

1 Housing Strategy Consultation Report

1.1. The consultation exercise was undertaken for 6 weeks, from 24 October to 5 December 2022. Details of the consultation were sent to the following groups and platforms, (including potential reach):

1. Torbay Housing Development Partnership (27)
2. Devon Home Choice applicants (1,600)
3. Living Options
4. Elected members (briefing)
5. Households in temporary accommodation (160)
6. Neighbourhood forums - Planning
7. Senior Voice of Devon
8. Town Councils: Brixham, Paignton, Torquay (press release distribution list)
9. Torbay Strategic Housing Board (32)
10. Housing associations: newsletters to tenants etc (press release distribution list)
11. Schools and colleges (also asking to share with parents)
12. Local businesses, via Torbay Development Agency (including the Black and Minority Ethnic Network)
13. Local churches and other faith organisations (press release distribution list)
14. Torbay Community Development Trust (press release distribution list)
15. Community Partnerships (press release distribution list)
16. Ward councillors
17. Riviera Business Improvement Districts
18. Public sector partners such as the local NHS, Devon and Cornwall Police, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue and a range of others (press release distribution list)
19. Voluntary sector partners (press release distribution list)
20. Administrators of local Facebook groups and pages
21. Devon Equality Network
22. Churston, Galmpton and Broadsands Neighbourhood Forum
23. Sports clubs (press release distribution list)
24. Torbay Council, TDA and SWISCo staff (917)
25. Local environmental groups (press release distribution list)
26. Harbours
27. Devon Communities (press release distribution list)
28. Food safety - business support (5,358)
29. One Torbay newsletter (9,223)
30. Facebook (12K followers)
31. Twitter (12.8k followers)

Both the Local Plan Update and the Housing Strategy were out to consultation at the same time and consultees were encouraged to undertake both.

- 1.2. 186 people took part in the main survey (58% female, 38% male), from which we received 292 comments and suggestions. 10 people took part in the longer, more in depth supplementary survey for housing stakeholders.
- 1.3. The majority of respondents (79%) were over 45 years of age. Of these 74% owned their own home, 12% rented privately and 8% rented from a social landlord. The remaining 6% were either in temporary accommodation or staying with friends/family.
- 1.4. The online survey results generally demonstrate an endorsement of the Strategy's three priorities and the three cross-cutting principles, which support the Council's ambition to 'improve the delivery, affordability and quality of housing' (Community and Corporate Plan 2019-2023)
- 1.5. Percentage of respondents who 'strongly agree and agree' for each priority and principle:
- | | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| 1. Improve housing supply | 71% |
| 2. Improve housing quality | 84% |
| 3. Improve housing support | 69% |
| 4. Put the customer first | 76% |
| 5. Tackle climate change | 65% |
| 6. Work in partnership | 64% |
- 1.6. For more detail, please see the 'Survey Response Report', pages 3 to 18

Housing Strategy survey

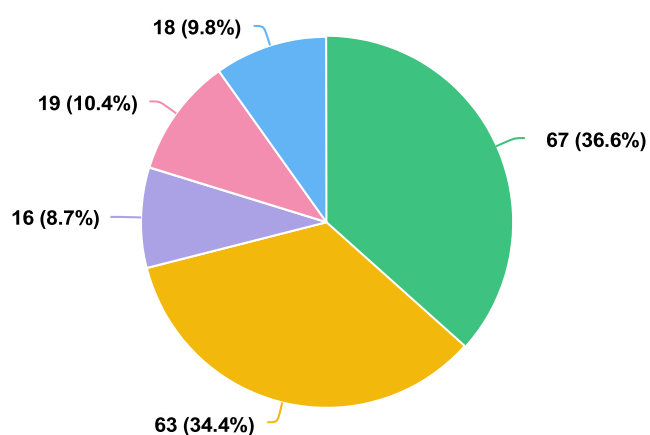
SURVEY RESPONSE REPORT

24 October 2022 - 05 December 2022

PROJECT NAME:

Have your say on our new Housing Strategy

Q1 The Strategy's first priority is to 'improve housing supply'. Do you agree with this priority?



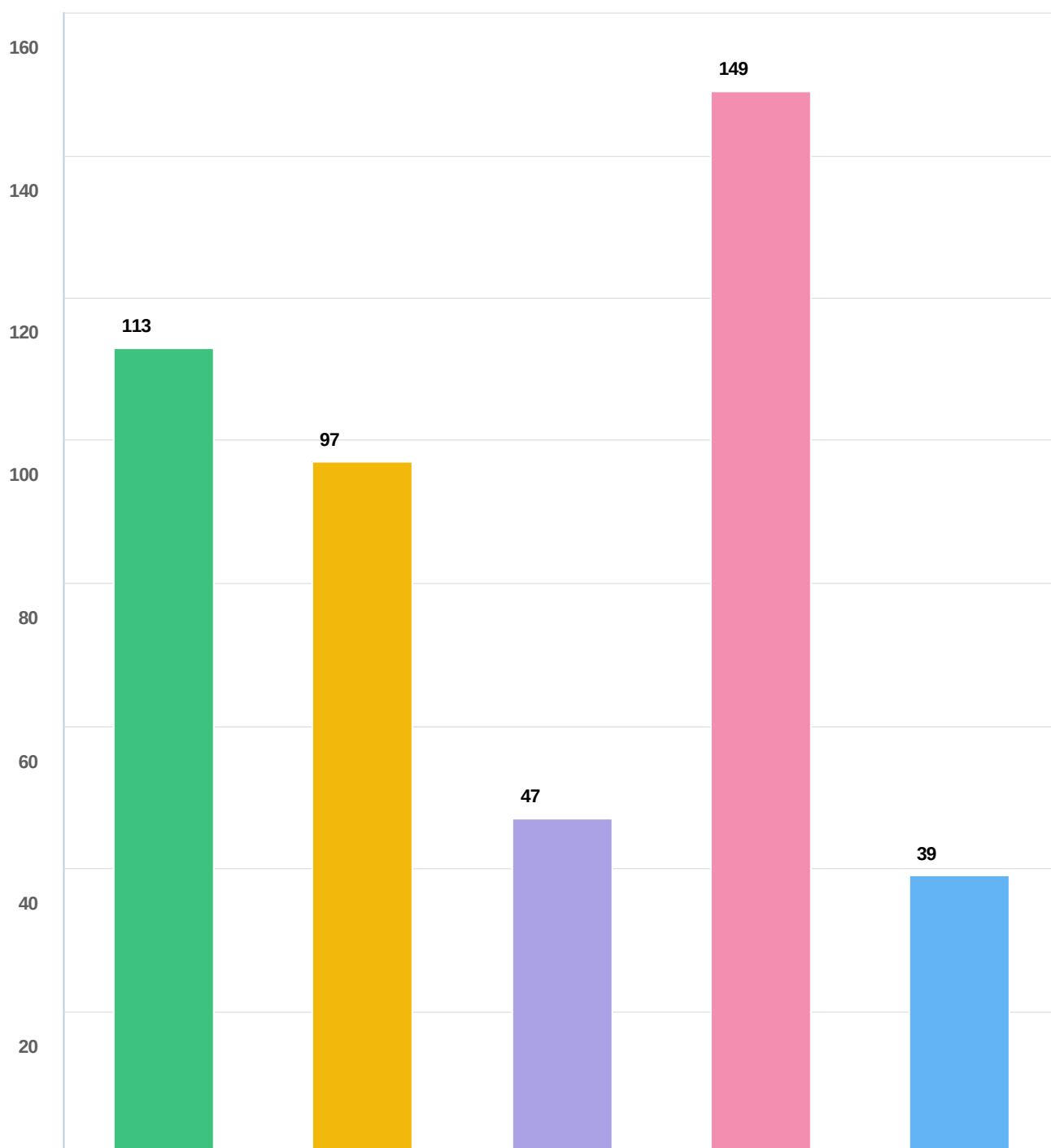
Question options

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree, or disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree

Optional question (182 response(s), 4 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

Q2 Under this priority we have identified 4 key actions. With which of the following do you agree with? You can choose as many as you want.



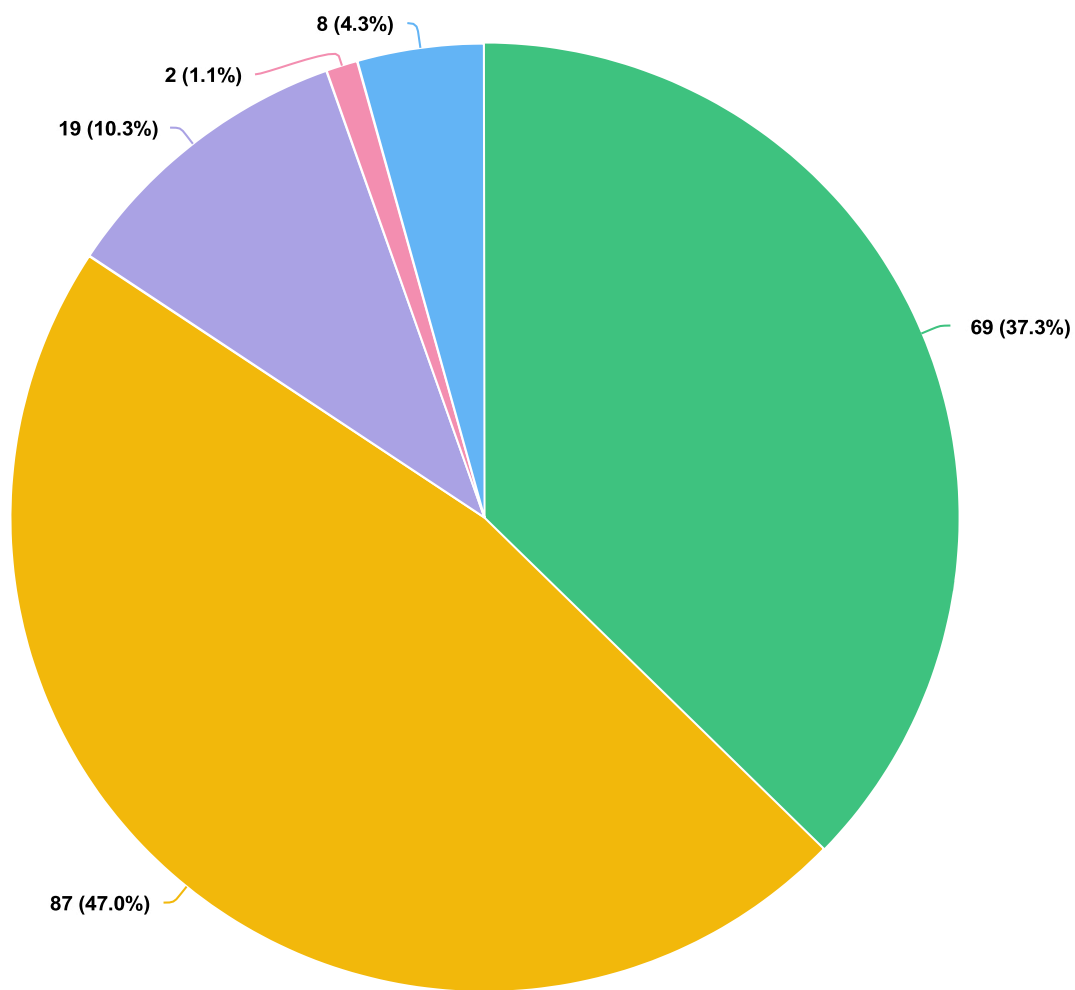
Question options

- ☒ Build affordable homes for rent ☒ Build homes for low-cost ownership ☐ Build and acquire innovative and specialist homes ☒ Make better use of our housing stock ☐ Other priority, please say:

Optional question (184 response(s), 2 skipped)

Question type: Checkbox Question

Q3 The Strategy's second priority is to 'improve housing quality'. Do you agree with this priority?



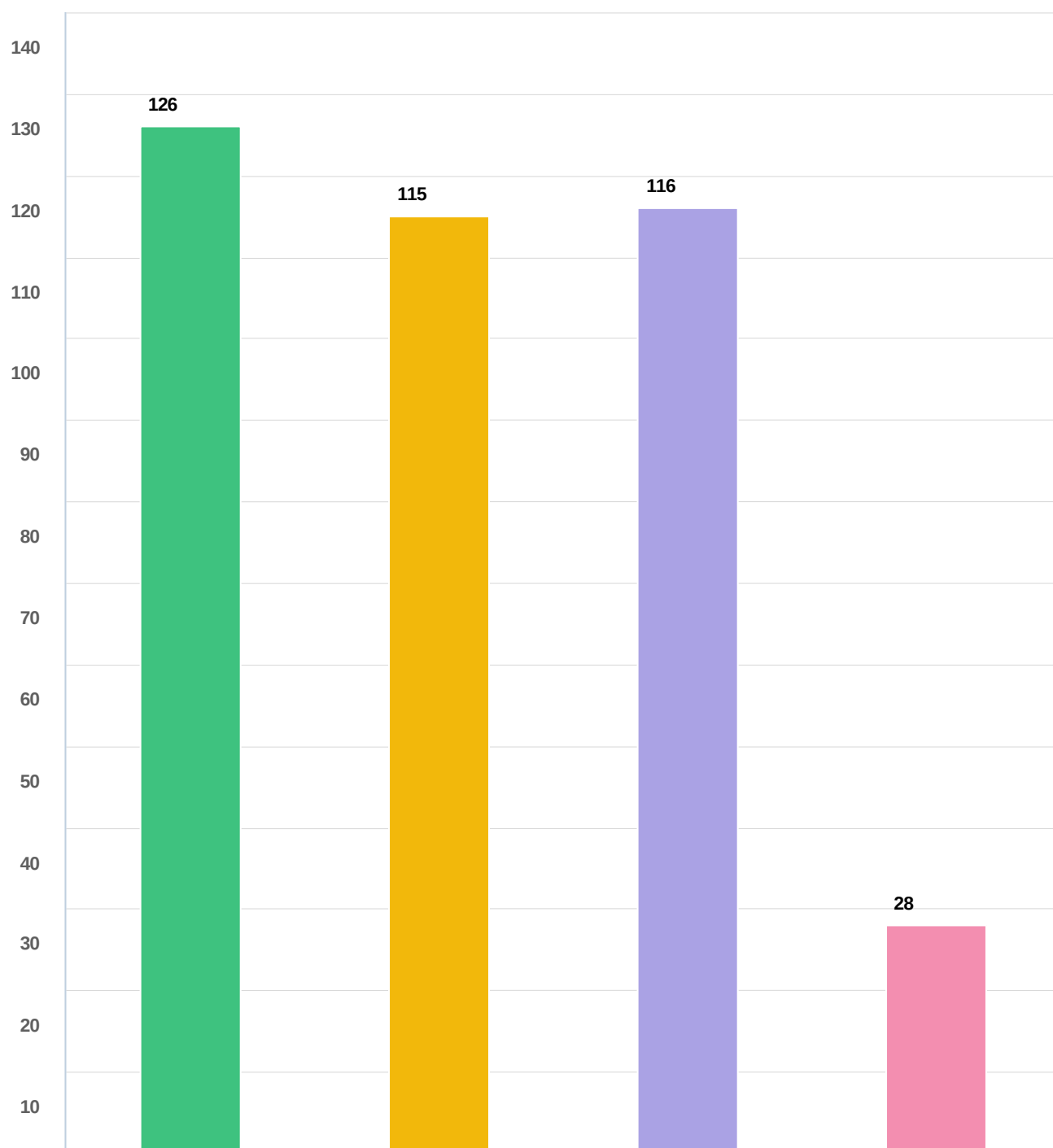
Question options

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree, or disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree

Optional question (184 response(s), 2 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

Q4 Under this priority we have identified 3 key actions. Which of the actions do you agree with? You can choose as many as you want.



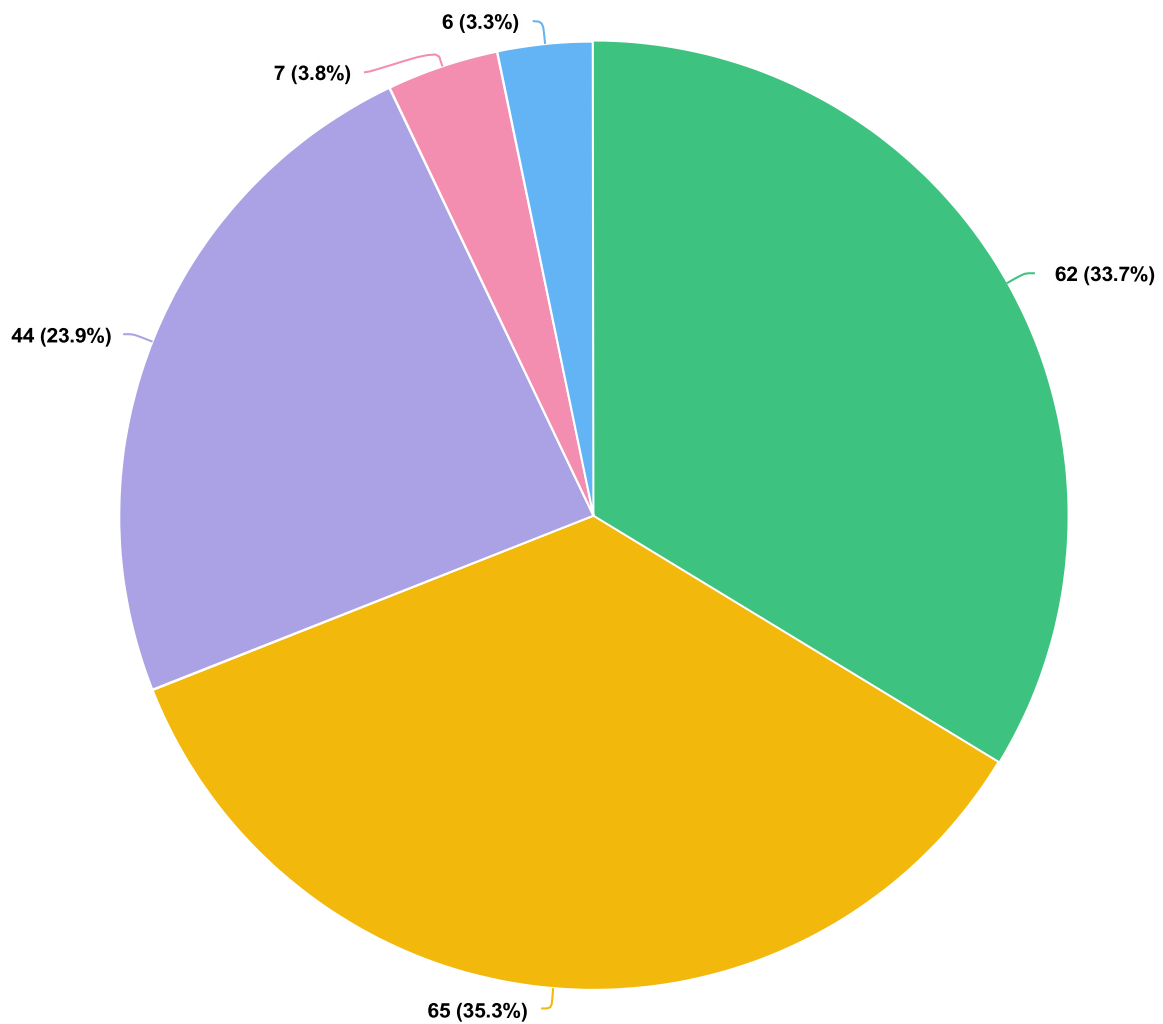
Question options

- ☒ Tackle conditions in the private rented sector ☒ Improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty
☒ Keep people independent at home ☒ Other priority, please say:

Optional question (183 response(s), 3 skipped)

Question type: Checkbox Question

Q5 | The Strategy's third priority is to 'improve housing support'. Do you agree with this priority?



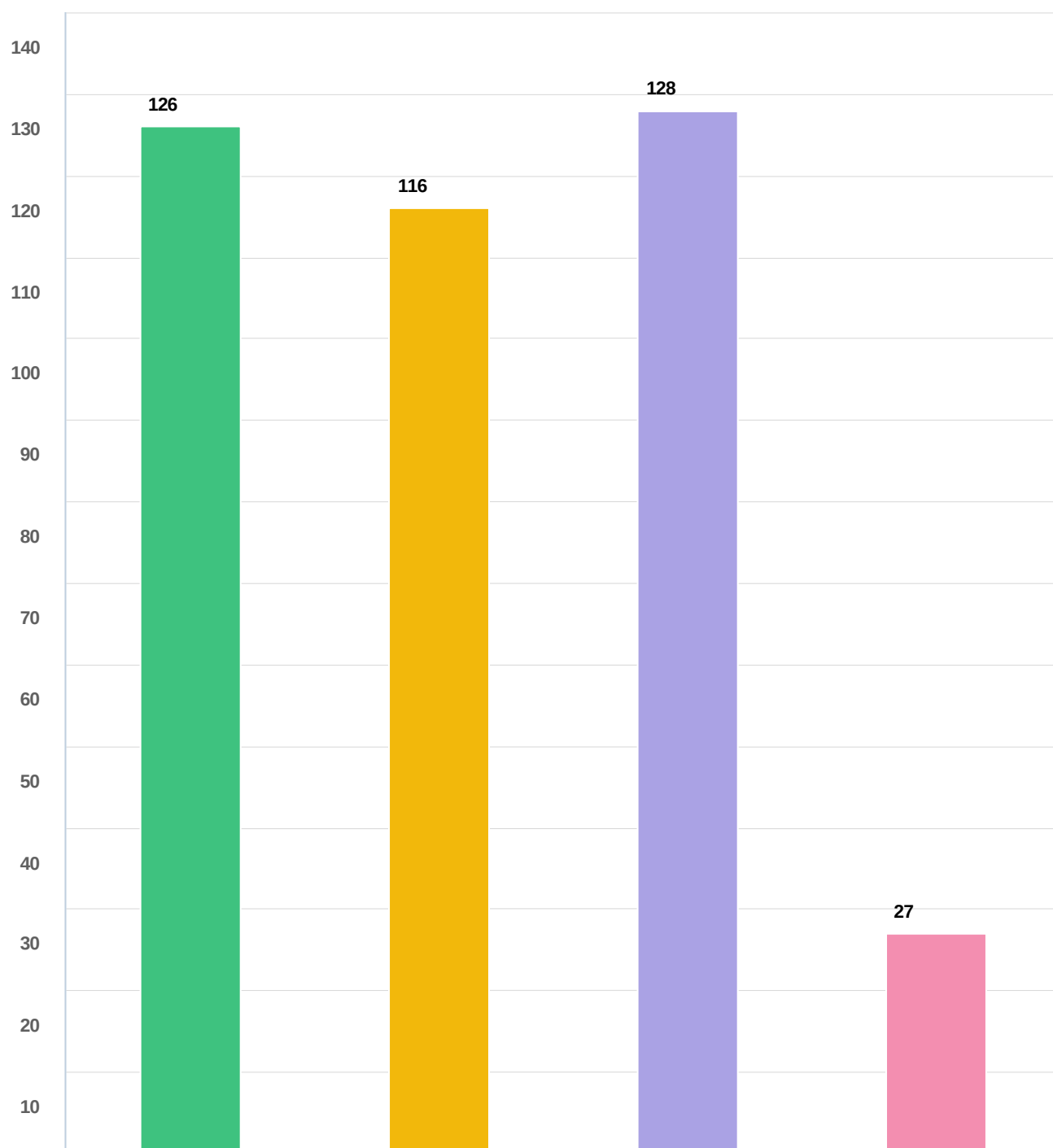
Question options

● Strongly agree ● Agree ● Neither agree, or disagree ● Disagree ● Strongly disagree

Optional question (183 response(s), 3 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

Q6 Under this priority we have identified 3 key actions. Which of the actions do you agree with? You can choose as many as you want.



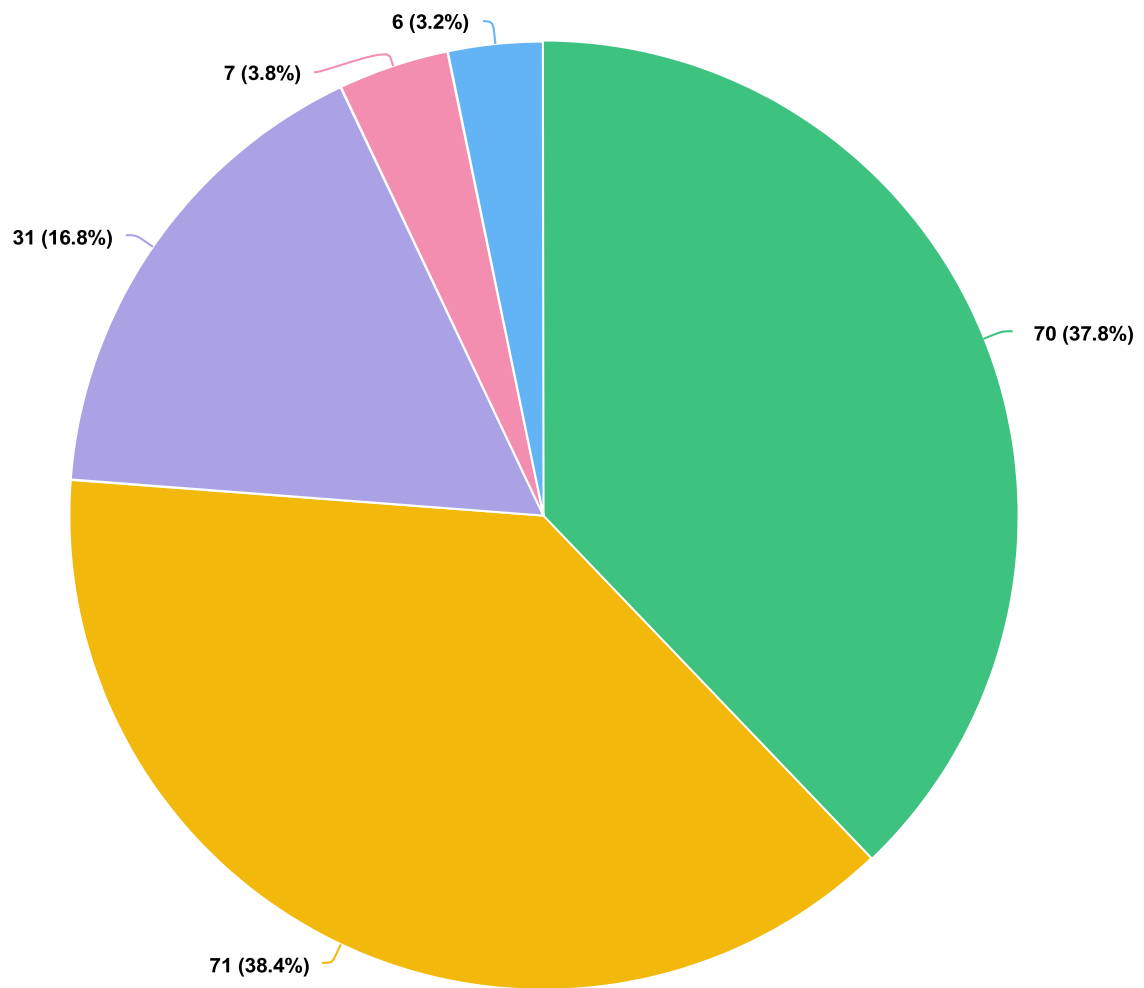
Question options

- Prevent homelessness
- Offer intervention, for example, advice, support and temporary accommodation
- Help households sustain accommodation
- Other priority, please say:

Optional question (182 response(s), 4 skipped)

Question type: Checkbox Question

Q7 | The Strategy aims to 'put the customer first'. Do you agree with this principle? See our Customer Service Standards



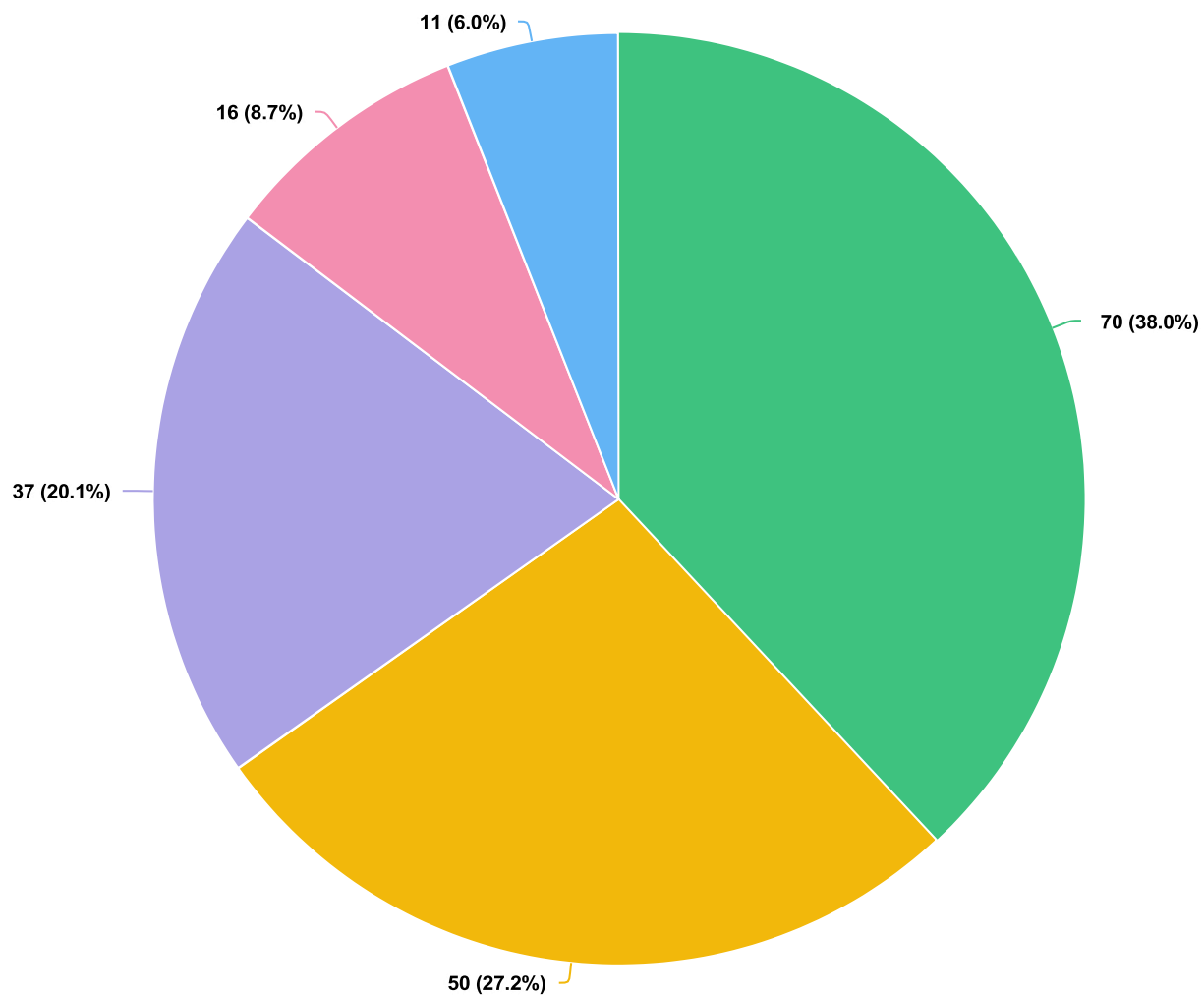
Question options

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree, or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Optional question (184 response(s), 2 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

Q8 The Strategy aims to 'tackle climate change'. Do you agree with this principle?



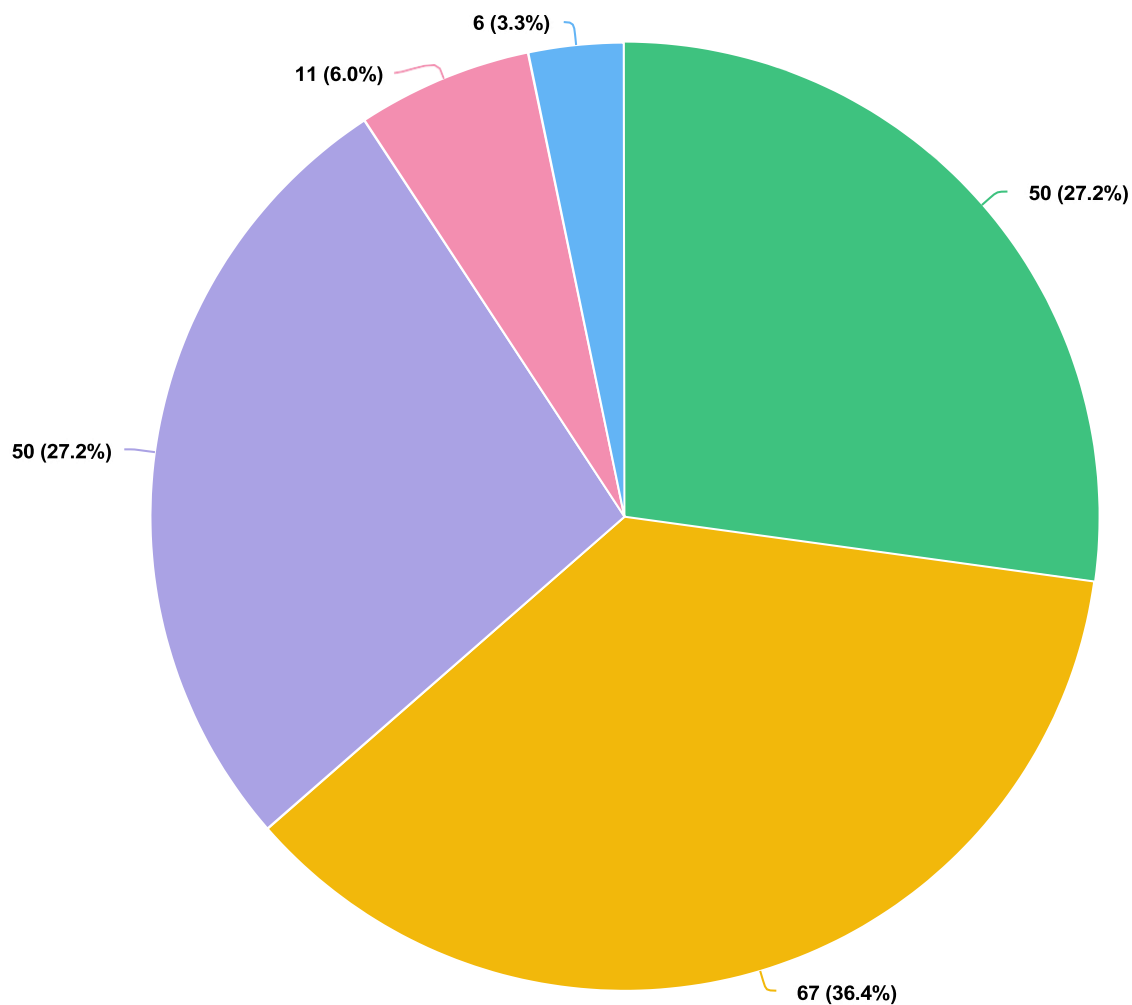
Question options

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree, or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Optional question (183 response(s), 3 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

Q9 The Strategy aims to 'work in partnership'. Do you agree with this principle?



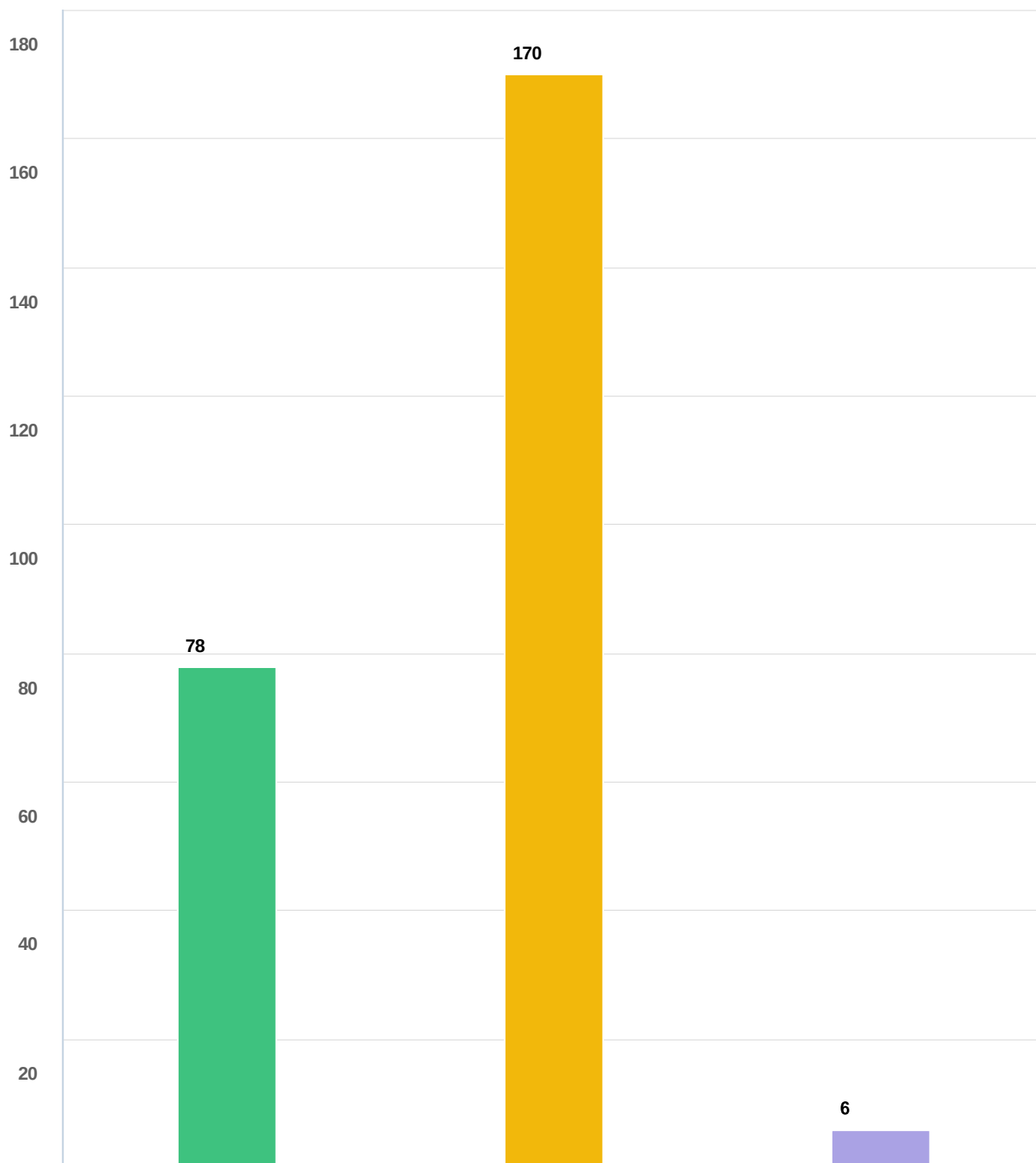
Question options

Strongly agree Agree Neither agree, or disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

Optional question (183 response(s), 3 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

Q10 Do you work, or live in Torbay?



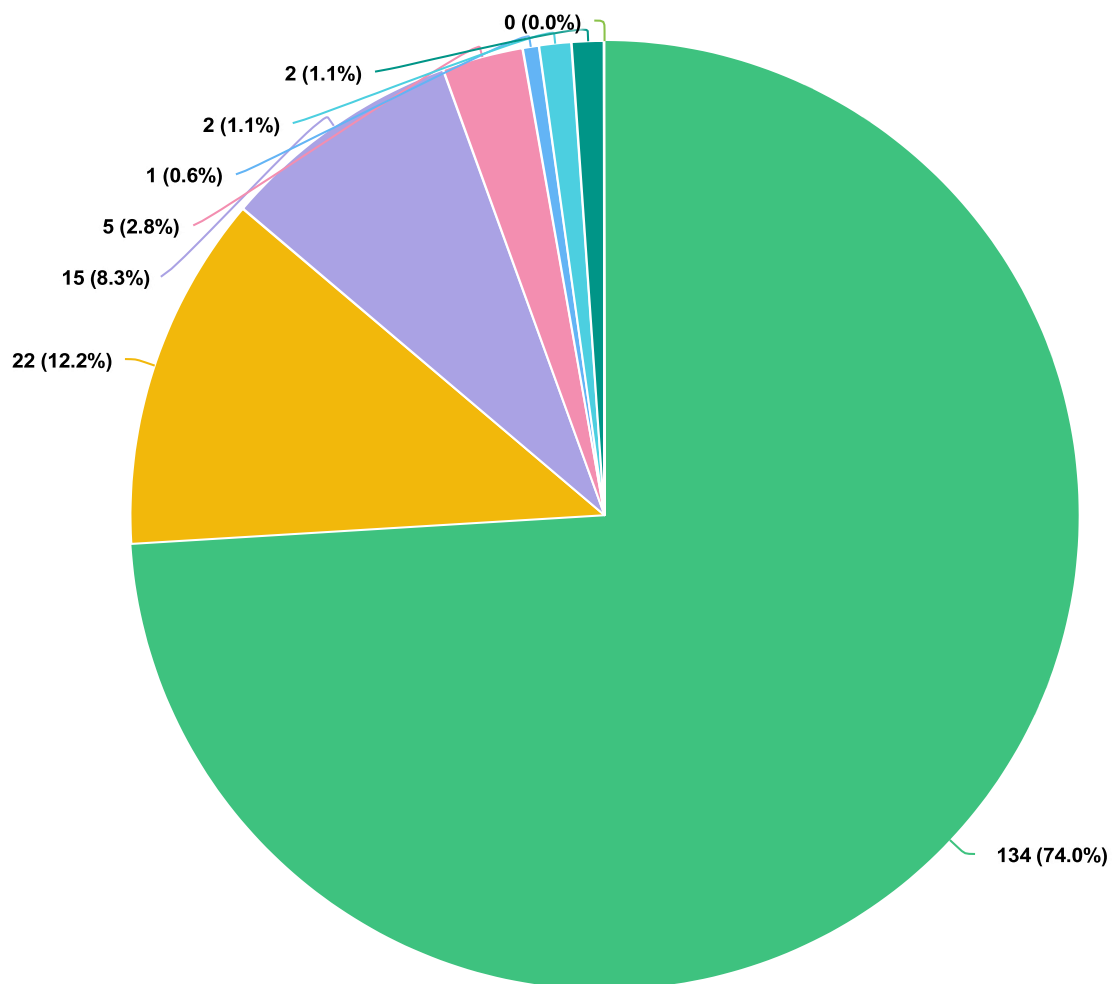
Question options

☒ Work in Torbay ☒ Live in Torbay ☐ Other, please say:

Optional question (182 response(s), 4 skipped)

Question type: Checkbox Question

Q11 Where do you live?



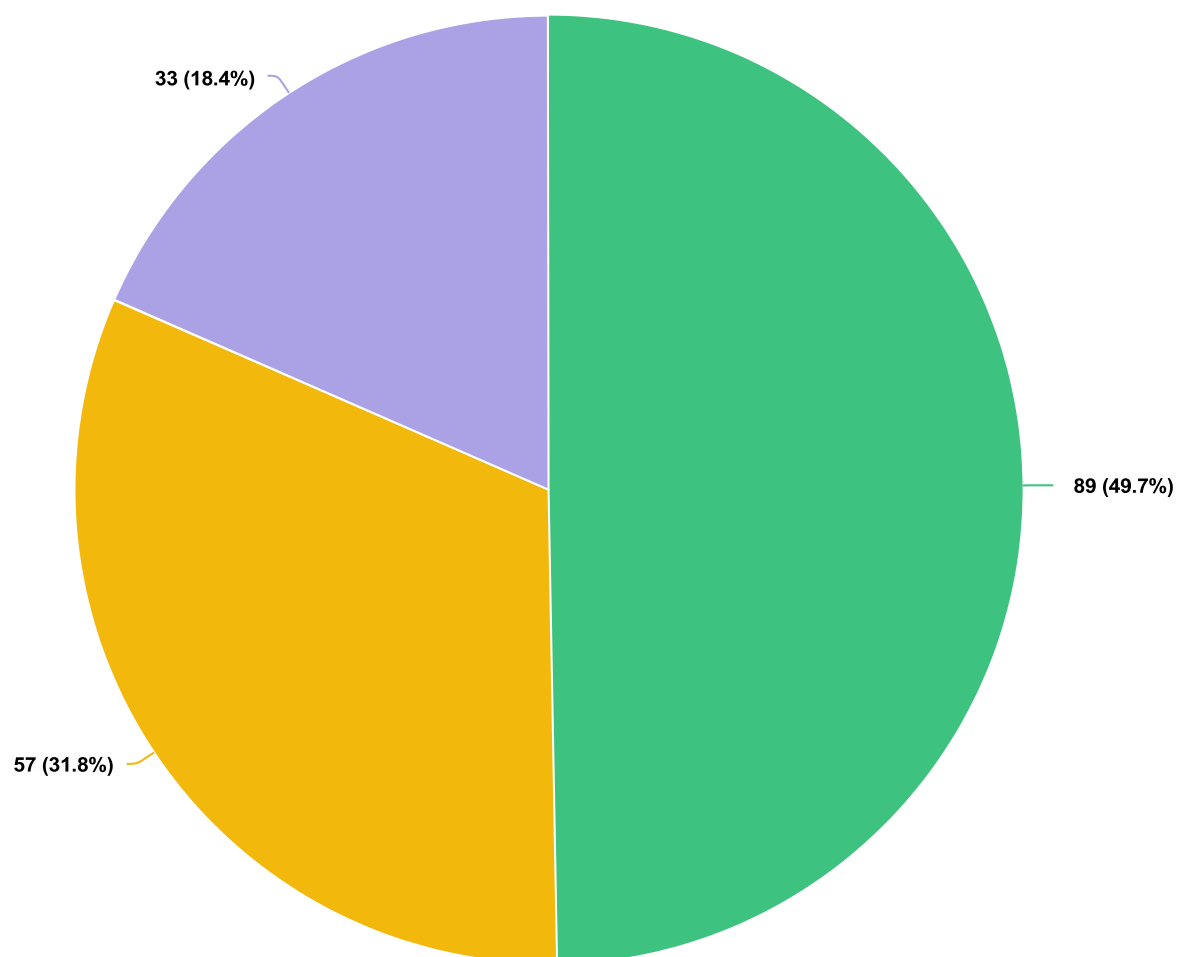
Question options

- Home owned outright, or with mortgage
- Private rented home
- Housing association home
- Living with family
- Living with friends
- Temporary accommodation
- Other, please say:
- Homeless

Optional question (180 response(s), 6 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

Q12 Is your annual income, including any benefits or pension:



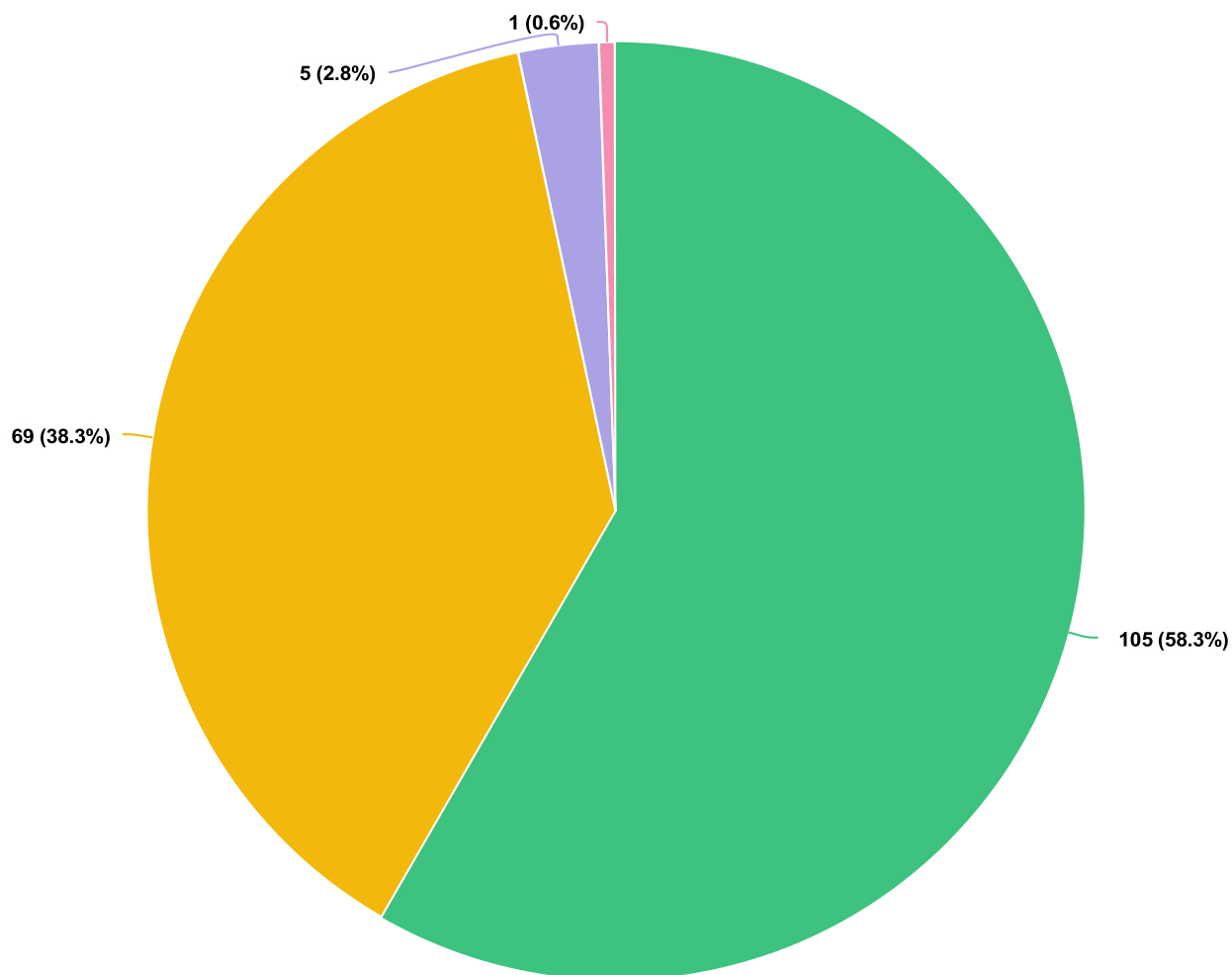
Question options

☒ Above £18,840 ☐ Below £18,840 ☐ Prefer not to say

Optional question (178 response(s), 8 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

Q13 What is your gender?

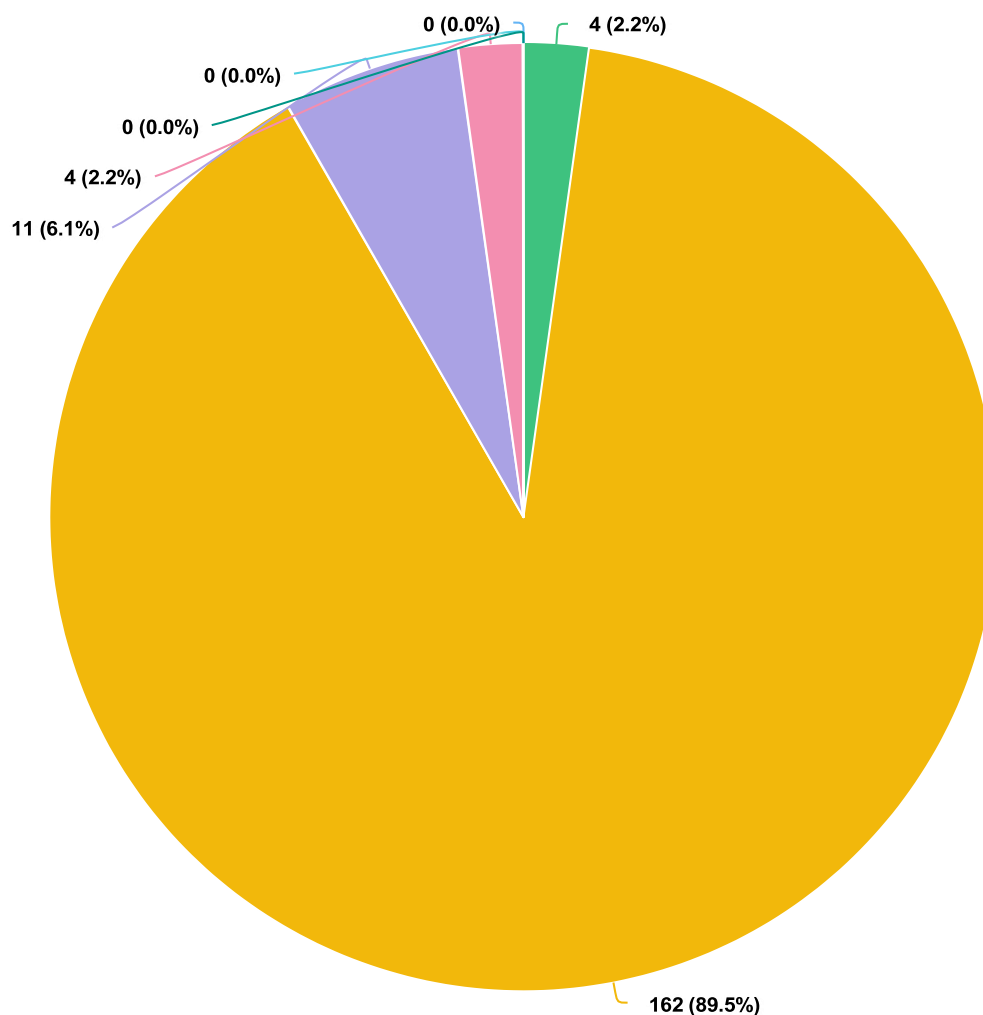


Question options

● Female ● Male ● Prefer not to say ● Other, please say:

Optional question (179 response(s), 7 skipped)
Question type: Radio Button Question

Q14 How would you describe your ethnic origin?



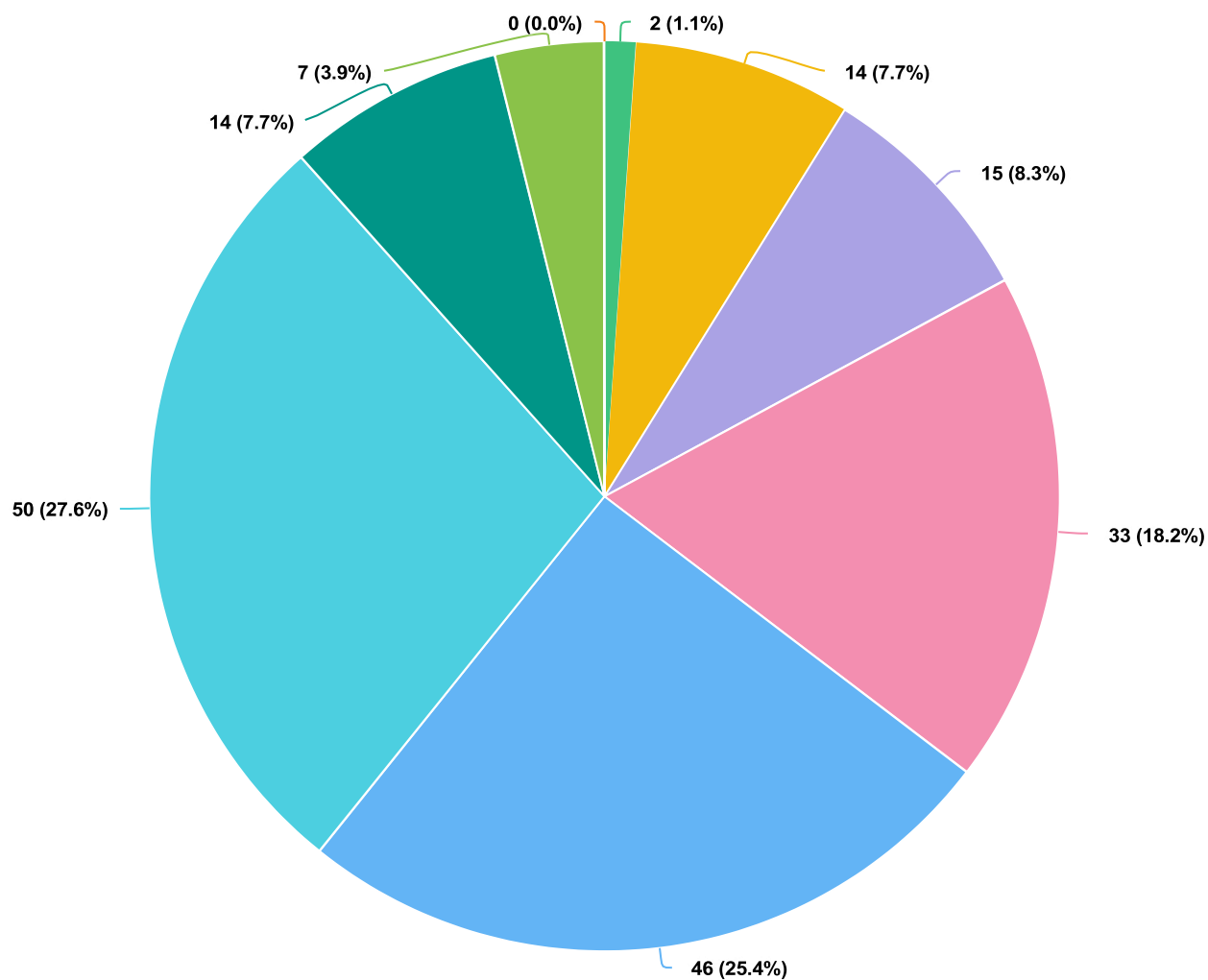
Question options

- ☐ Mixed or multiple ethnic groups ☐ White ☐ Prefer not to say ☐ Other, please say: ☐ Asian, or Asian British
☐ Black, Black British, Caribbean or African ☐ Gypsy or Traveller

Optional question (180 response(s), 6 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

Q15 To which age group do you belong?

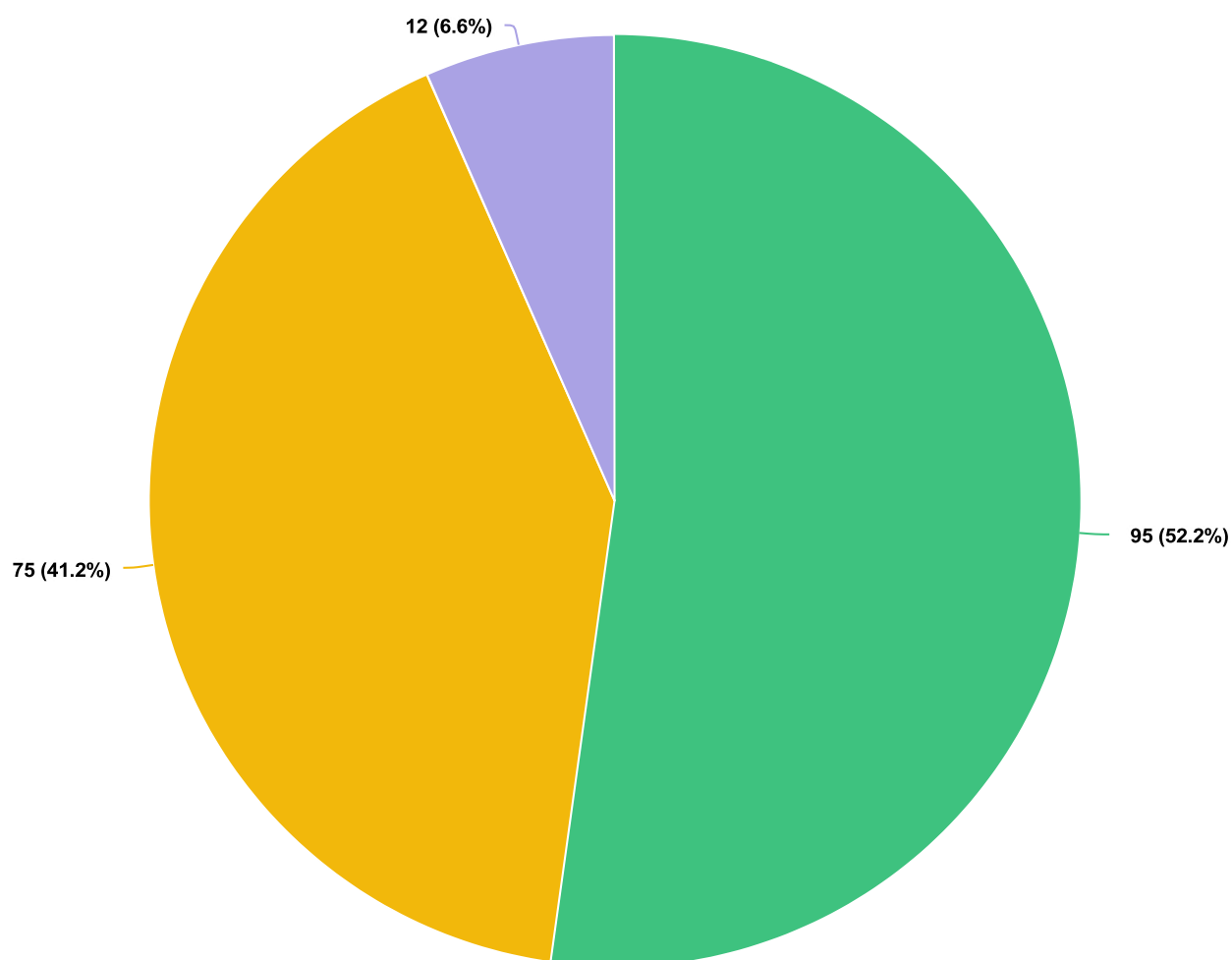


Question options

- ☐ 18 to 24 ☐ 25 to 34 ☐ 35 to 44 ☐ 45 to 54 ☐ 55 to 64 ☐ 65 to 74 ☐ Over 75 ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Under 18

Optional question (180 response(s), 6 skipped)
Question type: Radio Button Question

Q16 Do you, or anyone living with you, have a long-term illness, or condition?



Question options

☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ Prefer not to say

Optional question (181 response(s), 5 skipped)

Question type: Radio Button Question

2 Comments and suggestions

The comments and suggestions received were grouped by topic and can be categorised under the following themes:

Topic	Count	%
1 Develop on brownfield land, reduce the number of empty homes and curb the use of second homes	73	25%
2 Develop more affordable homes	31	11%
3 Homes should go to local households	29	10%
4 Preserve open countryside and green fields	28	10%
5 Prevent homelessness and address rough sleeping, particularly in town	23	8%
6 Help landlords and help tenants in private rented accommodation	23	8%
7 New homes require more infrastructure, like roads, NHS, schools, cycling, public transport etc	21	7%
8 Other: topics related to other Council functions	20	7%
9 Tackle conditions in the housing stock, both private and social	15	5%
10 Improve the design of new homes, including energy efficiency and parking	10	3%
Housing is unaffordable	8	3%
More eco and environmental measures, such as insulation, solar power etc	6	2%
Less luxury market homes and more for first time buyers	3	1%
More homes, including extra care for those with a disability	2	1%
Total	292	100%

Of these, around 57% were related to planning policy, such as policies on the open countryside, brownfield land and lack of infrastructure, with a further 7% related to other Council initiatives, such as tourism, waste collection etc. We will pass the comments to the relevant departments.

Officers have summarised a response for the most frequent topics and themes, where more than 10 responses were received:

1 Develop on brownfield land, reduce the number of empty homes and curb the use of second homes

Unfortunately, there isn't sufficient brownfield land across the area to provide all the homes Torbay needs. Additionally, due to site clearance and contamination issues, viability of these sites reduces the delivery of affordable homes. The current economic climate is making the situation worse.

Torbay Council currently charges 100% Council Tax on properties from the day the property becomes empty. This increases to 200% if the property remains empty for over two years, increasing to 400% should it remain empty for up to ten years. The Council

adopted an Empty Homes Policy in 2022 and is committed to bringing empty homes back into use to increase all of the available housing stock in the Bay.

To enable higher Council Tax levies on second homes would require changes to legislation. Torbay Council currently charges the maximum 100% Council Tax allowable for second homes. From April 2023, second homeowners will have to prove holiday lets are being rented out for a minimum of 70 days a year to access small business rates relief, where they meet the criteria.

2 Develop more affordable homes

It is the Torbay Local Plan that provides the Council's blueprint for housing distribution and the level of development, including affordable housing. It establishes the level and need for supporting infrastructure and sets out a raft of policies, proposals and actions to meet the environmental, social and economic challenges facing the area.

Open market housing (in particular the contribution via affordable housing planning obligations) is the main route to securing the delivery of affordable housing. However, affordable housing can also be provided using government grants and the Council's assets, including land. The housing strategy proposes a mix of Homes England grant and local housing investment, such as Council land and assets, with a view to establishing affordable rents for Torbay residents on low incomes. Building more affordable homes is one of the Strategy's key priorities.

3 Homes should go to local households

Social housing is managed by registered providers and lettings are governed by the Housing Register (Devon Home Choice) Allocation Policy. All applications are assessed and placed in one of four priority bands, which is based on our assessment of a household's housing need, and whether or not they have a local connection.

At the end of each weekly advertising cycle, a list is produced of all qualifying bids. The list initially sorts applicants by their priority banding and then on how long they have been waiting. All appropriate checks are carried out by the registered provider that owns the stock.

4 Preserve open countryside and green fields

The Local Plan determines the level and need for development and sets out a raft of policies, proposals and actions to meet the environmental, social and economic challenges facing the area. The Local Plan consultation has just concluded and following a review, the Council will update its housing supply policies.

The Local Plan housing growth scenario will affect poverty, inequalities, and the delivery of affordable housing. Broadly speaking, a high growth scenario will provide the most affordable housing and economic prosperity; but will come at the cost of its environmental impact. Torbay has internationally important biodiversity associated with the South Hams Special Area of Conservation (SAC) at Berry Head, and the Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The options will need to be assessed through a Habitats Regulations Appropriate Assessment (HRA), that will need to consider the in-combination effects of growth.

5 Prevent homelessness and address rough sleeping, particularly in town

Homelessness has a serious and harmful effect on those who experience it. No household should ever have to experience homelessness. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

took effect on 3 April 2018, placing new duties on councils to work with homeless families to prevent or relieve homelessness before a main homeless duty is accepted.

Our approach is to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity, before individuals, or families lose their home. We are developing a separate homelessness and rough sleeping strategy that will be published during the life of this strategy. It will contain a lot more detail about how we intend to tackle homelessness and its causes.

For many people there will be several reasons they become homeless; for some there will be multiple, complex reasons. Our primary focus is upon helping households to remain in their own home, provided that it is safe and suitable for them to do so. There are a number of in-house services available to help households remain in their homes, including:

- financial and debt advice
 - work with landlords and lettings agents
 - mediation with family and friends, or landlords
 - partnership work to tackle harassment and domestic abuse
 - partnership work to deal with anti-social behaviour
- taking a trauma informed approach to supporting those with complex needs

6 Help landlords and help tenants in private rented accommodation

The housing conditions in the private rented sector are worse than for any other, so making sure that the quality and standard of the private rented sector is a priority for us. We also focus much of our work in this sector because tenants have little, or no control over getting remedial works carried out, so we use all the tools available to take action against poor standards.

In Torbay there is a large percentage of low-income households renting privately. A low-income household is defined as a household in receipt of one, or a number of benefits. In Torbay's private rented stock, 68% of households claim some sort of housing subsidy. This is significantly higher than national and regional averages. Legislation states that benefits are paid to the tenant, not direct to the landlord, unless there are extenuating circumstances. The cost of living crisis is making the situation worse, with the Housing Options Team receiving around 13,000 calls each year.

Our Enforcement Policy helps to promote efficient and effective approaches to regulatory inspection and enforcement that improve outcomes without imposing unnecessary burdens. We work with private landlords to drive up standards, but will also take action against any landlords who do not comply with legislation, in line with our Policy.

Although there are many reasons for homelessness, last year, the most common reasons recorded locally were: the loss of a private rented home (34%), family and friends no longer willing, or able to accommodate (19%) and domestic abuse (12%).

7 New homes require more infrastructure, like roads, NHS, schools, cycling, public transport etc

It is the Torbay Local Plan that establishes the level and need for supporting infrastructure, which is considered alongside plans for new development. All existing Local Plan allocations are supported by policies that require specific types of infrastructure to be provided, whether that be roads, schools, community facilities etc.

All new dwellings, or commercial premises are subject to what is effectively a tax on new development called the Community Infrastructure Levy. This money is retained in the Council's budget for infrastructure projects in the Bay. It often goes unnoticed that increased capacity of schools, GP surgeries, new roads, community centres or sports facilities have been paid for as a direct result of housing development.

8 Other: topics related to other Council functions

A number of comments were received related to other Council initiatives, such as tourism, road works, waste collection etc. We will pass the comments to the relevant departments.

9 Tackle conditions in the housing stock, both private and social

Torbay Council does not own housing stock at scale. In the late 1980s, along with the 'Right to Buy' Torbay undertook a 'Large Scale Voluntary Transfer' (LSVT) as part of the Government's programme to transfer the ownership, management, and repair of public housing from local government to private contractors and landlords. Subsequently, a number of local authorities created private housing associations, now called 'registered providers'. In Torbay Riviera Housing was created, the stock is now owned by Sanctuary Housing.

It is the Regulator of Social Housing who undertakes the economic regulation of social housing providers, focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and will take action if these standards are breached, or if there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants.

If you rent your home from a social landlord, they're responsible for dealing with most repair problems. If you've reported repairs to your landlord and they haven't done anything, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman. Our advice would be to follow the registered provider's complaints process, however, over recent months we have received an increasing number of complaints from tenants in social housing requiring formal action to be undertaken by the Council.

10 Improve the design of new homes, including energy efficiency and parking

Housing design is one of the issues under consideration in the emerging Local Plan update. Aspiration 4 aims 'to conserve and enhance the richness and diversity of the built, historic, marine and natural environments, and 'to avoid mediocre design by the application of clear design standards, including the use of Torbay's Design Review Panel to maintain quality development that is well integrated in its surroundings and responds successfully to local character'.

Aspiration 5 aims 'to end the cycle of deprivation linked to substandard accommodation and resist inappropriate conversions and poor design where this may exacerbate disadvantage and deprivation'. Policy SHS aims 'to end the cycle of deprivation linked to substandard accommodation and resist inappropriate conversions and poor design where this may exacerbate disadvantage and deprivation.'

3 Amendments to the strategy

Generally, the comments received tend to, either echo Torbay's Council's commitment to our housing function and practice, for example 'reduce the number of empty homes', or they contravene our statutory duties, for example 'pay rent direct to landlord'. Sometimes it's simply not possible to achieve the suggestions as there are insufficient resources to do so. It might

therefore be beneficial to promote our housing duties and actions more widely as part of a communication campaign.

As a result of consultation with the public, partners and stakeholders we have taken on a number of comments and suggestions and have amended the Strategy accordingly. In summary they are:

- a. Clarify and better explain housing terms, such as 'housing support', geographic relief' and role of strategic partners
- b. Include the fact that affordable housing is key to attracting and retaining our workforce, supports the growth of our key employment sectors, such as tourism, fishing, hi-tech etc, reduces the levels of deprivation and meets the priorities in our Economic Growth Strategy
- c. Reinforce a partner approach and that we are open to all methods of affordable housing delivery and that it is the Local Plan that dictates overall housing targets, as well as affordable homes
- d. Update the number of affordable homes required over the next seven years to ensure all of our strategies reflect the same target. This is the function of the Local Plan, and, until it is updated, we must adopt the Government's 'standard method' calculation for the delivery of homes that places a requirement on Torbay to build 600 dwellings a year, plus a 20% (120) imposed 'buffer', due to the under-delivery of housing over the previous years. However, the Government is now looking at reducing its compulsory housebuilding targets, which will also be mentioned
- e. Ensure we include our partners in the voluntary sector to help us improve our support offer and take the opportunity to work closer to better understand how they can assist and support our work, as well as listen to what is happening at a local level

Conclusion

The refreshed strategy describes how the Council will continue to expand our innovative approach to deliver solutions to meet the wide variety of housing need in our communities. It has been updated in light of the consultation and where appropriate we have taken on board comments to prioritise the work we do.

Overall, it does look like the Strategy reflects the public mood and ambition, for example a demand for affordable homes for local people and increased energy efficiency in the Bay. As it is the Local Plan that dictates the delivery of affordable homes; we will feed consultation results into the Local Plan Update, which ran alongside the Strategy consultation.