

Eat for Free consultation results

January 2021

Methodology and headline findings

A consultation on proposed changes to the Eat for Free programme was held between 17th December 2020 and 17th January 2021.

An online survey was available via the Newham Council website and an email address was available for comments. The consultation was promoted via a press release, social media and by asking primary schools to tell parents.

Four online focus groups and eight telephone interviews were held in the week beginning 18th January 2021. These are discussed in a separate analysis report.

Headline findings

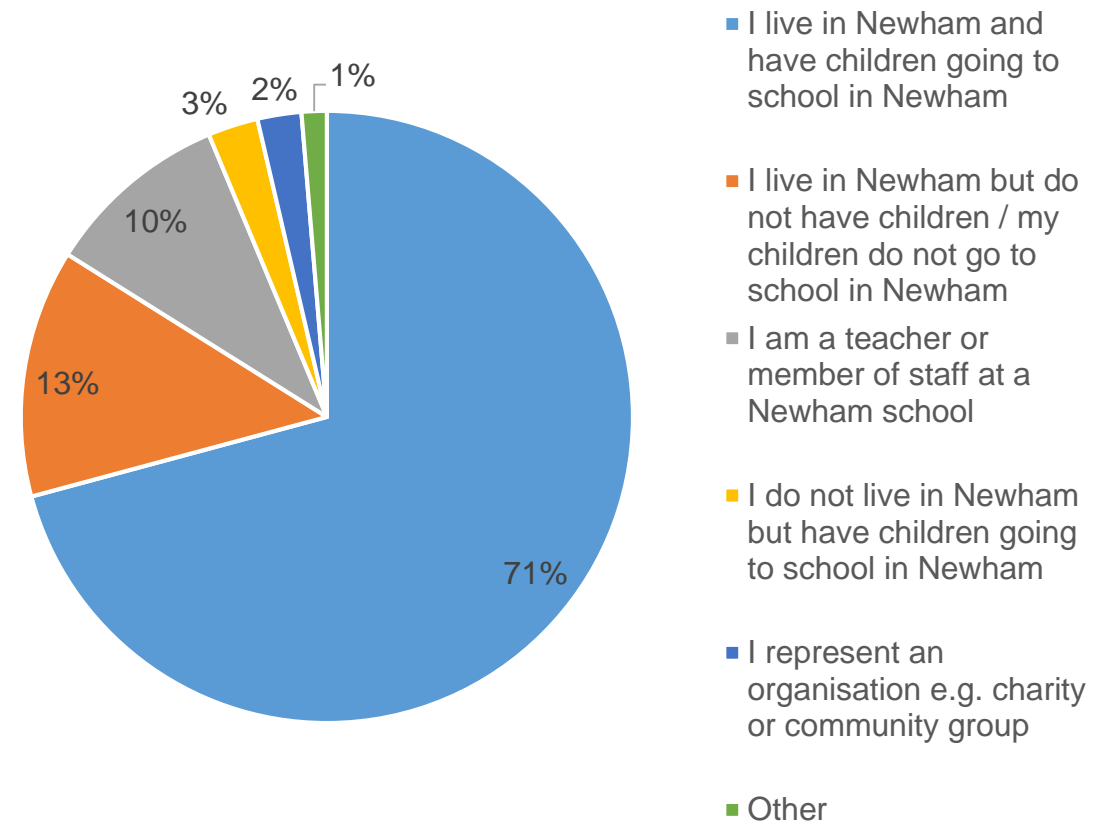
- 603 responses; **three quarters of respondents had a child in a Newham school**
- Half of parents who responded would not be eligible for statutory free schools meals; 45% are unsure how to apply for free school meals if they needed to
- **Over three-quarters** of respondents think the **council should provide free school meals for all pupils**, rather than means-tested free school meals or asking parents to pay for part of the cost of the school meal.
- A majority of respondents **disagree with any level of part-charging** for free school meals:
 - £0.60: **50% disagree**; 40% agree
 - £1.00: **64% disagree**; 27% agree
 - £1.42: **80% disagree**; 9% agree
 - More than £1.42: **87% disagree**; 7% agree
- Responses were more varied when asked if the council should charge out of borough pupils for school meals: whilst **46% of respondents disagreed, 40% agreed with the proposal**. However, **67% of teachers and school staff disagreed** with this proposal
- Only **around a third (31%)** of parent respondents said they would be likely to **make a voluntary contribution** towards school meals if asked
- Only **16%** of parents with children aged 7-10 would **choose a paid for school meal** if FSMs were removed
- Respondents are concerned these proposals would **impact families living on low incomes** who do not qualify for statutory FSMs and fear children could have **less healthy lunches**, impacting on **their education and their health**
- Suggestions for how to make savings included **voluntary contributions, reducing the cost** of school meals and asking for **private sector support**

Three quarters of respondents have children in Newham schools

Three quarters of respondents have a child in a Newham school (71% are Newham residents; 3% do not live in Newham)

Around a tenth of respondents were Newham residents without children or children not in Newham schools, and a further tenth were teachers or school staff

The remaining respondents were responding on behalf of an organisation, worked in the catering service or were school governors.

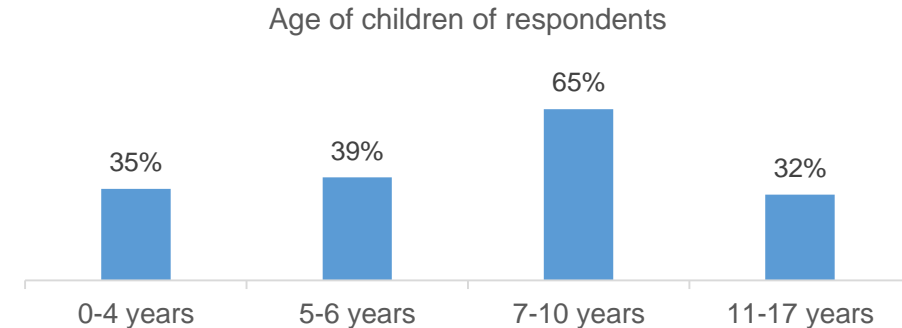


Question asked: Q1. Which of these best describes you? I live in Newham and have children going to school in Newham; I do not live in Newham but have children going to school in Newham; I live in Newham but do not have children / my children do not go to school in Newham; I represent an organisation e.g. charity or community group; I am a teacher or member of staff at a Newham school; Other (N= 603)

Half of parents who responded would not be eligible for statutory free schools meals; 45% are unsure how to apply for free school meals

Parents with children in Newham schools were asked how old their children were:

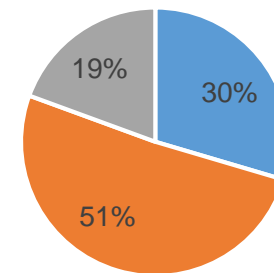
- **65% had children aged 7-10 years:** these are the children who would be affected by the proposed changes
- 39% had children aged 5-6 years
- 35% had children aged 0-4 years
- 32% had children aged 11-17 years



Half of parents said their child would not be eligible for statutory free school meals, but a fifth were unsure if they would be.

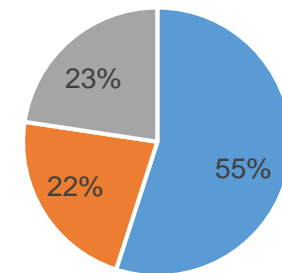
When asked if they would know **how to apply for FSMs** if they needed to, **45% of parents said no or not sure.**

Would your child be eligible for statutory FSMs?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

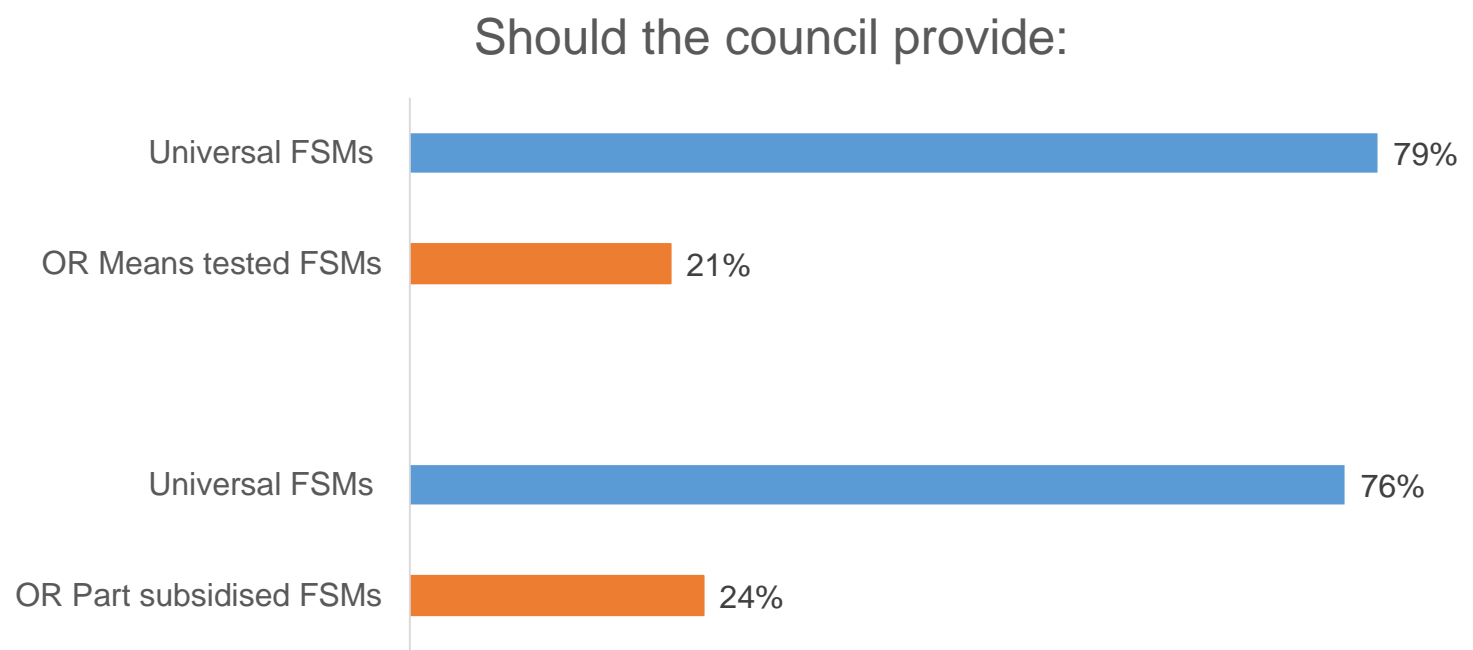
Would you know how to apply for FSMs?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

Respondents generally support the council providing universal free school meals

Over three-quarters of respondents think the **council should provide free school meals for all pupils**, rather than means-tested free school meals or asking parents to pay for part of cost of the school meal



Teachers and school staff were more likely to agree with means-testing or part-subsidised meals:

- 33%** thought the council should means-test for meals rather than provide universal FSM
- 43%** thought the council should part-subsidise meals rather than provide universal FSMs

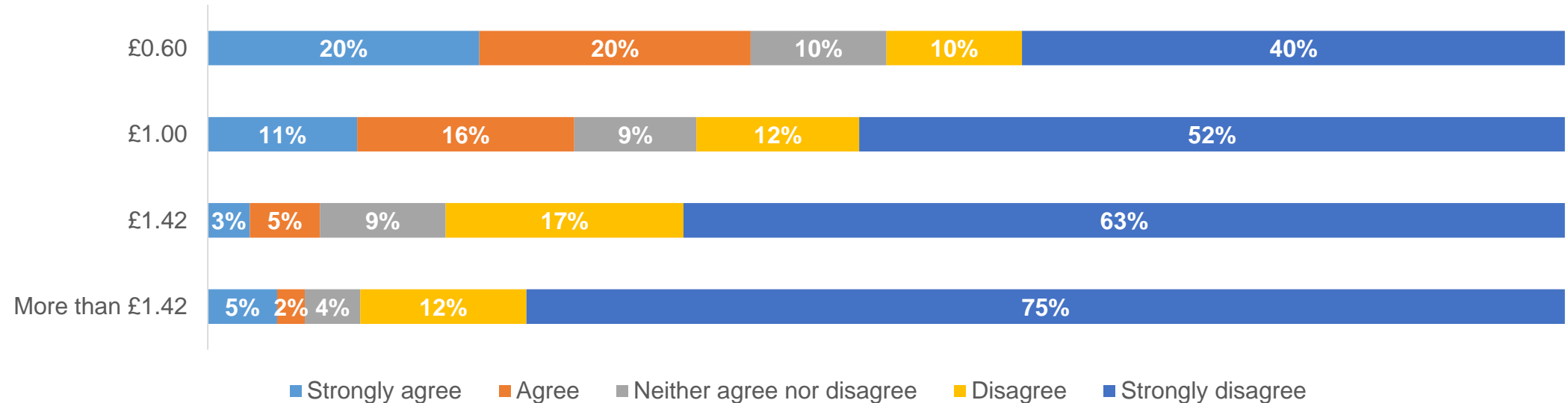
Questions asked: There are different ways the council can support pupils in our schools regarding food, and there are choices about how best to target the support. We want to know what you think about these different ways to target support. For each of the below, please choose which option you think the council should do. Q6. Should the council: provide free school meals to all children, or provide means-tested free school meals, meaning pupils in lower income families receive free school meals and other pupils pay for them? (N= 570) Q7. Should the council: provide free school meals to all children or split the cost of school meals with parents, meaning the council pays part of the cost and parents pay the rest? (N= 523)

A majority of respondents disagree with any level of part-charging for free school meals

All respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with different levels of payment, if school meals were part-subsidised (not affecting pupils who are eligible for statutory FSMs).

There is a clear gradient in disagreement as the suggested cost increases: **50% of respondents disagree with charging 60p per meal**, increasing to **87% of respondents disagreeing with charging more than £1.42 per meal**

How strongly do you agree or disagree with part-charging parents per meal...?

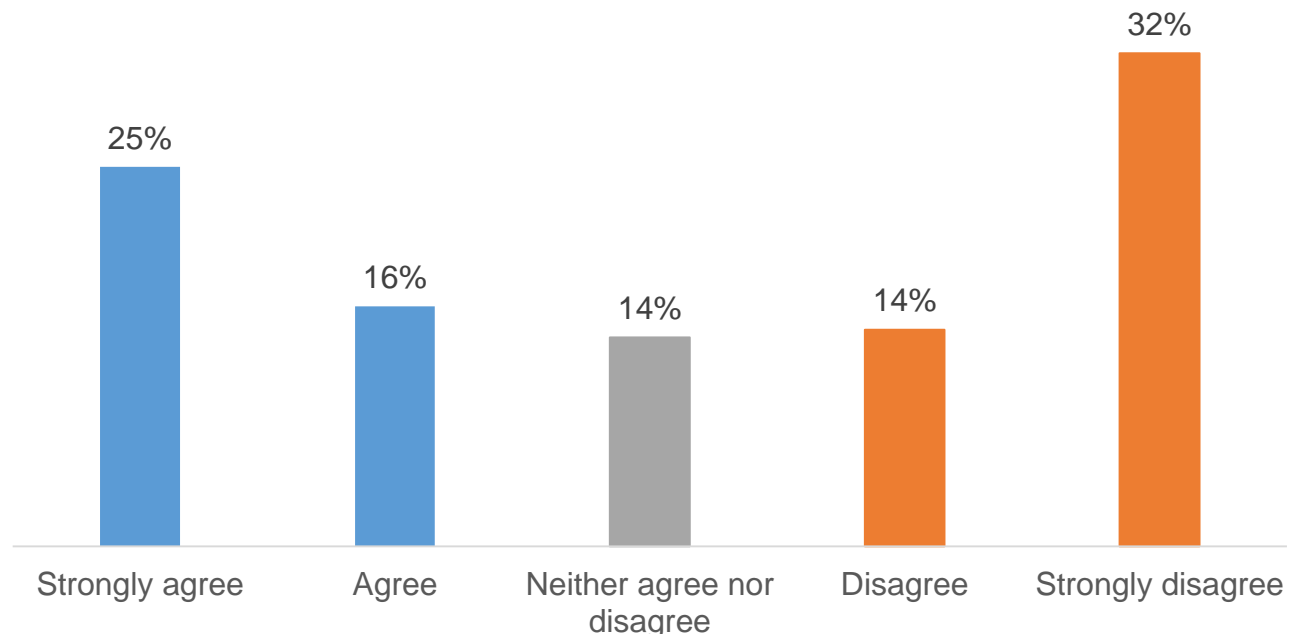


Questions asked: Q8a. How strongly do you agree or disagree with part-charging parents... £0.60 per meal? (N=569): Q8b. How strongly do you agree or disagree with part-charging parents... £1 per meal? (N=550): Q8c. How strongly do you agree or disagree with part-charging parents... £1.42 per meal? (N=538): Q8d. How strongly do you agree or disagree with part-charging parents...more than £1.42 per meal? (N=543) Answer options: Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree

Responses were more varied when asked if the council should charge out of borough pupils for school meals

All respondents were asked how strongly they agree or disagree with **charging pupils who live outside of Newham** for school meals (unless they are eligible for statutory free school meals). Views were less clear on this proposal: whilst **46% of respondents disagreed, 40% agreed with the proposal**

Charging pupils who do not live in Newham



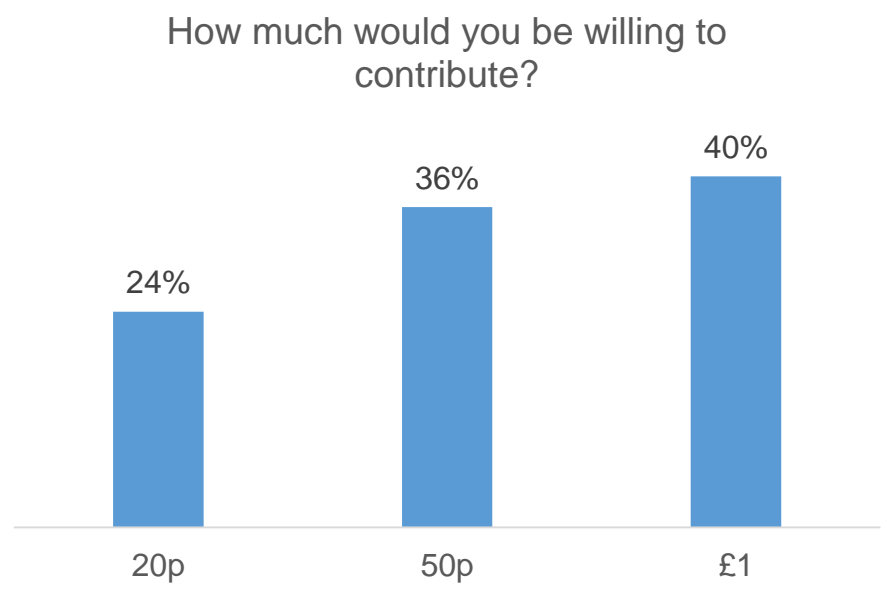
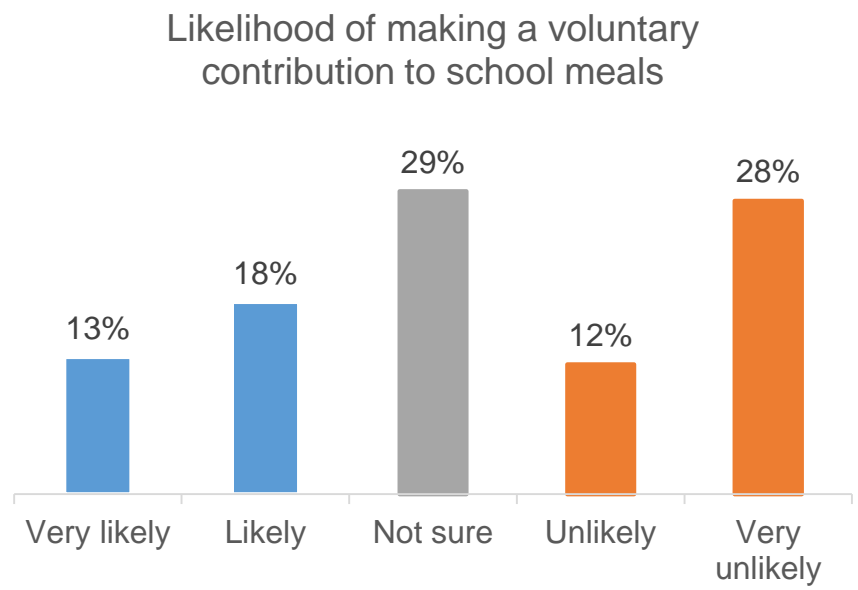
Teachers and school staff were significantly more likely to disagree with the proposal to charge out-of-borough pupils: 67% disagreed, compared to 46% of all respondents

Question asked: Q9. Eat for Free is funded by residents who live in Newham and pay Council Tax in Newham. This proposal would mean that children in Years 3-6 that do not live in Newham would have to pay for school meals, unless they are eligible for benefits related Free School Meals. This is currently around 650 pupils and would save around £300,000 annually. How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal? Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree (N=596)

Only around a third of parent respondents said they would be likely to make a voluntary contribution towards school meals

Parents were asked how likely they would be to **make a voluntary contribution towards school meals**, in order to support families who were less able to pay. Just under **a third of respondents** said they **were likely** to do this.

These parents were then asked **how much they would be willing to pay**: **three quarters** were willing to pay **50p or more**

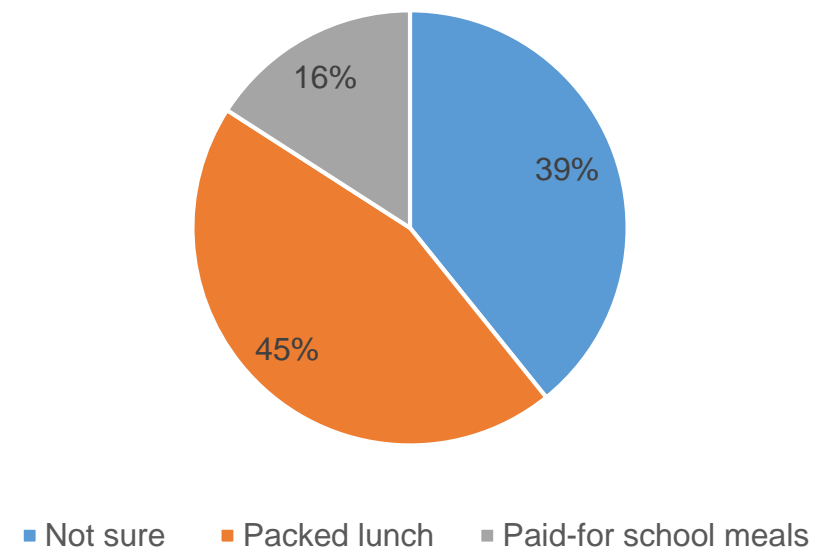


Questions asked: Q10. If the council asked you to make a voluntary contribution towards the cost of school meals, in order to support other families less able to pay for meals, how likely would you be to do this? Very likely, likely, not sure, unlikely, very unlikely (N=439): Q11. [If Q10= very likely/likely] How much would you be willing to contribute? 20p, 50p, £1 (N=144)

Only 16% of parents with children aged 7-10 would choose a paid for school meal if FSMs were removed

Respondents with children aged 7-10 years – i.e. the children that would be affected by these proposals – were asked what kind of lunch they would choose if universal free school meals were no longer offered. Only 16% would continue with paid-for school meals.

If universal FSMs weren't available, would your child take paid for school meals or a packed lunch?



Respondents are concerned these proposals would impact families living on low incomes who do not qualify for statutory FSMs

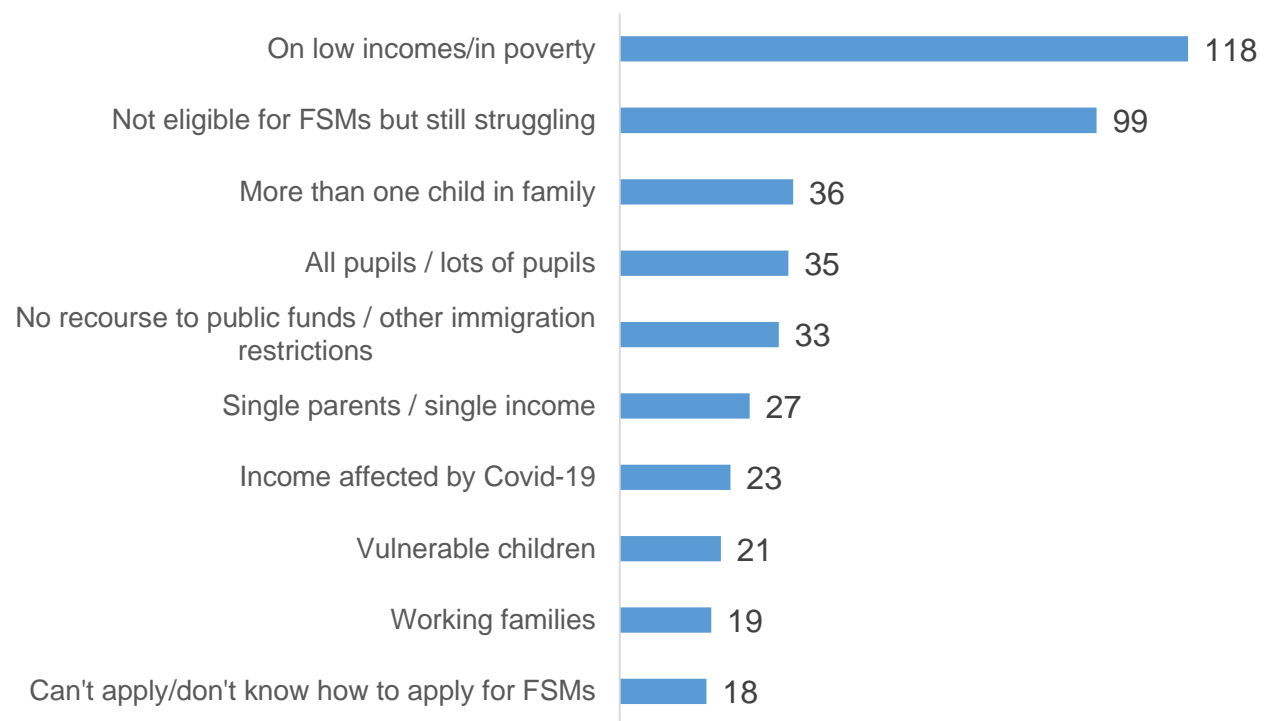
Respondents were asked what groups would be impacted if the council reduced our free school meal offer: the top ten responses are presented in the chart (full list in appendix).

There was concern about families on low incomes, particularly families who are not eligible for statutory free school meals but would struggle to pay.

It was also highlighted that larger families could struggle, families with only one incomes and families who have had their income affected by Covid-19.

There was also concern about families with no recourse to public funds and those who would struggle to apply for statutory free school meals.

Who would be impacted by proposals?



“Children of parents with No Recourse to Public Funds. Children of parents who cannot figure out the paperwork to apply because of literacy, digital skills, language. The most destitute and marginalised children will suffer as ever.”

“Families who don't qualify for free school meals but have a large number of children in primary education. This would be a big, sudden change in weekly costs and might be an unmanageable burden.”

“Food Poverty is a major issue in Newham and the number of families experiencing financial difficulties has increased significantly and is likely to continue to increase as economic conditions worsen.”

Questions asked: Q13. Can you think of any groups of people that would be impacted if the council reduced our free school meal offer? Please tell us who you think could be impacted and what these impacts could be. (N=337) Top ten answers presented: full list available in appendix

Respondents thought children could have less healthy lunches which could impact on their education and their health

Respondents were also asked what impact the proposals could have. There is concern that children may have less healthy lunches, with some highlighting some parents will not have time to prepare a good packed lunch.

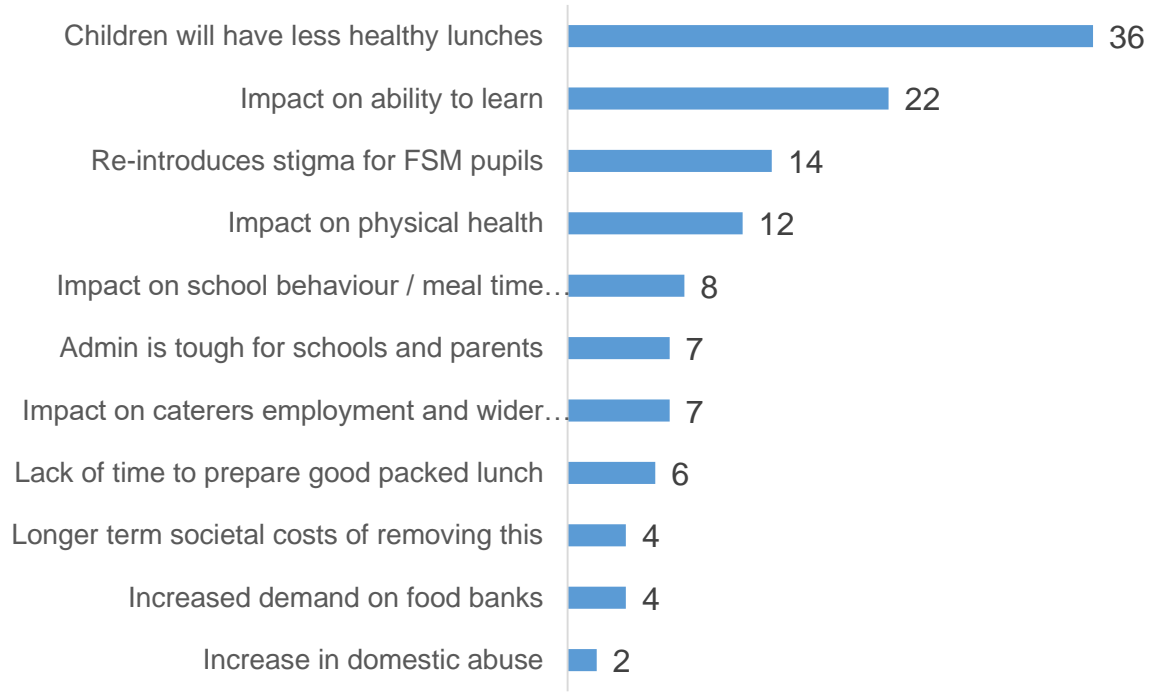
There were also concerns about impact on a child’s ability to learn, their physical health and their behaviour.

Some respondents also felt this could re-introduce a stigma around FSMs.

Others highlighted the increase in admin for school and parents, and the potential impact on employment if demand for school meals reduces.

A small number also highlighted wider impacts: a longer term societal cost; increased demand on food banks; increase in domestic abuse.

Impact of proposals



“As a parent and teacher I know the importance and impact decent food has on children and in their concentration towards learning, I am concerned about the food students would be bringing to school and how balanced their diet would be. There are parents who struggle with providing healthy meals both at home and for school.”

“I have always admired Newham council for making it a priority to feed our children. A well nourished child will be better behaved and have the mental and physical ability to concentrate and apply themselves at school.”

“Free school meals for all pupils is an amazing approach, and helps destigmatise free school meals. I believe that removing this and only providing free meals by means testing would create unnecessary divisions between children.”

Respondents also highlighted this could be the only hot meal a child gets, and these proposals are badly timed

- Respondents also made some wider comments in response to this question:
 - School meal could be the only hot meal a child gets (26 respondents)
 - This is bad timing by the council, with parking charges being introduced, Council Tax increasing and the impact of Covid-19 (15 respondents)
 - Suggestion that Newham should introduce a bespoke means testing system so that those who can afford pay towards meals (13 respondents)
 - Children should not be impacted by budget cuts (8 respondents)

Suggestions for how to make savings included voluntary contributions, reducing the cost of school meals and asking for private sector support

Respondents were asked if they had any suggestions about how the council could make savings. This slide presents the responses which relate to school meals.

The most common response was to say these proposals should not be introduced, with some respondents stating the savings should be found somewhere else.

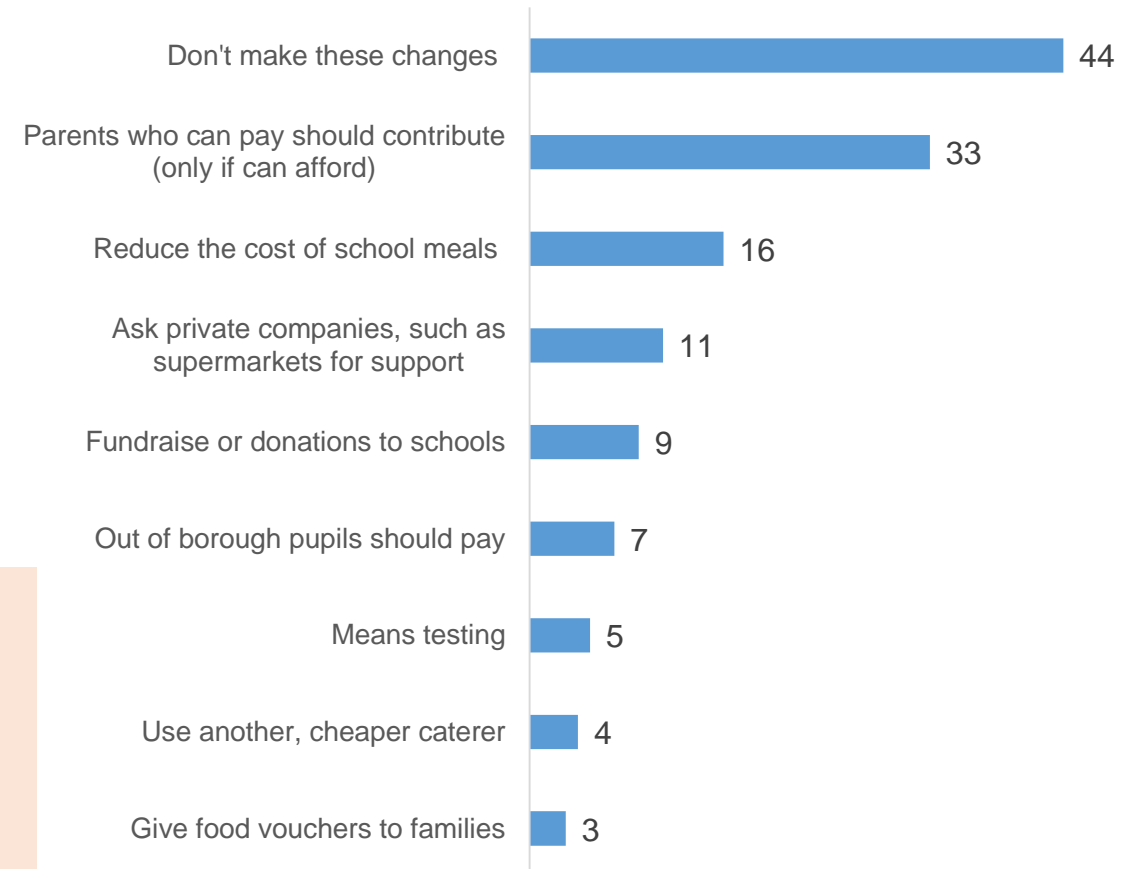
Some respondents stated their support for some aspects of the proposals e.g. asking parents to contribute if they can afford to, using means testing or charging out-of-borough pupils. Other suggested school should fundraise to pay for meals.

Others suggested ways to reduce the cost of the programme. This included reducing the cost of meals (e.g. fewer options available, reducing food waste); asking private companies such as supermarkets for support or by finding a new, cheaper caterer.

“I strongly support voluntary contributions from parents who can afford it (myself included). I would prefer this over your proposal of means testing, as we know that this system does not catch everyone who needs a free school meal.”

“For the amount of savings proposed it would be hugely disappointing to make this through cutting children's provisions. You could make this saving elsewhere or even ask for private sector sponsorship. I am certain this would be a cause many local organisations or even national ones would support”

Suggestions for savings- school meal related



Respondents suggested the council becomes more efficient, including staffing and how we use our buildings, to make savings

Respondents also made suggestions about other parts of the council.

Respondents suggested the council needed to be more efficient in spending across all departments, including reviewing staff pay and the number of staff employed by the council, and improving asset management.

Some respondents suggested the council generates more revenue e.g. by increasing business rates and fines for fly-tipping.

Respondents brought up roads and parking but there were differences in views: whilst some respondents wanted to see increases in charging for parking and emissions, others said road management projects were a waste of money.

Other suggestions were to stop free events such as firework displays and increasing council tax.

Again, some respondents re-iterated that these proposals have come at a bad time because of Covid-19.

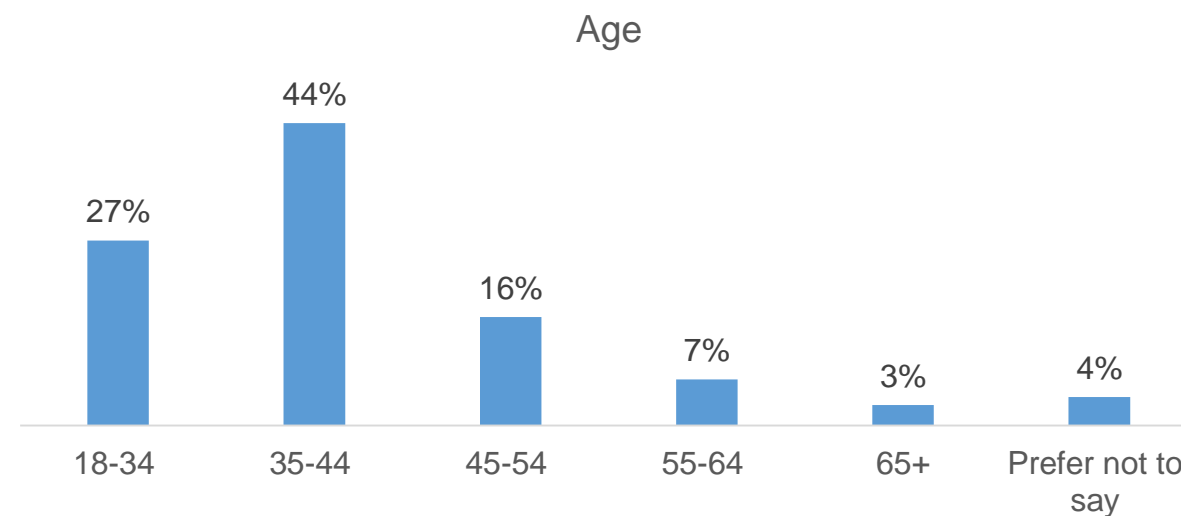
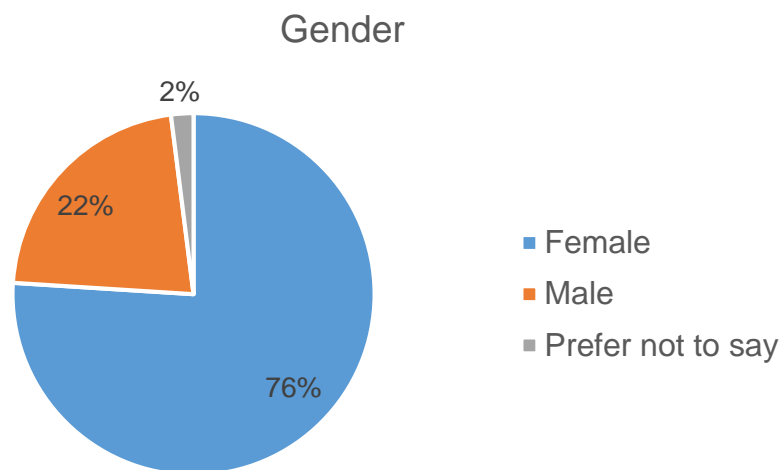
“Cut costs on unnecessary spending in your organisation would save you millions but don’t try to cut costs on school meals. Find a better supplier for food costs and support local businesses.... If you want to make a saving looking at all your other spending. Food is a necessity everyone needs to eat.”

“Yes by getting rid of staff not needed and wasting money on non newham residents... cancel the newham magazine too and strip councillors of pay. Pay cuts to high earners.”

Suggestions for savings

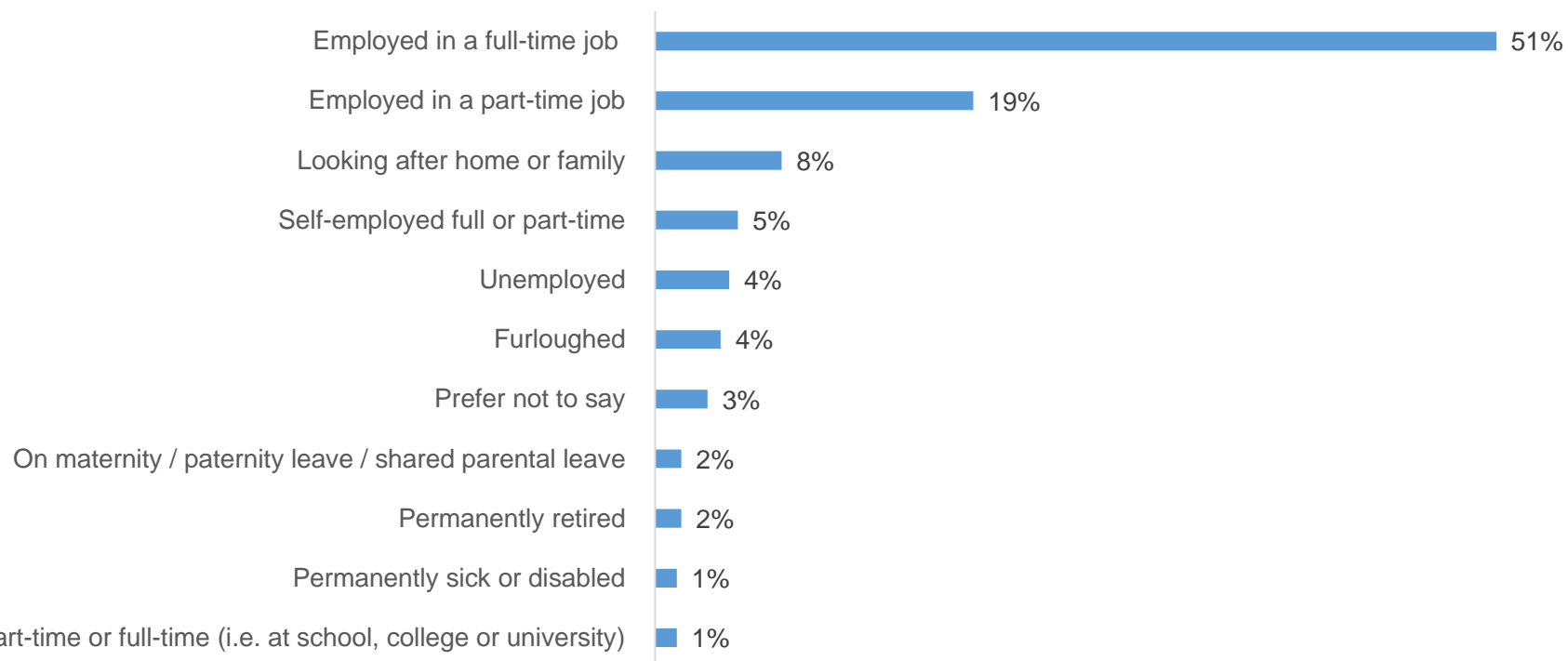


Appendix: Demographics of respondents (1)

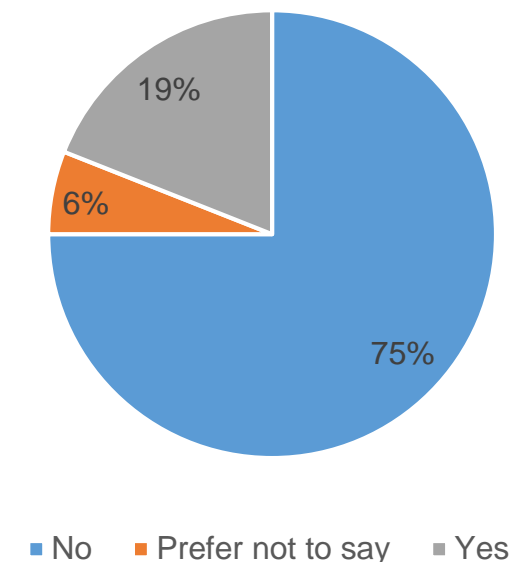


Appendix: Demographics of respondents (2)

Economic activity

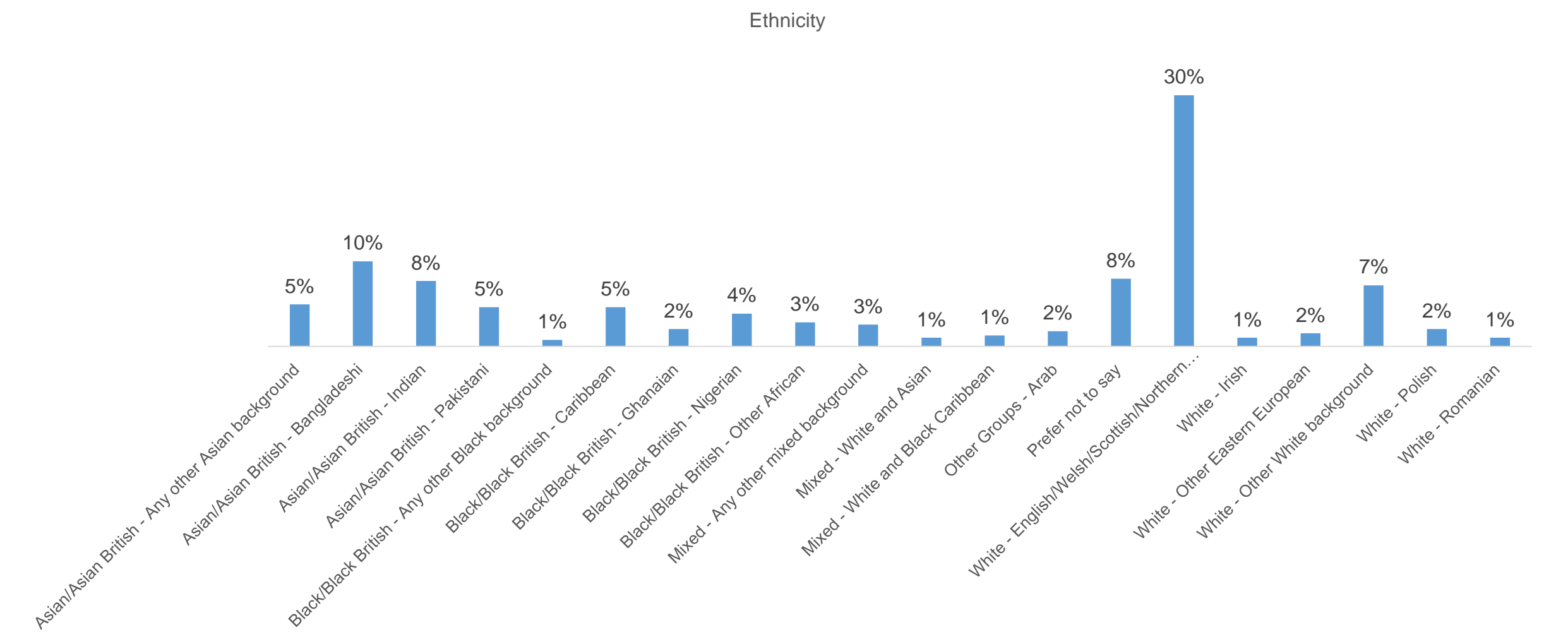


Carer



Questions asked: Q21. Which of these activities best describes what you are doing at present? (N= 380) Q22. Is there anyone who is sick, disabled or elderly whom you look after or give special help or assistance to (for example, a sick, disabled or elderly relative/husband/wife/friend etc.)? (N=385)

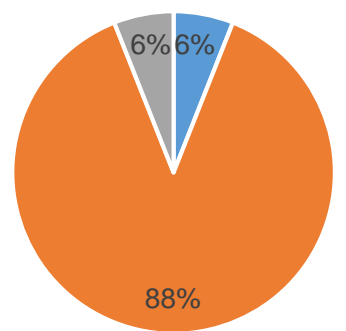
Appendix: Demographics of respondents (3)



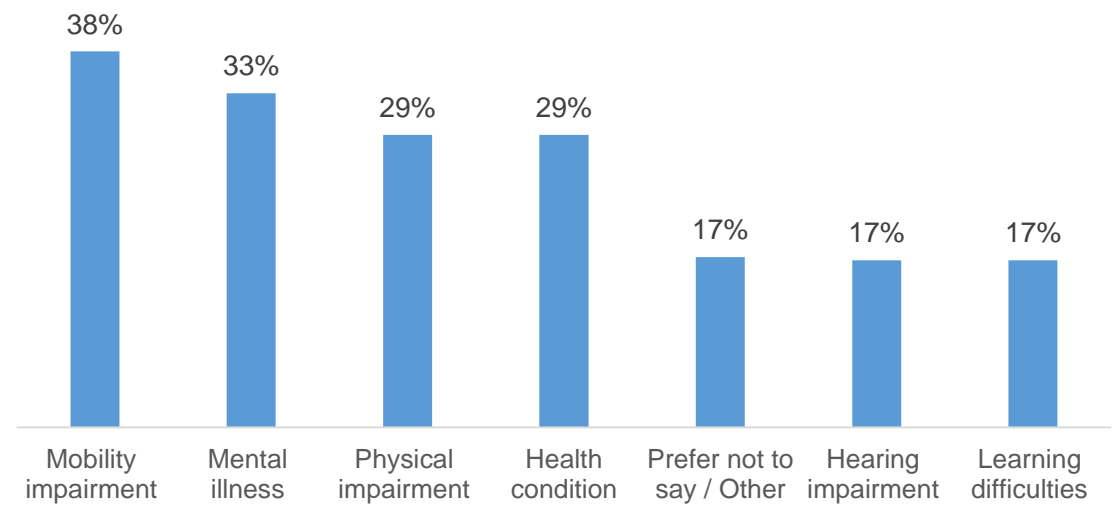
Questions asked: Q25. How would you describe your ethnic origin? (N=385)

Appendix: Demographics of respondents (4)

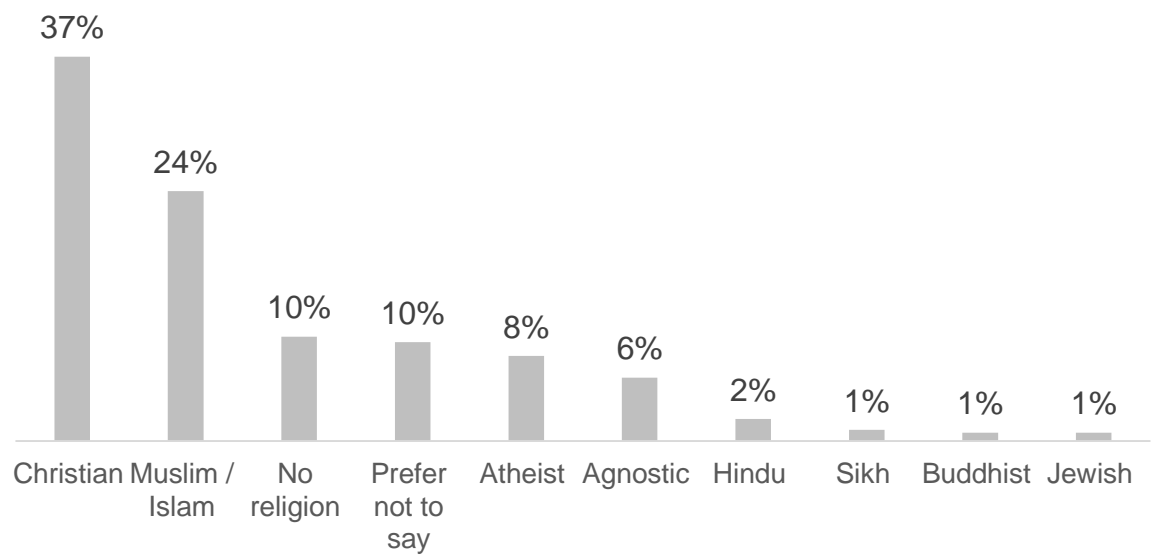
Disability
 ■ Yes ■ No ■ Prefer not to say



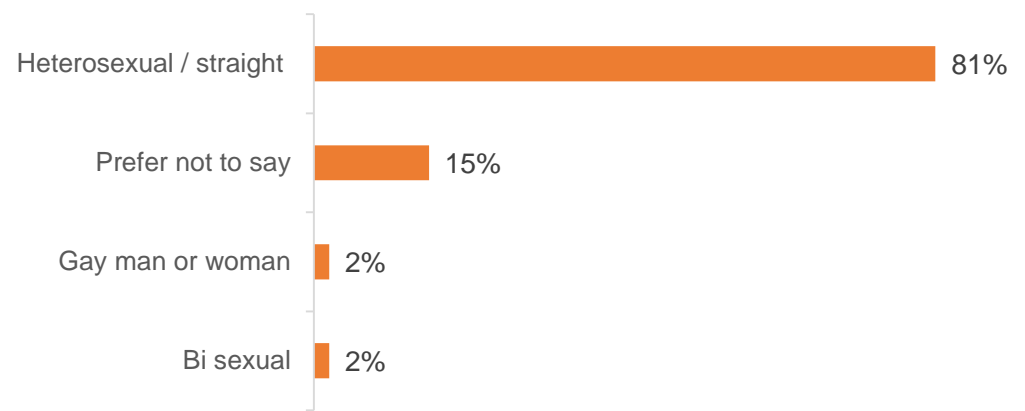
Type of disability



Religion



Sexual orientation



Questions asked: Q23. Do you consider yourself to have a disability? (N=386): Q24. [If Q23 = yes] Which of the following best describes your disability? (N= 24): Q26 What is your sexual orientation? (N=375): Q27 How would you describe your religion or beliefs? (N=377)

Appendix: Full responses to Q13: Can you think of any groups of people that would be impacted if the council reduced our free school meal offer? Please tell us who you think could be impacted and what these impacts could be (N=337)

