

Proposals for service charge changes for council tenants for 2019/20 – Consultation feedback and narrative

Contents

Introduction	2
<i>Aims</i>	2
<i>Consultation principles</i>	3
<i>Consultation methodology</i>	3
Questionnaire	4
Public drop-ins	4
Additional feedback channels.....	4
Promotion and communication.....	4
Part 1 – Summary of Consultation Feedback	6
<i>Overall respondents</i>	6
<i>Questionnaire quantitative feedback</i>	6
Breakdown of questionnaire respondents	6
Agreement or disagreement with the council recovering some of the cost of providing services	10
Changes to service charges for walk-ups blocks and tower blocks	11
Impacts	15
<i>Qualitative written feedback from questionnaires, letters and emails</i>	16
Comments expressing agreement with the proposed service charges	17
Comments expressing disagreement with the proposed service charges	17
Comments on the potential impacts of the proposed service charges	20
Comments giving suggestions related to the proposed service charges.....	22
Other comments related the proposed service charges	24
Comments regarding the housing service in general	24
<i>Public engagements, meetings and verbal feedback</i>	24
<i>Feedback on the consultation process</i>	25
<i>Conclusion</i>	26
Part 2 – Consideration of the Consultation Feedback	27
Background	27
Consultation considerations	27

Introduction

1. Southampton City Council ran consultations on a range of budget proposals for 2019/20. As a part of this, the council sought views on a specific set of proposals regarding service charges for housing tenants. The consultation ran from 17 October 2018 to 16 January 2019.
2. As a result of reductions in funding from central government, Southampton City Council has made £136.4 million savings over the last seven years and needs to make another £15.05 million savings by 2020/21. Income from Council Tax covers 17% of total council expenditure (excluding Housing Revenue Account expenditure and schools expenditure) and the revenue support grant funding the council receives from central government will be reduced by 54% over the medium term. At the same time as having to make further savings, demand for council services – particularly those for vulnerable children and adults – continues to increase year-on-year.
3. Housing service has its own budget, called the Housing Revenue Account. Within this budget, are services including managing the housing register, helping people and families to manage their budgets and debts, tenancy management, estate management, tenant involvement, independent domestic violence advocacy for the victims of domestic abuse, Telecare and responding services, repairs and maintenance, leasehold management and the decent neighbourhoods programme.
4. As a result of reductions in funding from central government, the housing service needs to make £4 million savings by 2020/21. These are in addition to the £15.05 million savings the council needs to make from its 'General Fund' budget (which covers everything apart from housing).
5. This consultation sought views on a proposal to increase service charges and introduce four new service charges to council tenants, which will help the housing service to balance its budget. The council has legal powers to charge for these services as long as the charges represent the actual cost of the service. The council's current charges are lower than the actual costs and in some cases the council has not previously made a charge, but has been providing a service to tenants. These proposals reflect a step towards recovering the full cost of the services provided. These proposals will only affect tenants living in walk-up blocks and tower blocks.
6. This report summarises the aims, principles, methodology and results of the public consultation. It provides a summary of the consultation responses both for the consideration of decision makers and any interested individuals and stakeholders.

Aims

7. The aim of this consultation was to:
 - a. Communicate clearly to residents and stakeholders the proposals for service charges.
 - b. Ensure any resident, business or stakeholder who wishes to comment on the proposals has the opportunity to do so, enabling them to raise any impacts the proposals may have.
 - c. Allow participants to propose alternative suggestions for consideration which they feel could achieve the objective in a different way.
 - d. Provide feedback on the results of the consultation to elected Members to enable them to make informed decisions about how to best progress.
 - e. Ensure that the results are analysed in a meaningful, timely fashion, so that feedback is taken into account when decisions are made.

8. The consultation was not a vote, it enabled participants to read about the preferred option, answer questions and make comments that will enable the final decision to be made. Decision makers need to consider the representations made during the consultation period but a majority view will not necessarily dictate the final decision. It is also important to note that the consultation is one element of the suite of reports that will feed into the final position.

Consultation principles

9. The council takes its duty to consult with residents and stakeholders on changes to services very seriously. The council's consultation principles ensure all consultation is:
 - a. Inclusive: so that everyone in the city has the opportunity to express their views.
 - b. Informative: so that people have adequate information about the proposals, what different options mean, and a balanced and fair explanation of the potential impact, particularly the equality and safety impact.
 - c. Understandable: by ensuring that the language used to communicate is simple and clear and that efforts are made to reach all stakeholders, for example people who are non-English speakers or disabled people.
 - d. Appropriate: by targeting people who are more likely to be affected and using a more tailored approach to get their feedback, complemented by a general approach to all residents, staff, businesses and partners.
 - e. Meaningful: by ensuring decision makers have the full consultation feedback information so that they can make informed decisions.
 - f. Reported: by letting consultees know what was done with their feedback.
10. Southampton City Council is committed to consultations of the highest standard, which are meaningful and comply with the following legal standards:
 - a. Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage
 - b. Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response
 - c. Adequate time must be given for consideration and response
 - d. The product of consultation must be carefully taken into account.
11. Public sector organisations in Southampton also have a compact (or agreement) with the voluntary sector in which there is a commitment to undertake public consultations for a minimum of 12 weeks wherever possible. This aims to ensure that there is enough time for individuals and voluntary organisations to hear about, consider and respond to consultations. It was felt that a 12 week consultation period would be the best approach.
12. Southampton City Council has published statement of arrangements for consultation on matters of housing management in compliance with Section 105 Housing Act 1985 and Section 137 Housing Act 1996. This consultation was undertaken in compliance with these arrangements.

Consultation methodology

13. Deciding on the best process for gathering feedback from stakeholders when conducting a consultation requires an understanding of the audience and the focus of the consultation. It is also important to have more than one way for stakeholders to feedback on the consultation, to enable engagement with the widest range of the population. Previous best practice was also considered in the process of developing the consultation methodology.

14. The agreed approach for this consultation was to use a combination of online and paper questionnaires as the main basis, supported by a range of meetings with those directly affected. Feedback was also received through email and letter.
15. It was felt that due to the sensitivity of the consultation it was important to provide face to face contact with consultees to provide clarity and answer any questions. The drop-in or stakeholder sessions were designed to both increase awareness of the consultation but also to answer questions and explain some of the more technical elements to specific stakeholder groups.
16. This approach of open consultation, supported by a wide range of communications ensured that as many people as possible were aware of the issues and could have their say if they chose to.

Questionnaire

17. The main vehicle for gathering feedback through the consultation was a combination of online and paper questionnaires. Questionnaires enable an appropriate amount of explanatory and supporting information to be included in a structured questionnaire, helping to ensure respondents were aware of the background and detail of the proposals. It was deemed the most suitable methodology for consulting on this complex issue alongside the information sheets which act as a summary of proposals by area.
18. Paper copies of the questionnaire were made available in Southampton Civic Centre reception, Gateway, all Southampton libraries and were shared at a wide range of events for tenants and with block reps.

Public drop-ins

19. A range of service charge consultation drop-in events were run at four locations around the city from the 20 November to 6 December 2018. These drop-ins were attended by 21 tenants and leaseholders. The aim was to promote the consultation and answer any questions that came up.
20. The drop-in dates were:
 - 20 November 2018. Weston – 5 attendees
 - 26 November 2018. Golden Grove – 3 attendees
 - 30 November 2018. Thornhill – 6 attendees
 - 6 December 2018. Millbrook – 7 attendees

Additional feedback channels

21. Any emails addressed to senior officers or Cabinet members were collated and analysed as a part of the overall consultation.
22. Respondents to the consultation could also write letters to provide feedback on the proposals.

Promotion and communication

23. Throughout the consultation, every effort was made to ensure that as many people as possible were aware of the budget proposals and had every opportunity to have their say.
24. Particular effort was made to communicate the proposals in a clear and easy to understand way. This was achieved by including key information within the questionnaire and signposting to a wide range of supporting information. This included the following which were hosted on a focused area of the council website.
 - a. Information sheets

- b. Equality and Safety Impact Assessments
- c. Questionnaire
- d. Supporting information for the three parallel consultations.

25. For the duration of the consultation, paper versions of the consultation questionnaire were available in libraries and council offices. Paper copies of the questionnaire or alternative format versions could be obtained on request.
26. At the start of the consultation a media release was issued.
27. The tenant engagement team promoted the consultation through a wide range of mechanisms including tenants meetings, drop-in events, emails, magazine, online newsletters and calendars, texts, posters and electronic noticeboards.
28. There was a special edition of the online Tenants Link Magazine publicising the consultation, emailed to 6,500+ tenants and leaseholders.
29. Tenants and leaseholders were also informed about the consultation in the annual Housing Service magazine, hand delivered to tenants and leaseholders.
30. Tenant reps were both emailed and texted about the consultation and the proposals were presented to a number of tenant groups including the Tenants Panel and Block Rep Forum.
31. A combination of paper and electronic posters advertised both the consultation and the drop-in events at various noticeboards around the city.
32. The budget consultations were included in 8 Southampton City Council e-alerts. The total reach of these e-alerts was in excess of 30,000. These e-alerts resulted in 810 clicks through to further information and the questionnaire.
33. With regard to social media, a combination of Twitter and Facebook promotion was used, there were five posts about the overall budget consultation on Facebook with an overall reach of 37,033. There were a total of 17 tweets about the overall budget which had a total reach of 32,948. In addition to this there were three further tweets on the tenant service charge consultation with a reach of 5,744 and three specific Facebook posts with a reach of 24,961. Also through housing specific social media accounts there were a total of eight posts about the consultation with a total reach of 7,637.
34. To support the external promotion of the consultation, there were also activities to make staff of Southampton City Council aware of the consultation, internal emails and promotion on staff webpages.

Part 1 – Summary of Consultation Feedback

Overall respondents

35. Overall, there were 200 separate written responses to the consultation.

36. The majority of responses were received through the consultation questionnaire; 182 in total. Additional written responses were also received through emails and letters. The breakdown of all written responses is shown within table 1 below.

Feedback route	Total number of responses
Questionnaire (Paper and online)	182
Letters or emails	16
Feedback received through the overall budget questionnaire	2
Total	200

Table 1

37. In addition to written responses to the consultation, there were a number of public engagements and meetings in which verbal feedback was provided.

38. All written and verbal feedback received is summarised within the following sections.

Questionnaire quantitative feedback

Breakdown of questionnaire respondents

39. A number of questions were asked within the questionnaire to find out a bit more about the respondents to help contextualise their response.

40. The first question asked respondents what their interest in the consultation was. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of responses to this question. Please note percentages add up to more than 100% as respondents could select multiple options. A total of 103 respondents (57%) were interested as a resident of Southampton. The second highest proportion of respondents were tenants of walk-up blocks; a total of 62 (34%) selected this option. The next highest proportion of respondents were tenants of tower blocks; a total of 25 (14%) respondents selected this option. It is worth noting that when combined the number of respondents who were tenants of either a walk-up block or tower block totalled 87 (48%). A further 12 respondents described themselves as a family member of a tenant, 11 selected an employee of a local authority, 9 respondents were tenants of an unaffected property, 4 respondents selected a resident elsewhere in Hampshire, 4 respondents were political members, another 4 respondents described themselves as a member of a community group or organisation and a further 6 respondents selected “other”.

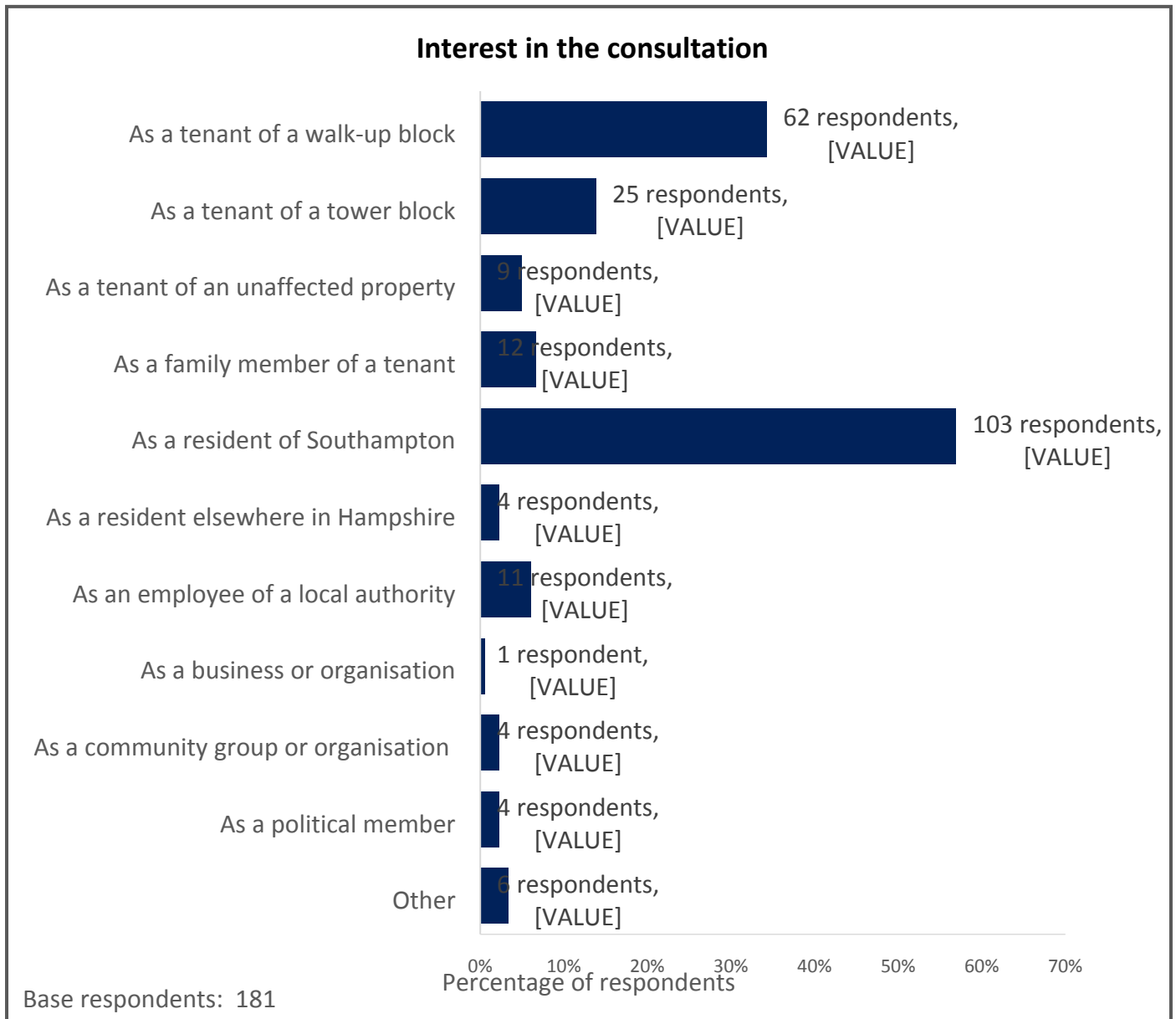


Figure 1

41. Figure 2 shows how respondents to the consultation best described their gender. 85 respondents described themselves as Male, 81 described themselves as Female and a further 3 respondents described themselves in another way.

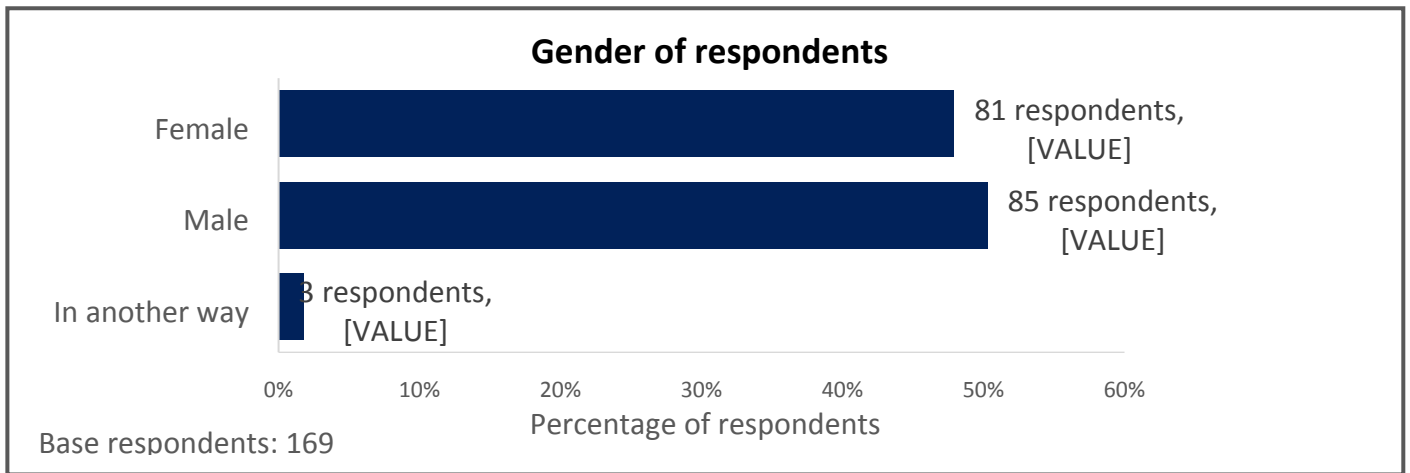


Figure 2

42. Respondents were also asked their age as shown within Figure 3. The highest proportion of respondents were between the ages of 45 and 64 which comprised 49% of respondents. There were a lower number of respondents for categories over the age of 75 and under the age of 25.

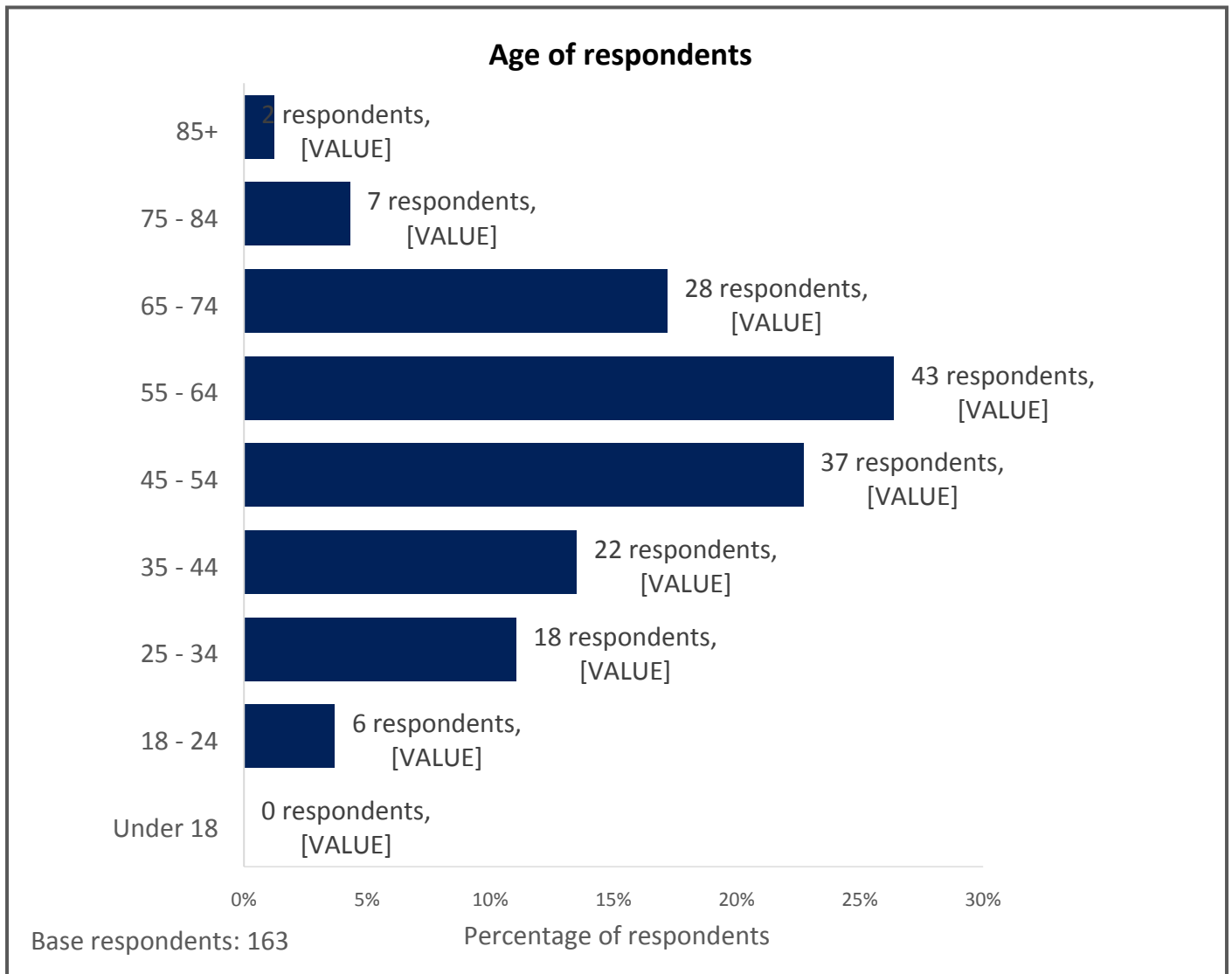


Figure 3

43. The final question asking for more information about the respondents themselves asked for their ethnicity. Figure 4 shows that the highest proportion of respondents (93%) described themselves as White. A further 2% of respondents described themselves as Asian or Asian British; 2% Black, African, Caribbean or Black British; 1% mixed or multiple ethnic groups and 2% as another ethnic group.

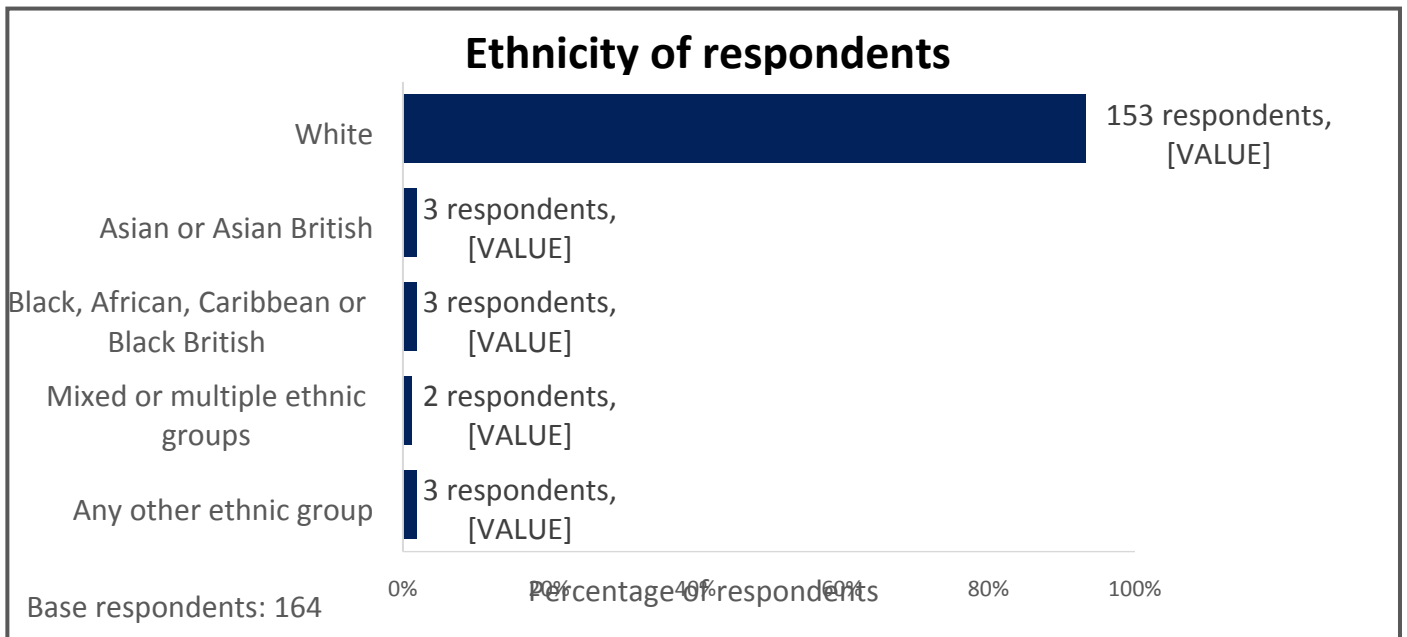


Figure 4

Agreement or disagreement with the council recovering some of the cost of providing services

44. The proposed change to service charges for council tenants for 2019/20 put forward the idea of increasing service charges and introducing new services charges to council tenants in order to help the housing service balance its budget by recovering some of the cost of the services provided.
45. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the principle of the council seeking to recover some of the cost of providing services. Figure 5 shows the results of this question.
46. A total of 62% of respondents expressed overall agreement with the principle of the council seeking to recover some of the cost of providing services. Of this, 37% strongly agreed and 26% agreed with the principle. A further 8% neither agreed nor disagreed. Overall, 30% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal; of which 14% disagreed and 16% strongly disagreed.
47. When focusing on the views of council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges), a total of 49% agreed with the principle of the council seeking to recover some of the cost of providing services. Another 43% said they disagreed with this principle and a further 9% neither agreed nor disagreed.

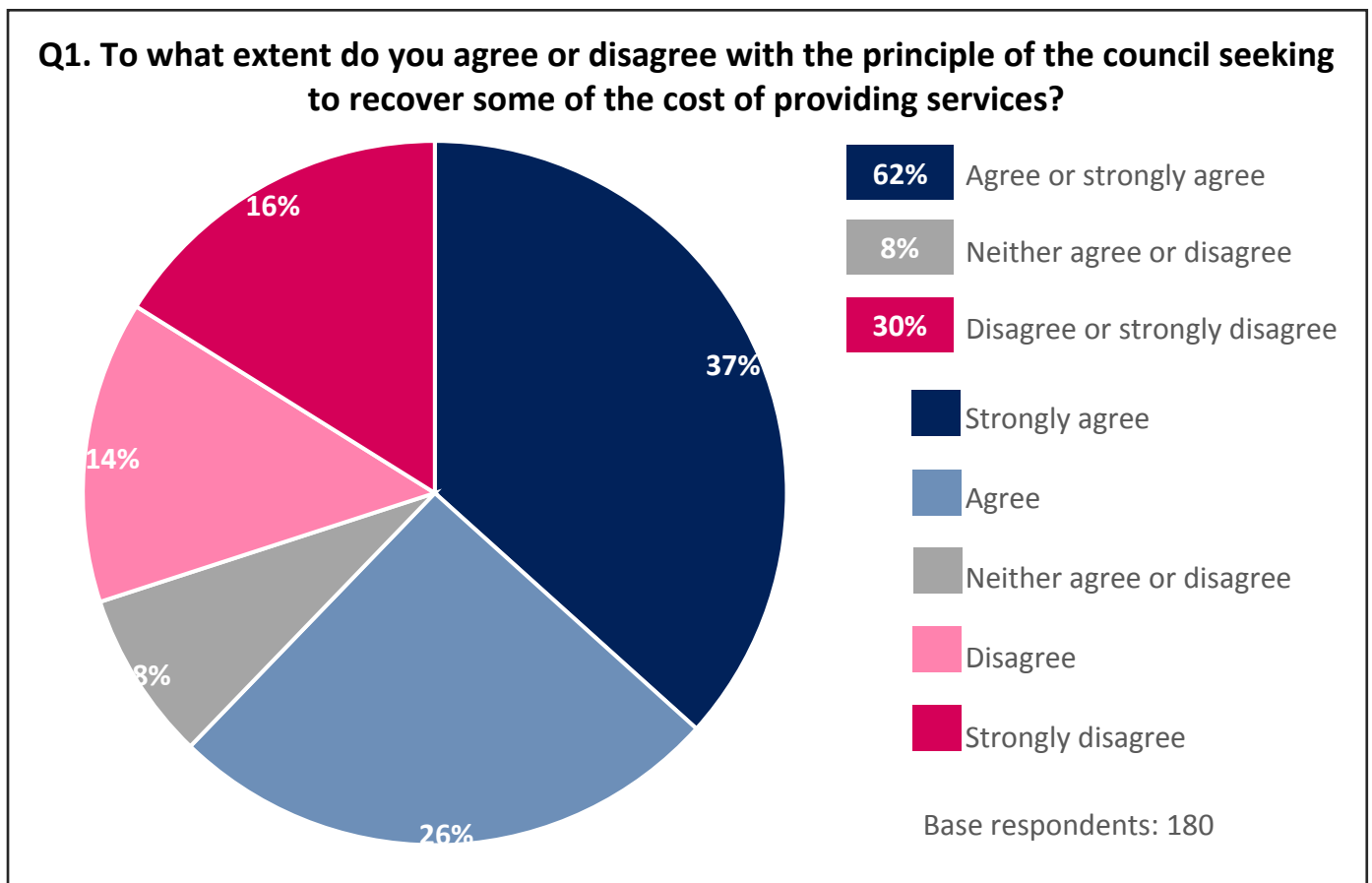


Figure 5

Changes to service charges for walk-ups blocks and tower blocks

48. The next section within the questionnaire asked respondents about proposed changes to service charges for walk-up blocks and tower blocks. The following charges were proposed:

Service (all charges are weekly)	Walk-up block			Tower block		
	Current Charge	Proposed Charge 2019/20	Proposed Charge 2020/21	Current Charge	Proposed Charge 2019/20	Proposed Charge 2020/21
Existing Charge						
Cleaning	65p	72p	72p	-	-	-
Concierge	-	-	-	£1.24	£2.18	£2.73
Neighbourhood Wardens	-	-	-	£5.12	£5.12	£5.12
TV Aerial (communal)	43p	43p	43p	43p	43p	43p
New Service Charge						
Neighbourhood Wardens	-	54p	£1.45	-	-	-
Test/Repair Emergency	-	27p	27p	-	27p	27p
Garden/Grounds	-	22p	22p	-	22p	22p
Door Entry	-	22p	22p	-	-	-
TOTAL	£1.08	£2.40	£3.31	£6.79	£8.22	£8.77

Table 2

49. Respondents were asked what they thought about the proposed services charges for walk-up blocks. Figure 6 shows the results to this question.

50. When thinking about the door entry system, a total of 40% of respondents believed the proposed charge to be too high (30% far too high, 11% slightly too high). A further 36% of respondents thought the proposed charge to be the right amount. Overall, 24% of respondents were of the opinion that the proposed charge for the door entry system was too low (13% far too low, 11% slightly too low). When considering the views of council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges), 63% believed the charge for the door entry system was too high. Another 10% considered it to be too low, whilst 27% thought it was the right amount.

51. Looking at the thoughts of respondents on the proposed charge for the garden/grounds maintenance, 36% of respondents considered the proposed charge to be too high (28% far too high, 8% slightly too high). A further 34% of respondents said the proposed charge was the right amount. A total of 30% of respondents believe the proposed charge for garden/ground maintenance to be too low (15% far too low, 14% slightly too low). This is the highest proportion of respondents believing the charge to be too low of any proposed walk-up block charge. When looking specifically at the views of council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges), 59% said the charge for the garden/grounds maintenance was too high. Another 10% thought it to be too low whilst 31% expressed that it was the right amount.

52. Overall a total of 38% of respondents considered the proposed charge for emergency lighting to be too high (27% far too high, 12% slightly too high). A further 38% of respondents thought the proposed charge was the right amount whilst another 24% of respondents said the proposed charge was too low (11% far too low, 12% slightly too low). Now concentrating on what council tenants said (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges) shows that 60% believe the emergency lighting charge to be too high. Some 7% of council tenants considered them to be too low and a further third (33%) thought it was the right amount.
53. The proposed charge for the communal TV aerial was believed to be too high by 33% of respondents (24% far too high, 8% slightly too high). A further 46% of respondents said the proposed charge for the communal TV aerial was the right amount. This is the highest proportion of respondents believing the charge to be the right amount for any proposed walk-up block charge. A total of 21% of respondents said the proposed communal TV aerial charges were too low (13% far too low, 9% slightly too low). Looking at the opinions of council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges), 48% think the charges for the communal TV aerial was too high. 9% considered the charge to be too low whilst 43% said it was the right amount.
54. When thinking about the proposed charge for neighbourhood wardens, a total of 45% of respondents believed the proposed charge to be too high (29% far too high, 16% slightly too high). This is the highest proportion of respondents who think the charge is too high of any proposed walk-up block charge. A further 32% of respondents thought the proposed charge to be the right amount. Overall, 23% of respondents were of the opinion that the proposed charge for neighbourhood wardens was too low (14% far too low, 10% slightly too low). Focusing on council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges), 65% of them said the charges for neighbourhood wardens were too high. Another 5% of tenants believed the charges for this to be too low whilst 31% considered it to be the right amount.
55. Overall a total of 29% of respondents considered the proposed charge for cleaning to be too high (20% far too high, 10% slightly too high). A further 43% of respondents thought the proposed charge was the right amount whilst another 28% of respondents said the proposed charge was too low (18% far too low, 10% slightly too low). A total of 43% of council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges) were of the opinion that the charges were too high for cleaning. A further 14% stated that the charges were too low whilst 43% said it was the right amount.

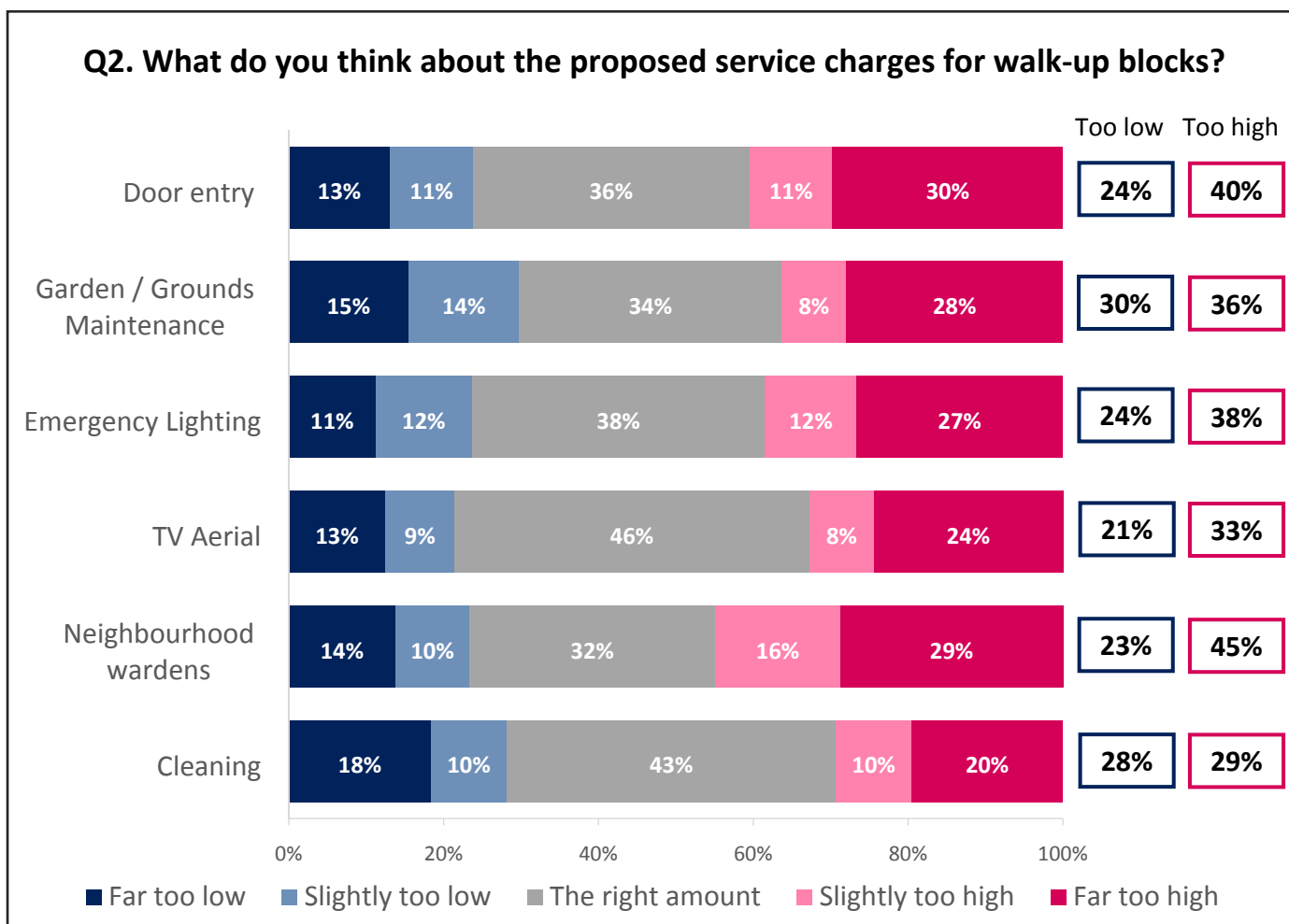


Figure 6

56. Respondents were also asked what they thought about the proposed services charges for tower blocks. Figure 7 shows the results to this question.
57. When asked about the proposed charge for tower block garden / grounds maintenance, 37% of respondents said the charge was too high (25% far too high, 12% slightly too high). A further 31% of respondents think the proposed charge is the right amount. The remaining 31% of respondents believe the charge is too low (16% far too low, 16% slightly too low). This is the highest proportion of respondents believing the charge to be too low of any proposed tower block charge, which was also the case for proposed walk-up block charges. When considering the views of council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges), 63% believed the charge for the garden/grounds maintenance was too high. Another 15% considered it to be too low whilst 22% thought it was the right amount.
58. Looking at the thoughts of respondents on the proposed charge for tower block emergency lighting, 33% of respondents believed the proposed charge to be too high (22% far too high, 11% slightly too high). A further 39% thought the charge was the right amount and another 27% considered the proposed charge to be too low (12% far too low, 15% slightly too low). When looking specifically at the views of council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges), 54% said the charge for the emergency lighting was too high. Another 14% thought it to be too low, whilst 32% expressed that it was the right amount.

59. A total of 27% of respondents believed the TV aerial charge to be too high (20% far too high, 7% slightly too high). A further 51% said the proposed charge was the right amount. As was the case with the walk-up blocks, this is the highest proportion of respondents believing the charge to be the right amount for any proposed tower block charge. Overall, 22% of respondents were of the opinion that the proposed charge for the TV aerial was too low (12% far too low, 10% slightly too low). Looking at the opinions of council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges), 38% think the charges for the communal TV aerial was too high. 12% considered the charge to be too low whilst 49% said it was the right amount.
60. When thinking about the proposed charge for neighbourhood wardens, 39% of respondents thought the charge was too high (25% far too high, 14% slightly too high). As was the case with neighbourhood wardens for walk-up blocks, this is the highest proportion of respondents believing the charge to be too high of any proposed tower block charge. In comparison, 21% of respondents thought the charge was too low (12% far too low, 8% slightly too low). A further 40% of respondents said the proposed neighbourhood warden charge was the right amount. Focusing on council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges), 56% of them said the charges for neighbourhood wardens were too high. Another 10% of tenants believed the charges for this to be too low whilst 35% considered it to be the right amount.
61. Overall, a total of 37% of respondents considered the proposed charge for the concierge service to be too high (23% far too high, 14% slightly too high). A further 37% of respondents believed the proposed charge was the right amount whilst another 26% of respondents said the proposed charge for the tower block concierge service was too low (13% far too low, 13% slightly too low). A total of 59% of council tenants were of the opinion that the charges were too high for the concierge service. In comparison, 16% stated that the charges were too low whilst 25% said it was the right amount.

Q3. What do you think about the proposed service charges for tower blocks?

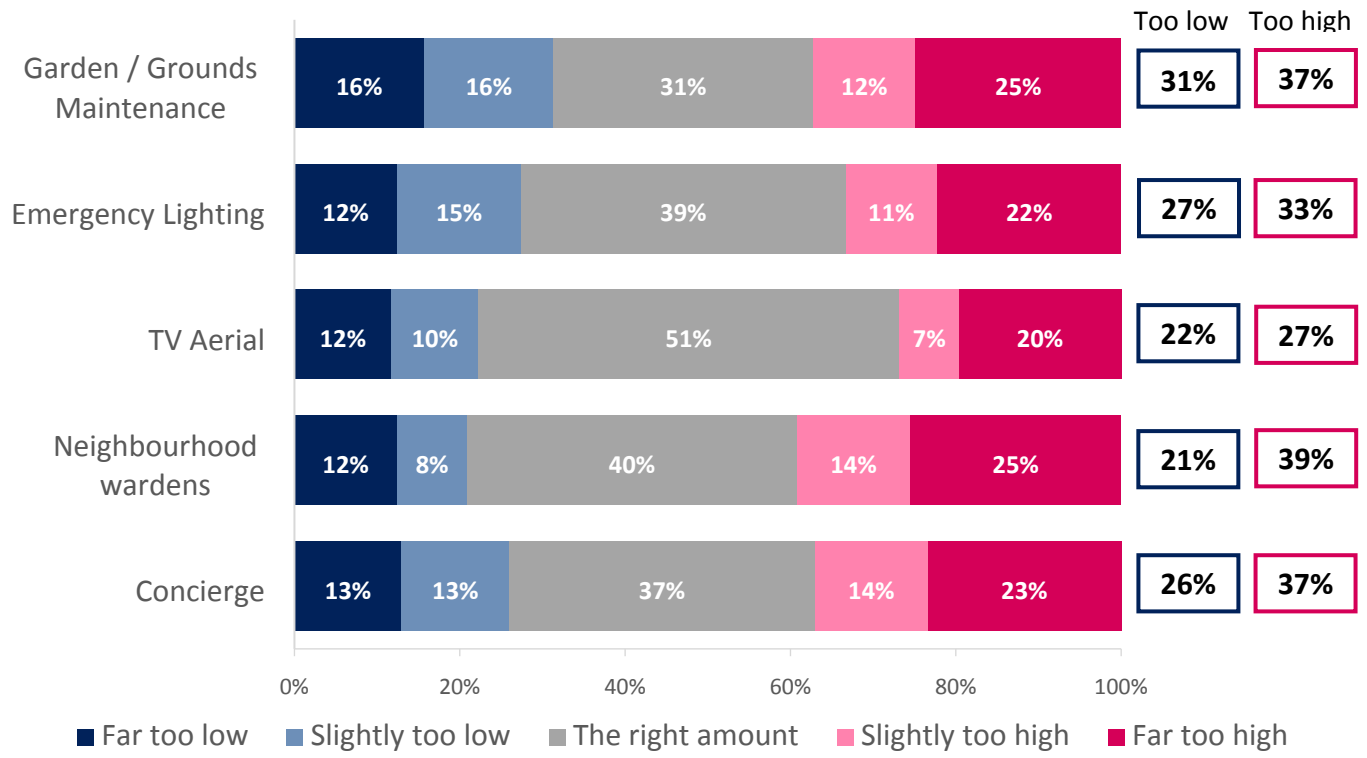


Figure 7

Impacts

62. Respondents were asked what the impact of the proposed charges would have on them, their family or community if they were to be implemented. Figure 8 shows that over a quarter (27%) of respondents felt the impact of these proposed charges would be positive. Of this 13% felt it would be very positive, 7% fairly positive and 7% slightly positive. In comparison, nearly half (49%) of respondents felt the impact of these proposed charges would be negative of which 21% felt it would be very negative, 15% fairly negative and 13% slightly negative. Of the remaining quarter (25%) of respondents, 19% felt there would no impact if the proposed charges were implemented and 6% of respondents did not know what the impact would be. When asking council tenants (this includes those who are tenants of walk-up blocks, tower blocks and properties unaffected by the proposed charges) about the potential impacts, a total of 16% said it would have a positive impact. In comparison, 70% of council tenants believed it would have a negative impact. Of the remaining 15% of council tenants, 11% think it will not have any impact whilst 3% did not know what the impact would be.

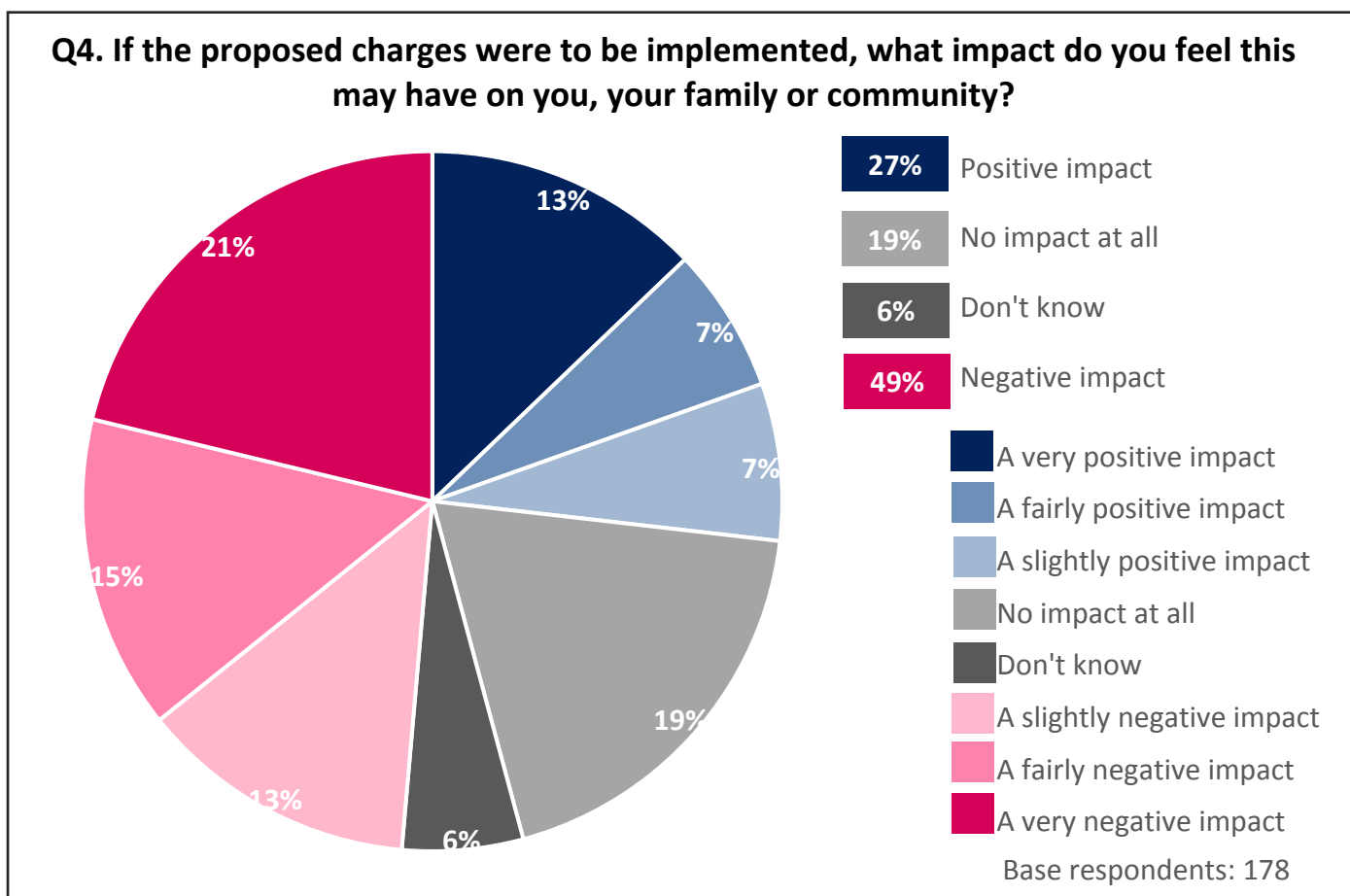


Figure 8

Qualitative written feedback from questionnaires, letters and emails

63. Respondents could provide written feedback to the consultation through a number of different routes. There was one free text question within the questionnaire that respondents could provide feedback through. In addition anyone could provide feedback in the form of letters and emails.

64. All written responses and questionnaire comments have been read and then assigned to categories based upon similar sentiment or theme. Written responses to the consultation were assigned to 21 separate categories. Individual responses that raised a number of different points would be assigned to multiple categories. The

report has also endeavoured to outline all the unique suggestions gathered as a part of the consultation. The following section provides further detail on these categories and the numbers of respondents that raised that theme within their response.

65. Points raised within the written feedback to the consultation generally fell into one of 6 broad categories. These were:

- a. Comments expressing agreement with the proposed service charges
- b. Comments expressing disagreement with the proposed service charges
- c. Comments on the potential impacts of the proposed service charges
- d. Comments giving suggestions related to the proposed service charges
- e. Other comments related the proposed service charges
- f. Comments regarding the housing service in general

Comments expressing agreement with the proposed service charges

66. A total of 15 respondents expressed agreement with the proposed service charges. The following table presents the unique comments associated with this.

Agree with charging for services	
Council tenants should pay for service provision in the same way private tenants and owners have to.	
I have no issue with charging for services generally.	
Tenants in council housing are already receiving a reduced rate for rent, they do not need the same on service charges.	
These services are necessary so charge to allow them to continue.	
The council must cover their costs of all services to residents, even if this means charging.	
Charge market rate for all services to residents.	

Table 3

Comments expressing disagreement with the proposed service charges

67. Figure 9 shows the themes of comments that expressed disagreement with the proposed service charges. The most frequently mentioned theme (by 47 respondents) was that tenants should not have to pay for what is a currently poor service. The second most referred to theme (by 26 respondents) was disagreement with specific charges mentioned within the proposal. The unique comments relating to this theme can be found in table 5. The third theme most often raised (by 20 respondents) was that the charges were unfair.

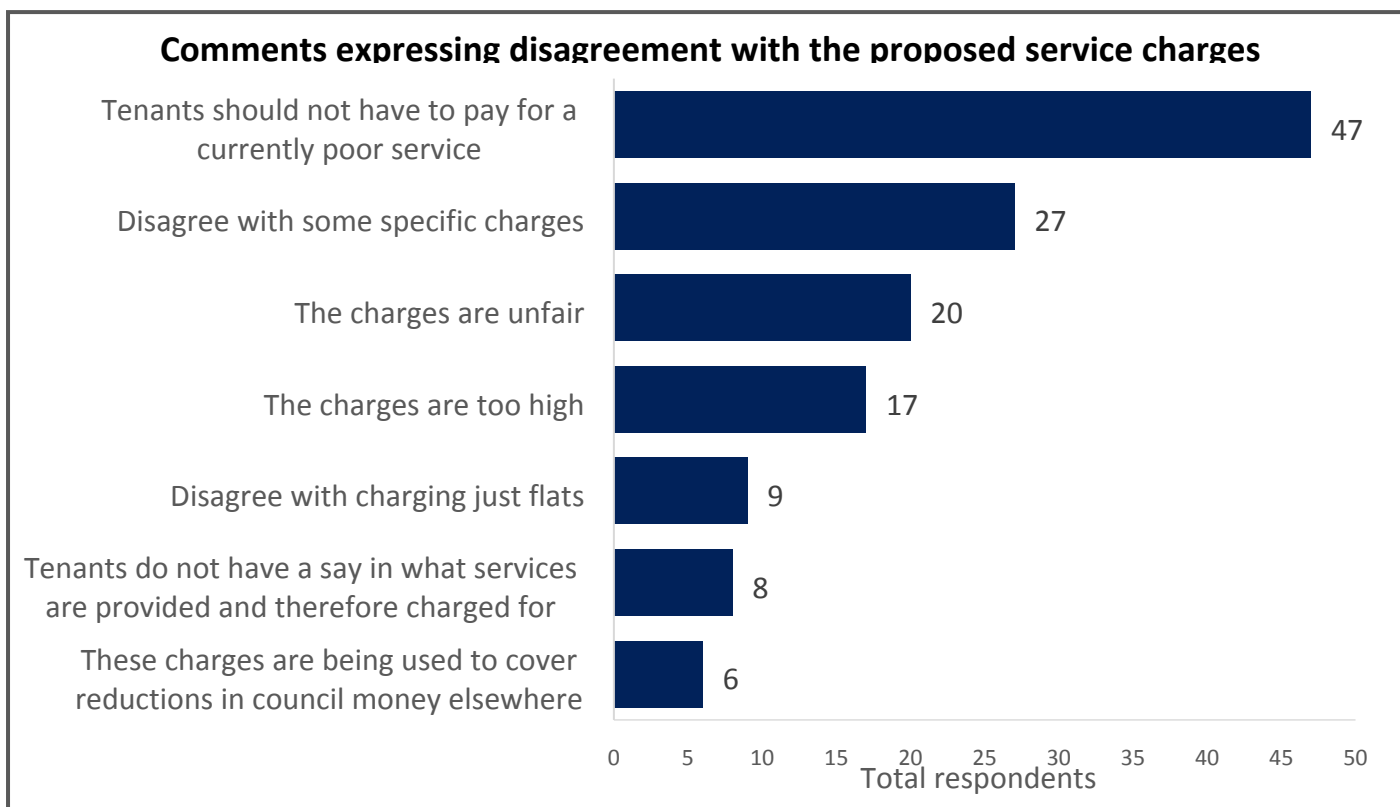


Figure 9

68. Overall, 47 respondents wrote about tenants not having to pay for a currently poor service. The unique comments and suggestions relating to this are presented in the table below.

Tenants should not have to pay for a currently poor service
Services charges are an agreement to pay for the provision of a service. It is therefore unreasonable to keep increasing the amount paid when the service provided has reduced or no longer exists.
Disagree with increasing charges as the current service is not good value for money.
There are services are of poor quality or not done properly (e.g. neighbourhood wardens; concierge; cleaning; grass cutting; window cleaning; clearing or corridors; lights not cleaned; litter not cleared up; broken paving not fixed; broken doors not fixed; no fire alarm installed).

Table 4

69. In total, 26 respondents disagreed with some specific charges. The unique comments and suggestions relating to this are summarised in the table below.

Disagree with some specific charges
Disagree with ground floor tenants being charged for services they don't use or aren't provided. (e.g. the door entry system if they don't use it as they have their own front door; repairing communal lighting when their property does not connect to the communal areas; ground floor tenants often get overlooked for cleaning).
Disagree with charging for the TV aerial when it is the only option to get television provided.
Disagree with some charges that are one off payments that will pay itself off, the council are now just profiting from said charges (e.g. TV aerial, door entry system).
Disagree with some blocks being charged for garden/grounds maintenance that they don't need or receive.

Disagree with the door entry system charges because many people leave the door propped open so it is pointless.
Disagree with some charges that should be covered by other budgets or funding (e.g. emergency lighting should be in the normal budget as part of health and safety requirements; the garden/grounds maintenance should be covered by the housing revenue account; neighbourhood warden wages should be covered by the housing revenue account).
Disagree with paying for services that are inefficient (e.g. paying for two cleaners to do a job that could be done by one).
Disagree that the leaseholder charges for a variety of jobs done always ends up costing the same £1600 a year.

Table 5

70. There were 20 respondents who considered the proposed charges to be unfair. The unique comments and suggestions regarding this are given in the table below.

The charges are unfair	
The charges are unfair because tenants are already paying for these services.	
It is unfair to have to pay for a service that I don't use (e.g. paying for the TV aerial).	
The charges are unfair because they are just a hidden rent increase, because the government capped rents.	
The charges are unfair because many flat block tenants receive some kind of benefits and therefore won't be affected by proposed increases, whilst any of those not receiving benefits will have to pay.	
It is unfair to charge particular flat blocks as opposed to charging every flat block.	
Some of these services are covered by other budgets so tenants should not have to pay twice (e.g. grounds maintenance is surely covered in the overall council budget).	
It is unfair to charge all flat tenants for issues caused by the anti-social behaviour of a few people.	

Table 6

71. The charges being too high was mentioned by 17 respondents. The unique comments and suggestions on this theme are detailed in the table below.

The charges are too high	
Especially for wardens.	
Previous increases in charges should have been enough.	
Not willing to pay extra charges caused by council admin fees and over inflated costs from contractors.	
These charges are disproportionate to people's earnings.	

Table 7

72. There were 9 respondents who disagreed with the proposal to charge just flat blocks. The unique comments and suggestions relating to this are presented in the table below.

Disagree with charging just flats	
Disagree with charging just flats, as opposed to all council tenants.	
Disagree with charging just council flat tenants, as opposed to all city residents.	
Disagree with charging just flats when houses used some of these services as well. (e.g. neighbourhood wardens and open spaces)	

Table 8

73. In total, 8 respondents felt tenants do not have a say in what services are provided and charged for. The unique comments and suggestions relating to this are summarised in the table below.

Tenants do not have a say in what services are provided and therefore charged for
--

Tenants have no say in any of the services provided.
Tenants should be consulted on services, including the cost to determine if that service is carried out. (E.g. consult on the need or desire for neighbourhood wardens, cleaning etc.)
Some tenants are happy without particular services and so do not want to pay for them.
Tenants used to do their own block cleaning.

Table 9

74. Overall, 6 respondents think these proposed service charges are being used to cover reductions in council money elsewhere. The unique comments and suggestions on this theme are detailed in the table below.

Tenants do not have a say in what services are provided and therefore charged for
--

This is being used to make up for lost income from reduction in central government funding for the council.
These increases are being used to make up for the loss in income due to the government rent cap. To avoid this problem, the council should have adjusted the 30 year plan and 6 year plan to fit the budget following the government rent cap. If this had been done the Housing Revenue Account could have covered these proposed costs.
There should be an emergency fund to cover this sort of thing?

Table 10

Comments on the potential impacts of the proposed service charges

75. Figure 10 shows the themes of comments surrounding the potential impacts of the proposed service charges. There were 2 negative impacts mentioned by respondents: that some tenants may not be able to afford the proposed increase in service charges (15 respondents) and that the proposed service charges would impact the most disadvantaged (9 respondents). A number of respondents mentioned 2 positive impacts: that the proposed service charges would encourage responsibility and care in tenants for where they live (10 respondents) and the proposed services charges could potentially improve the neighbourhood (1 respondent).

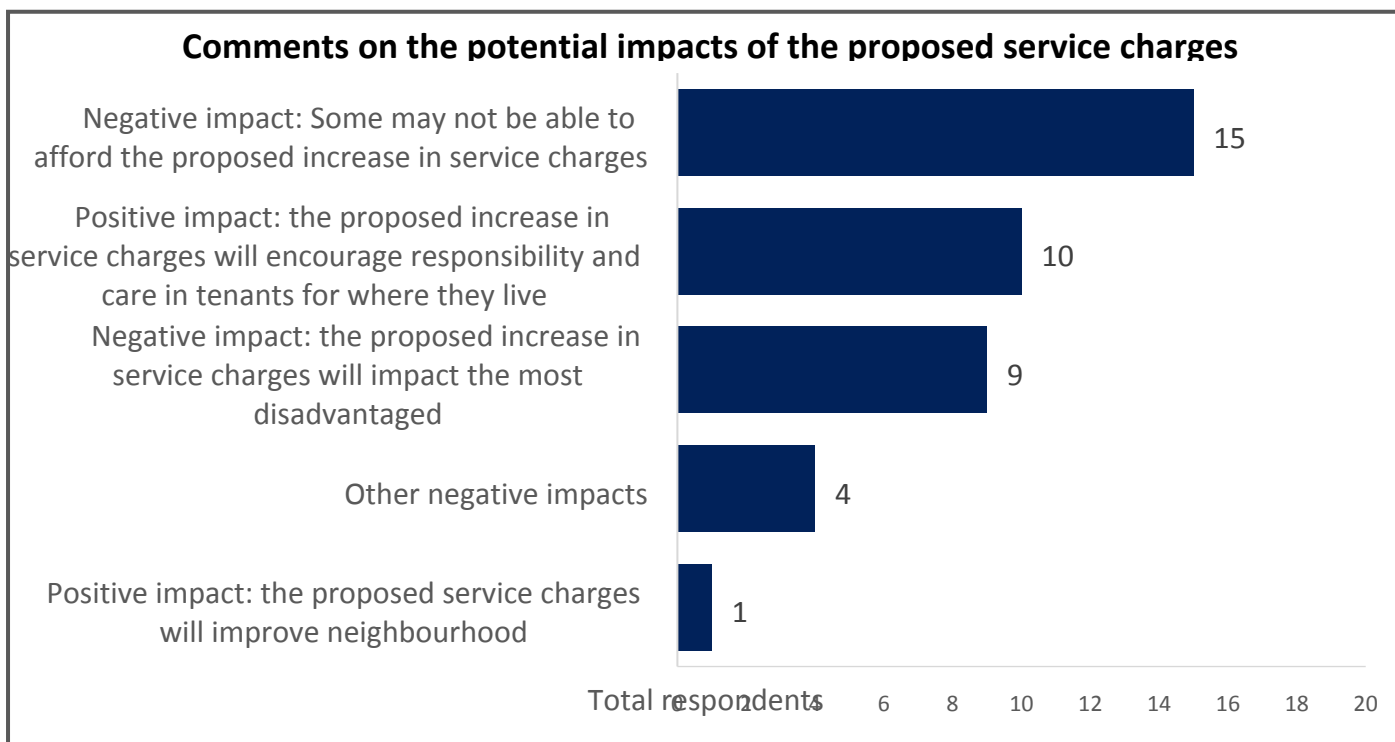


Figure 10

76. Overall, 15 respondents believe the proposed service charges may not be affordable to some tenants. The unique comments and suggestions relating to this are presented in the table below.

Negative impact: some may not be able to afford the proposed increase in service charges	
I am concerned about tenants on low to medium incomes being able to afford these charges.	
£8 a week more, best part of £400 a year! What are tenants supposed to do?	
For some this will just end up being covered for by benefits.	
Concerned for those tenants on benefits that may not be able to afford this.	

Table 11

77. A total of 10 respondents think the proposed service charge will encourage responsibility and care in tenants for where they live. The unique comments and suggestions relating to this are summarised in the table below.

Positive impact: the proposed increase in service charges will encourage responsibility and care in tenants for where they live	
If tenants have to pay more for services provided, then they may begin to value the provision more.	
If everyone has to pay then maybe everyone would take more care of their surroundings.	
If people had to pay for damage then perhaps they would rethink treating the area poorly.	

Make tenants responsible for litter.

Table 12

78. The proposed service charges impacting the most disadvantaged was mentioned by 9 people. The unique comments and suggestions regarding this are given in the table below.

Negative impact: the proposed increase in service charges will impact the most disadvantaged

These charges are taking money from those who can barely afford to survive.

The proposal is discriminating against the poorest and to mention a hardship fund is acknowledgement that the poorest will be hit.
--

Table 13

79. Other negative impacts were mentioned by 4 respondents. The unique comments and suggestions on this theme are detailed in the table below.

Other negative impacts

Charging for services (and repairs) will stop people reporting when things are not working and get others to fix it for cheaper and do a cowboy job.
--

The increase in charges will not help the tenants in anyway as it won't bring more wardens or more cleaners or better grass cutting, it will all go on just as before.
--

Table 14

80. One respondent said that the proposed service charges could potentially improve the neighbourhood. The unique comment for this theme is given below.

Positive impact: the proposed service charges will improve the neighbourhood

As long as the service being charged for is reliably delivered it should have a positive impact on the neighbourhood.

Table 15

Comments giving suggestions related to the proposed service charges

81. Figure 11 shows the themes of comments with suggestions related to the proposed service charges. The most frequently mentioned theme of comments was a suggestion to improve the current service provided (by 23 respondents). 12 respondents gave other suggestions of their own, more details of which can be found in table 18. Other suggestions mentioned by several respondents include: including some of the service charges within the rent (mentioned by 7 respondents); tenants becoming responsible for their flat blocks (mentioned by 6 respondents); and giving discounts or exemptions for those struggling financially (mentioned by 3 respondents).

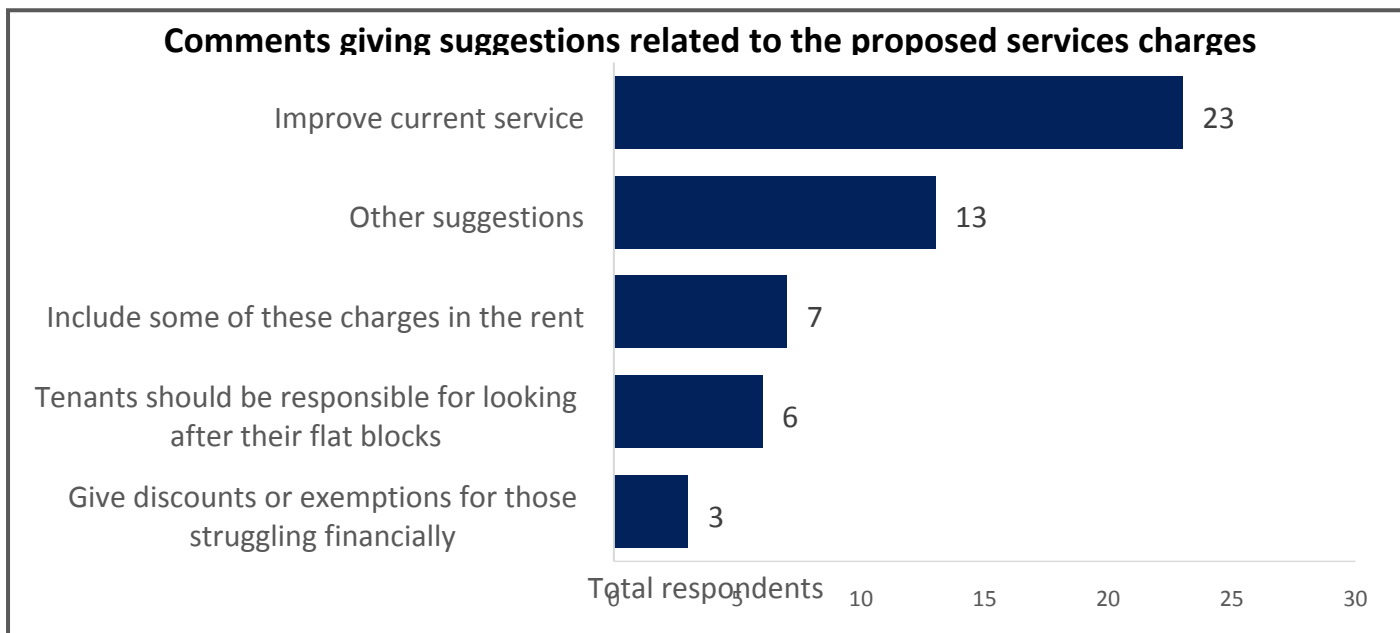


Figure 11

82. In total, 23 respondents suggested the current service should be improved. The unique comments and suggestions regarding this are given in the table below.

Improve the current service	
Improve current service before charging for it.	
Happy to pay more if this means an improvement in the service (e.g. more frequent cleaning of tower blocks).	
Services to improve: litter pick up; grass cutting; smell of cannabis in blocks; cleaning of block; more inspections, visits and responsibility taken by neighbourhood wardens; door access; TV aerials should be upgraded to allow SkyQ and aerial access to all bedrooms.	
We would like to see more rigorous enforcement of the Service Level Agreements including financial penalties when services are not up to scratch. This will mean that tenants either get a saving, or will have less issues paying for the service.	

Table 17

83. Overall, 12 respondents gave other suggestions related to the proposed service charges. The unique comments and suggestions relating to this are presented in the table below.

Other suggestions	
Charge businesses more tax instead.	
Have mobile cleaning teams with van and equipment to clean all estates.	
Charge everyone for these costs via council tax.	
Make flat areas including green spaces and bin stores more secure so only residents of blocks can access them.	
Conduct an investigation and review of the current service - why is so much being spent on such a poor service?	
Give a more comprehensive breakdown of service charges for leaseholders too.	
Find cheaper processes and contractors.	
Scrap cleaners - they don't do a good job and are not worth the cost.	
Charges should reflect cost of service only.	
Get rid of wardens and have more cleaners. The wardens don't do anything and are never seen.	
Cut down on the amount of emergency lighting and make them LED to save energy.	

Charges should be higher (e.g. charge more for TV aerial).
Charge for non-residential parking instead.
Service charges should be limited to make them affordable.

Table 18

84. The suggestion to include some of the proposed service charges in the rent was mentioned by 7 respondents. The unique comments and suggestions on this theme are detailed in the table below.

Include some of these charges in the rent
Emergency systems and lighting should be included in the rent.
Door entry systems should be included in the rent.
Some of these services are a landlord's responsibility so should be included in the rent.
These charges are part of the rent already so we should not be incurring extra charges.
All charges should come from rents (and this could then be spread across all council tenants).

Table 19

85. A total of 6 respondents suggested that tenants should be responsible for looking after their flat blocks. The unique comments and suggestions relating to this are summarised in the table below.

Tenants should be responsible for looking after their flat blocks
There are some services which could be encouraged by making tenants more responsible for where they live.
It might be useful to provide incentives for residents to volunteer to help with gardening/grounds maintenance in exchange for a reduced maintenance charge.
Tenants should be free to pay for their own maintenance.
Hand out fines for tenants that fly tip.

Table 20

86. The final suggestion given by 3 respondents was to give discounts or exemptions to the proposed service charges for those financially struggling. The unique comments and suggestions relating to this are presented in the table below.

Give discounts and exemptions for those struggling financially
Income based contribution to service charges.
Money off or no charge should be given to those in the most financial difficulty.

Table 21

Other comments related the proposed service charges

87. A further 4 respondents made other comments related to the proposed service charges that did not necessarily fit into the other broad categories of themes. The unique comment for this theme is given below.

Other comments related the proposed service charges
The cleaners and neighbourhood wardens do a fantastic job and do the work that no other departments do.
What's the point of paying for these services to clear up and care for the area when tenants won't care for it themselves?
Charge a fair price for repairs and improvements to properties.
We pay more council tax for less services but it goes up each year! We have parking charges coming soon too.

Table 22

Comments regarding the housing service in general

88. Comments about the overall housing service were made by 4 respondents. The unique comments for this are given below.

Comments about the overall housing service
Housing service is poor in general.
The contractors used to fix things by the council are extortionate.
The repairs service is poor.
Though the proposed charges are not for this service I believe it is symptomatic of the overall service that is on offer to tenants. God forbid a tenant wanting to actually speak to a member of staff at any of the local housing offices. Shutters down, posters saying do not knock on this door as you will not be seen without an appointment. Long term sickness and the inability to recruit new neighbourhood wardens/housing officers adds a poor service.

Table 23

Public engagements, meetings and verbal feedback

89. In total there were 4 separate public engagement events to support the consultation process. The details of the engagements are outlined below:

Date	Location	Number of attendees
20 November 2018	Weston Court	5
26 November 2018	Golden Grove (James Street Church)	3
30 November 2018	Thornhill Library	6
6 December 2018	Millbrook (Holy Family Church)	7

Table 24

90. In total 21 people engaged with this programme of events, made up of council tenants and leaseholders. The main purpose of these events was to explain the proposals, answer questions and signpost people towards the questionnaire as the main route for consultation feedback.

91. During the course of these events some feedback was gathered and the main themes were:

Disagreement with proposed service charges:

- There were concerns from some tenants that the Concierge and Neighbourhood Warden services were currently poor, and were concerned about paying more for a poor service.
- Some of the concerns raised about the concierge system were that they were not stopping non-tenants entering the building, particularly rough sleepers. And that they were very poor at following up any issues raised.
- The issues about Neighbourhood Wardens were that they were rarely seen.
- One person was unhappy about paying for safety checks for emergency lighting and felt this should be covered by all tenants in the city.
- Another tenant felt they should not have to pay for a communal door entry system, when they lived in a ground floor flat and did not use, or benefit from it.
- There were concerns from residents living in high rise flats in Thornhill about having to pay for maintenance of green spaces when their buildings curtilage didn't contained any green space.
- Some tenants questioning why we were now separating service charges from rent.

Suggestions related to the proposed service charges:

- There was an expectation from tenants that the introduction and increase of service charges should result in an improved service.

Feedback about the consultation process:

- Some tenants were seeking clarity on what service charges were.
- Supported Housing Tenants who already pay service charges were unclear about what services they were paying for and what the “management” cost included.

92. Many of these topics will have also been raised through other channels as a part of the consultation but in the interest of transparency they have also been summarised here.

Feedback on the consultation process

93. Southampton City Council are committed to make the whole consultation process as transparent and fair as possible. As a part of this commitment, any feedback on the consultation process itself received during the course of the consultation is gathered together here.

94. Overall, out of the 200 people or organisations who took part in the consultation, 7 commented on the consultation process itself.

95. The table below summarises the unique comments and suggestions given about the consultation process.

Comments on the consultation process	
Please clarify proposed service charges prices in pence in the table: per day, per week or other.	
Dates for when the results will be published should be given.	
Consultation does not clearly say which of the proposed services charges will be eligible for benefit support.	
This consultation is a tick-box exercise, the council will not listen.	
More should be done to promote this consultation (e.g. information on notice boards in walk up blocks).	
Provide more information about the proposed service charges and what they will include. (E.g. what will be included in the cleaning service; what will wardens be responsible for as this is biggest increase in cost; what will the garden/grounds maintenance service provide?).	

Table 25

Conclusion

96. Southampton City Council sought views on proposals for increasing service charges for tenants. The consultation ran for 12 weeks from 17 October 2018 to 16 January 2019.

97. As this report has demonstrated the consultation was extensively promoted throughout the period leading to good levels of engagement.

98. In total, there were 200 responses to this consultation. Of this, 182 responded to the consultation questionnaire and all other submissions were made via emails, letters or in a public meeting. This consultation ran parallel with the overall budget consultation and two other consultations on specific proposals.

99. All questionnaire results have been analysed and presented in graphs within the report. In addition all written responses to the consultation were read and comments assigned to a category based upon similar sentiment or theme and descriptions have been provided of each category within the report.

100. In conclusion, this consultation allows Cabinet to understand the views of residents and stakeholders on the proposals that have been consulted on. It represents the best possible summary and categorisation of all the feedback received through the consultation period. Therefore it provides a sound base alongside the other information to inform a final decision.

Part 2 – Consideration of the Consultation Feedback

Background

101. This proposal will increase the costs to tenants living in the council’s walk-up blocks and tower blocks across the city. Southampton City Council is a major landlord with around 18,000 council properties of these properties, over 16,000 are rented by tenants.

102. As a landlord, the council provides a range of services to tenants and leaseholders. These include block cleaning, concierge, heating, grounds and garden maintenance and other services. The council has legal powers to charge for these additional services so long as the charges are clear and transparent and represent the actual cost of the service.

103. The council needs to have a viable and sustainable Housing Revenue Account (HRA) that enables the council to deliver effective services, invest in its properties to ensure homes are of a modern standard, and to provide new social housing to rent. The council’s current service charges are lower than the actual costs and in some cases the council has not previously charged for services, but has been providing a service to tenants.

104. In addition, HRA has been impacted by the Government requirement introduce a reduction in rent of 1% in the 2019/2020 year (this is the last of a four year rent reduction of 1% each year).

105. As part of the consideration as to how that money could be found, service charges paid by tenants and leaseholders were considered and the decision made to consult on increasing current service charges, and introducing some new service charges. These amounts are not full cost recovery of that service but are a contribution towards the provision of that service.

Consultation considerations

106. A total of 62% of respondents expressed overall agreement with the principle of the council seeking to recover some of the cost of providing services.
107. In the consultation, respondents were asked what the impact of the proposed charges would have on them, their family or community if they were to be implemented. Nearly half (49%) of respondents felt the impact of these proposed charges would be negative.
108. Southampton City Council recognises that for some people, an increase in service charge will have a negative financial impact, which in turn could affect their health and wellbeing.
109. Approximately 10,000 tenants (out of a total of approximately 16,000 total) are currently in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, and therefore all or some of their rent and services charges are met by benefit payments. Tenants will be given information as to how to gain advice from local agencies such as the council's Homeless Prevention Team, Citizen Advice, Money Advice Service, StepChange, Money Matters, Age UK, and local relevant charitable/voluntary sector organisations.
110. The council intends to set up a discretionary relief fund if these proposals are approved to help those in most need to pay for all or part of the additional charges. This fund will assist the people and families in most need, and will enable them to transition to being able to pay for the additional charges, if the charges are not covered by Housing Benefit/Universal Credit or they are not entitled to these benefits.
111. Following consideration of the representations made in the consultation, the proposal is to increase service charges for tenants as proposed in the consultation and set out in the table below:

Service (all charges are weekly)	Walk-up block			Tower block		
	Current Charge	Proposed Charge 2019/20	Proposed Charge 2020/21	Current Charge	Proposed Charge 2019/20	Proposed Charge 2020/21
Existing Charge						
Cleaning	65p	72p	72p	-	-	-
Concierge	-	-	-	£1.24	£2.18	£2.73
Neighbour-hood Wardens				£5.12	£5.12	£5.12
TV Aerial (communal)	43p	43p	43p	43p	43p	43p

<i>New Service Charge</i>						
Neighbour-hood Wardens	-	54p	£1.45			
Test/Repair Emergency Lighting	-	27p	27p	-	27p	27p
Garden/ Grounds Maintenance	-	22p	22p	-	22p	22p
Door Entry	-	22p	22p	-	-	-
TOTAL	£1.08	£2.40	£3.31	£6.79	£8.22	£8.77