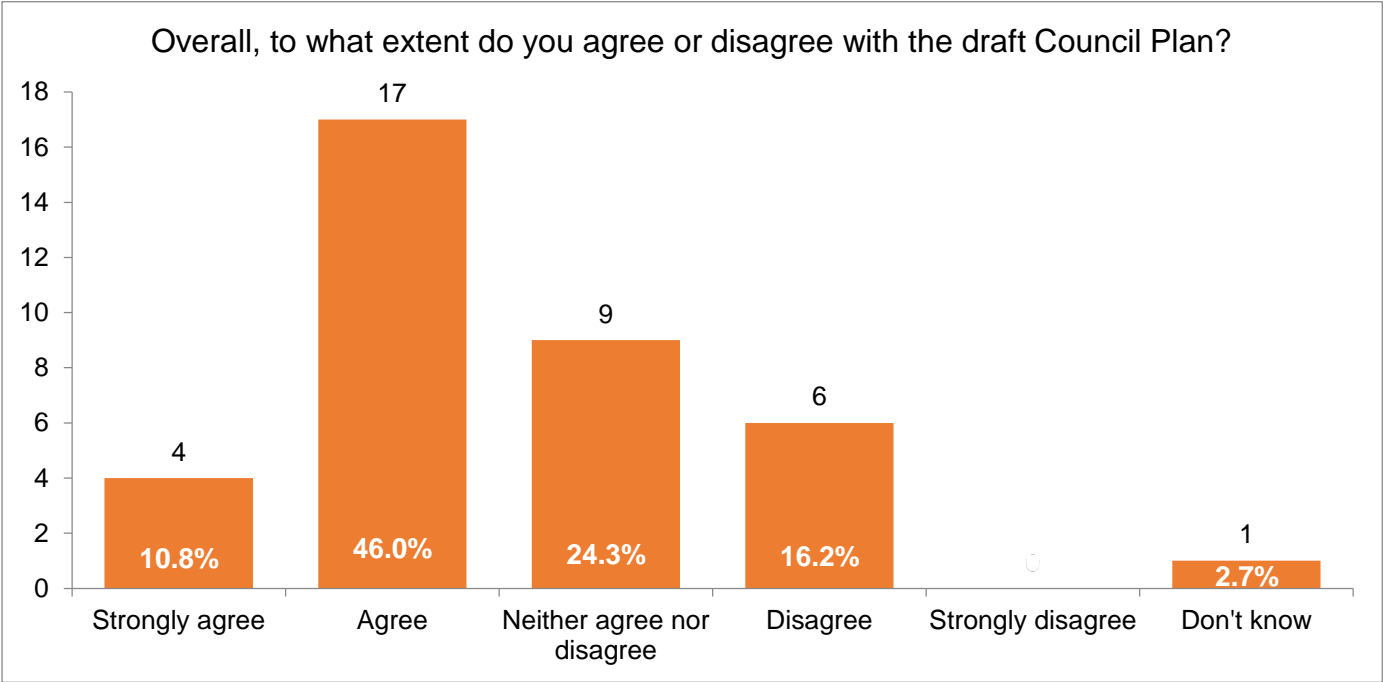
- Include a local radio station (1)

Council Plan

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the Council Plan 2020-2023 as whole, using a five point scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

Of the 63 people who responded to the Council Plan consultation, 37 (59%) gave a view on this question. Of those:

- 21 (57%) agreed or strongly agreed with the Council Plan
- 6 (16%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the Council Plan
- 9 (24%) neither agreed or disagreed with the Council Plan
- 1 (3%) didn't know



There were also 9 free text responses to this question (14% of respondents) which are summarised below:

- Agree (2)
- Listen to the feedback (2)
- It was produced by the previous administration and should not proceed (1)
- Look forward to seeing progress reports (1)
- Appreciate being consulted(1)
- More detail needed (1)
- Needs more emphasis on safety (1)
- Just a wish list (1)
- Could be good (1)
- Like the design and presentation (1)
- Would be useful to have a plan on a page (1)