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# Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 – Consultation Report

## 1. Stakeholder consultation.

Ipswich Borough Council hosted a stakeholder consultation workshop on the 16th of February 2024. This was a two-hour event in which stakeholders contributed their views towards the proposed priorities and provided suggestions on what to include in the Action Plan. Over 40 individuals attended the event, out of nearly 80 that were invited.

### 1.1 Stakeholder consultation results.

The stakeholder consultation results are summarised below.

#### 1.1.1 Priority One: Providing a high-quality advice service.

Stakeholders stated that accessibility was vital to provide a high-quality advice service. Therefore, it was suggested that this service be provided not only over the phone and online, but also face-to-face. A face-to-face option would be particularly helpful for vulnerable residents. It was also suggested that the Council improve their advertising and communication, including by providing a booklet with a description of services available. This should be written in simple language so that it is accessible to all. Furthermore, it was suggested that a triage function should be available to filter service users to different support areas, such as an Early Intervention Team. Stakeholders also expressed an interest in improving partnerships. Some suggestions included working together to deal with funding cuts, to create protocols, and to share data (such as through an online shared vulnerability passport). Finally, it was also highlighted that service users should be involved in the decision-making process.

#### 1.1.2 Priority Two: Focusing on early prevention.

Stakeholders agreed that partnership work is essential as it allows for early diagnosis, planning, and prevention. Once again, the need to cooperate with partners to create processes for hospital admissions and prison discharges was mentioned, as well as to share information about service users. The need for suitable support for those dealing with mental health issues and/or substance misuse was also deemed necessary. It was restated that the Council should better advertise the services it provides and improve its online presence by making it more accessible and interactive. It was suggested an Early Prevention service could be incorporated into the Housing Options team, which could host early prevention panels, create an early referral protocol, and target sofa surfing, particularly in high-risk situations. Finally, it was once again stated that service users should be involved in the decision-making process, such as through focus groups.



### **1.1.3 Priority Three: Working with our partners to end rough sleeping.**

The consensus was that the current provision could be improved. Services would greatly benefit from being funded appropriately, while ensuring statutory services are being provided. More affordable housing is needed, as well as more hostel move-on options. It was felt that more positive publicity around the Council's achievements and the services it provides is necessary, using a clear and concise vocabulary and in multiple languages. Partnership working was once again brought up and deemed essential to end rough sleeping in Ipswich, and various examples were suggested: collaboration with partners when bidding, more agencies to attend the Rough Sleeper Working Group, among others. Finally, the safety and wellbeing of rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping was highlighted, and suggestions were provided such as the installation of more CCTV cameras in the town centre, engaging with tenants regarding mental health and substance misuse, and the use of the Be Well Bus.

### **1.1.4. Priority Four: Facilitating access to suitable accommodation.**

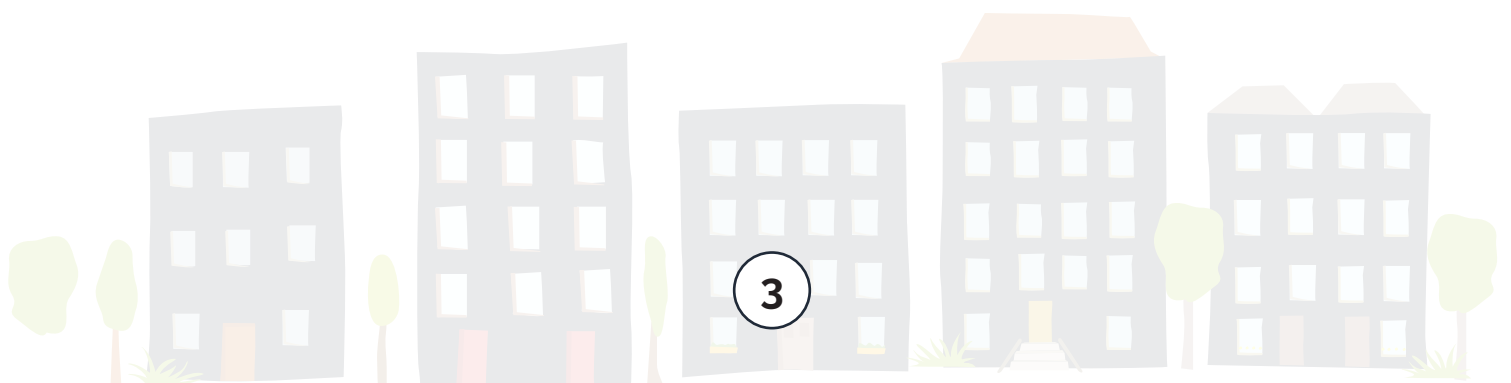
Stakeholders seemed to agree that expanding the current stock of suitable accommodation was necessary, and various suggestions on how to achieve this were mentioned: expanding the Ipswich LET scheme, considering alternative spaces through change of use, increasing the availability of specialist accommodation, funding larger projects alongside stakeholders, bringing empty homes back into use, and better offer and incentives for private landlords. Other priorities included ensuring current provision is of good quality, such as through regular inspections, and facilitating accessibility, such as through changes to hostel access, clearer pathways, emergency weekend provision and better communication between providers and service users. Finally, the need to provide ongoing support following accommodation was also highlighted.

### **1.1.5. Priority Five: Building and maintaining partnerships that support residents.**

All stakeholders agreed that building and maintaining partnerships was more important than ever considering the changing landscape from 2024 onwards, including the phased ending of Housing Related Support. It was agreed that how to deal with these changes should be discussed and agreed by all relevant services in the area, and partnerships could even be broadened to include service providers outside the Ipswich borders. Networking, sharing good practice, regular contact through multi-agency meetings and access to databases were all suggested as ways to improve collaboration and service provision across the Borough.

## **1.2. Conclusion.**

The stakeholder consultation workshop confirmed that the selected priorities are the most relevant for the Borough. Furthermore, the feedback provided by the participants helped to develop the aims and actions for each priority.



## 2. Public consultation.

Executive agreed at a meeting on Tuesday, the 10th of September 2024 that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 should go out to public consultation between the 17th of September and the 15th of October. It was also agreed that this should be a summarised version of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy instead of a full draft.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy draft summary was published on Ipswich Borough Council's website on the 17th of September 2024. All interested parties, including members of the public, were invited to participate in the consultation by filling in an online survey that was available for the full duration of the consultation period.

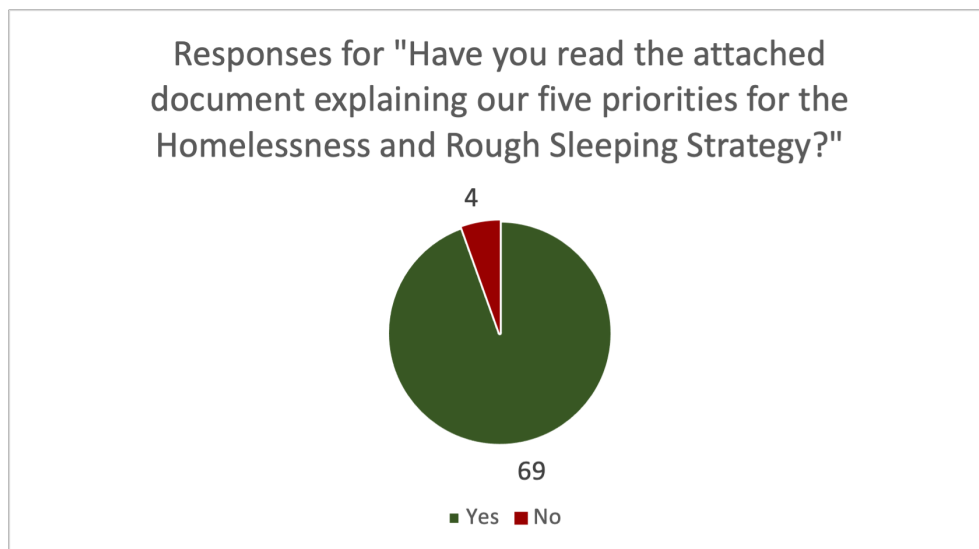
Over 100 internal colleagues and external agencies were advised by email on the 16th of September that the public consultation for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 would be open the following day. A reminder email was also sent out on the 30th of September, advising that there were two weeks remaining until the public consultation ended. In both instances, email recipients were encouraged to forward the information on to anyone else who may be interested in participating, including members of the public.

The consultation was also advertised on the Council's social media throughout the consultation period, and Ipswich residents and other interested parties were invited to participate.

### 2.1. Public consultation results.

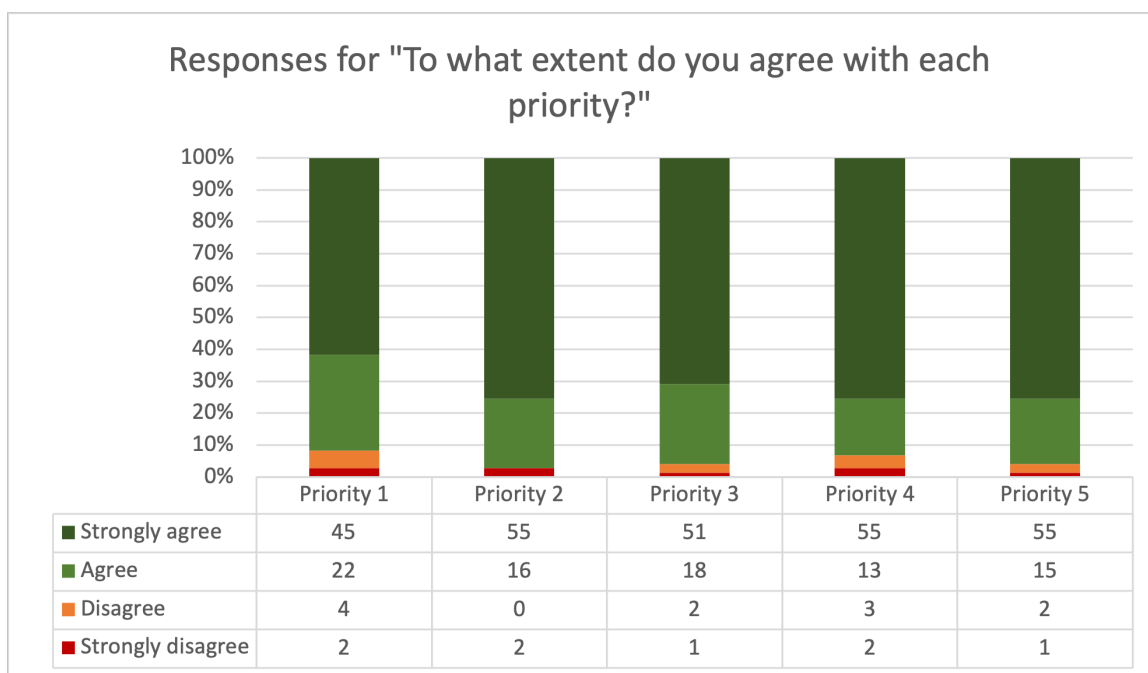
We received 73 responses via Survey Monkey. There was a mix of responses from internal colleagues, external agencies, and Ipswich residents.

Participants were asked to read a document titled "Five challenges for our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030" before completing the survey. This document contained more information regarding each priority, including the aims for each one. The vast majority of the respondents stated that they read the document, as illustrated in the chart below:



Participants were then asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with each priority. Over 90% of participants stated that they agreed with each of the priorities for the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030, as can be seen in the chart below.





## 2.2. Comments.

The participants were then asked whether we had missed any key areas or actions that the Council should address in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030, and they were provided with an open text box where they could add their comments. Due to the volume of responses, we have categorised each comment and will address each category below. Sometimes, one comment contains several points – in these situations, we have broken down the text into separate comments.

### 2.2.1. Advice service.

There were ten comments regarding the housing advice service the Council provides. Three comments stated that face-to-face support should be provided or improved. Two other comments stated that households should be able to apply for housing advice and support online but that digital skills should be considered. Overall, respondents seemed to agree that households should be able to access support through various means. Two respondents stated that interventions and engagement should be delivered in a timelier manner, and another highlighted the need to ascertain that applicants have a genuine need for support. Finally, two participants highlighted the need for staff to receive training: one mentioned that this should be focused on the complexities of homelessness and the other stated that this should be trauma informed.

**Our response:** Improving the accessibility and timeliness of our advice service are two of our aims in this strategy, and this includes tackling digital exclusion. This is also covered in more depth in a separate Digital Strategy 2024-2030. Furthermore, before services are provided it is standard practice that the advice team complete assessments and require evidence of an applicant's circumstances to prevent fraud and verify that applicants have a genuine need. We are committed to training our staff on a variety of issues related to homelessness, including from a trauma-informed perspective, and this is mentioned throughout the strategy and the Action Plan. As a result of this feedback, a reference to the Digital Strategy 2024-2030 was added to this strategy.



### 2.2.2. Communication.

One respondent stated that the Council should communicate the services they provide to homeless households more effectively, and they added that one way this could be achieved is through partnership work with statutory and voluntary agencies, as well as the public.

**Our response:** The Council acknowledges this concern and advertising our homelessness services is in our Action Plan for this strategy. Partnership working is also one of our key priorities in this strategy. No changes are proposed as a result of this feedback.

### 2.2.3. Cost of living.

One respondent stated that the increased cost of living was not mentioned directly, nor how this would have an impact on people's lives and potentially lead to homelessness.

**Our response:** The Council acknowledges this concern, and this is mentioned throughout the strategy. No changes are proposed as a result of this feedback.

### 2.2.4 Eligibility criteria.

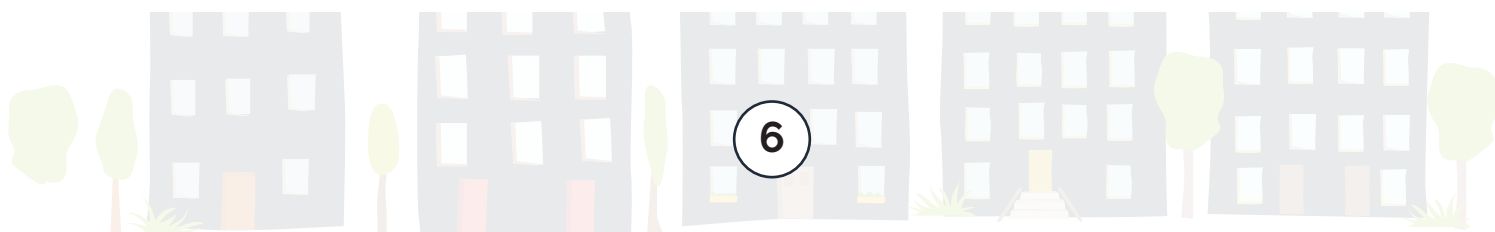
There were two comments that stated that Ipswich residents and persons from the UK should be prioritised.

**Our response:** To do this would be discriminatory. The Council works within the law both when it comes to eligibility for support and to local connection criteria. No changes are proposed based on this feedback.

### 2.2.5 Homelessness.

There were nine comments which discussed various issues around homelessness. One respondent claimed that sofa surfing should be tackled, particularly for those in unsafe situations. The same respondent also stated that a better pathway is necessary to avoid individuals becoming stuck in a cycle of homelessness and reliance on benefits. Finally, this same participant stated that there is a lack of accommodation for complex women in abusive or exploitative situations that do not wish to leave the area, while another asked for gender informed services for women. Two other comments stated that more affordable accommodation for single people is needed, including through privately rented HMOs, and another expressed concern over the practice of other Local Authorities placing people in temporary accommodation in Ipswich. Finally, someone commented that providers should not evict service users without clear communication and support, and someone else stated that accommodation providers are often too strict in their accommodation policies and do not give people second chances following an eviction.

**Our response:** The Council recognises these concerns, and reviewing our move-on process and providing more accommodation for single/ one-person households are two of our aims in this strategy. We have a limited influence over providers' policies, and many of them choose immediate evictions to protect staff and other residents. Due to HRS funding coming to an end in the life of this strategy, the Council is currently developing a supported housing pathway for Ipswich which includes the provision of beds specifically for women to meet this need. Contracts for Ipswich's supported housing pathway will also include our expectations regarding eviction processes. Finally, we cannot stop other Local Authorities from placing people in temporary accommodation within our borough, but this is addressed in this strategy, and we do discuss this with the relevant Local Authorities as and when needed. As a result of this feedback, we have added information regarding accommodation for vulnerable women to the strategy.



### 2.2.6. Housing.

Three participants made comments regarding housing. One participant commented that housing deemed affordable must be truly affordable, and affordable rents should be similar to social housing rents. Another commented that building more council housing should be one of the main priorities, while another stated that empty homes could be converted into multiple occupancy units.

**Our response:** Housing affordability and availability, as well as the issue of empty homes, are all topics covered in the separate Housing Strategy 2025-2030, therefore no changes are proposed on the basis of this feedback.

### 2.2.7. Housing First.

One participant stated that more Housing First properties are needed.

**Our response:** The Council is committed to expanding the Housing First project, and this is reflected in this strategy. No changes are proposed as a result of this feedback.

### 2.2.8. Partnership working.

There were eight comments regarding partnership working. One participant stated that information should be shared between services so that service users do not have to tell their story more than once. This participant also stated that partnership working is key to tackle service users' various needs, and further added that the Council should return to office working to improve communication between different departments. Three other respondents supported the need for partnership work between the council and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, including with Jobcentre Plus and the police. Finally, someone stated that the Council should expand its partnerships, while someone else argued that the Council should provide funding to deliver partnership working.

**Our response:** Partnership working is one of our main priorities in this strategy and is mentioned throughout the text. We are open and willing to work with any and all organisations that are interested in tackling homelessness, and we offer funding opportunities to partners to deliver services where required and possible. We are also committed to working effectively across different departments, and this is included in our Action Plan for this strategy. Finally, although we agree that sharing information across services so that services users only have to tell their story once would be ideal, this is unlikely to work in practice due to different systems and GDPR concerns. However, this is something we will keep exploring. It is not proposed to amend the strategy based on this feedback.

### 2.2.9. Prevention.

There were four comments about prevention. One participant expressed their view that prevention should be the Council's biggest priority. Another participant suggested that a Housing Options prevention officer should be employed to address issues with tenants and partners before they are evicted. One comment stated that vulnerable people should be identified early to prevent homelessness. Finally, another respondent stated that finding out why people are currently rough sleeping could help to prevent others in similar situations from sleeping rough in the future.

**Our response:** The Council agrees that prevention should be one of our main priorities, and indeed this is reflected in the strategy. All our Housing Options officers are effectively prevention officers as they often work with households at risk of homelessness and assist them to remain in their current accommodation by supporting with rent arrears and liaising





with landlords. The Rough Sleeper Project works with a wide range of vulnerable individuals, including those currently rough sleeping, sofa surfing, or at risk of rough sleeping. This project aims to prevent rough sleeping where possible by checking in on known vulnerable individuals and regularly communicating with partner organisations. Finally, we currently gather information about people rough sleeping, including reason for loss of settled home, and we use this information to inform our approach. One of our aims in this strategy is to use data insights to target our resources where they are most effective. No changes are proposed following this feedback.

#### **2.2.10. Private rented sector.**

There were two comments related to the private rented sector. One comment stated that the Council should focus on ending illegal evictions through enforcement, while another stated that the Council should work with landlords to prevent eviction.

**Our response:** The Council acknowledges these concerns, and they are covered in this strategy, as well as in the separate Housing Strategy 2025-2030. The impending Renters Rights Bill will also tackle these issues, and a reference to this has been added to the strategy as a result of this feedback.

#### **2.2.11. Rough sleeping.**

There were ten comments regarding rough sleeping. Two participants stated that the Council's priority should be to end rough sleeping permanently. Another queried how the Council differentiates between rough sleepers and those seen begging. Someone else stated that it was important to have support workers that have a genuine desire to help homeless people, and for an Outreach team that can search the whole town, as well as beyond the town. Three participants expressed the need for more off-the-street accommodation, with suggestions such as 'manned areas with tents' and the winter night shelter. Two participants wished for more services for rough sleepers, including places where they can obtain breakfast and shower, and for more accessible locations to donate goods for those rough sleeping.

**Our response:** Ending rough sleeping is one of our aims and this is discussed at length in the strategy. The Rough Sleeper Project establishes who is rough sleeping through intelligence provided by the Outreach team and other partners in regular meetings. The Outreach team has a particular focus on the town centre and other regular rough sleeping spots but does investigate any areas with suspected rough sleeper activity as and when needed. Neighbouring Local Authorities will have their own Outreach teams to engage with rough sleepers outside Ipswich. As a Council, we do not believe that providing rough sleepers with tents is acceptable as it is not a suitable alternative to accommodation, so we choose to focus our resources into moving rough sleepers into suitable accommodation as soon as possible. A winter night shelter would be provided by the voluntary sector. The Rough Sleeper Project currently provides a variety of off-the-street accommodation, and it is one of our aims to make an off-the-street offer to all rough sleepers, where possible. The Rough Sleeper Project involves a network of partner agencies who provide a variety of services to rough sleepers. No changes are proposed in relation to this feedback.

#### **2.2.12. Safety.**

One comment expressed that the town should be made to be feel safe for women walking alone.

**Our response:** It is not clear how this relates to homelessness and rough sleeping; therefore, no changes are proposed as a result of this feedback.





### 2.2.13. Support needs.

There were eleven comments regarding support needs, particularly among those sleeping rough. Four comments mentioned a variety of support needs, whereas three comments specified support with substance misuse, two support with accessing work, one support with mental health issues and one support with budgeting.

**Our response:** The Council acknowledges these concerns, and tackling support needs alongside our partners is mentioned in this strategy. Data insights highlight that substance misuse and mental health issues are the biggest support needs for rough sleepers in Ipswich, and this has been added to the strategy as a result of this feedback.

### 2.2.14. Supported accommodation.

There were five comments regarding supported accommodation. Two comments expressed concerns about the ending of HRS provision in Ipswich and queried how the Council are planning to deal with this. Two other respondents expressed that complex homeless people often struggle to obtain suitable accommodation as they have high support needs. Finally, one comment stated that a clear move-on process for young people accessing supported accommodation is needed.

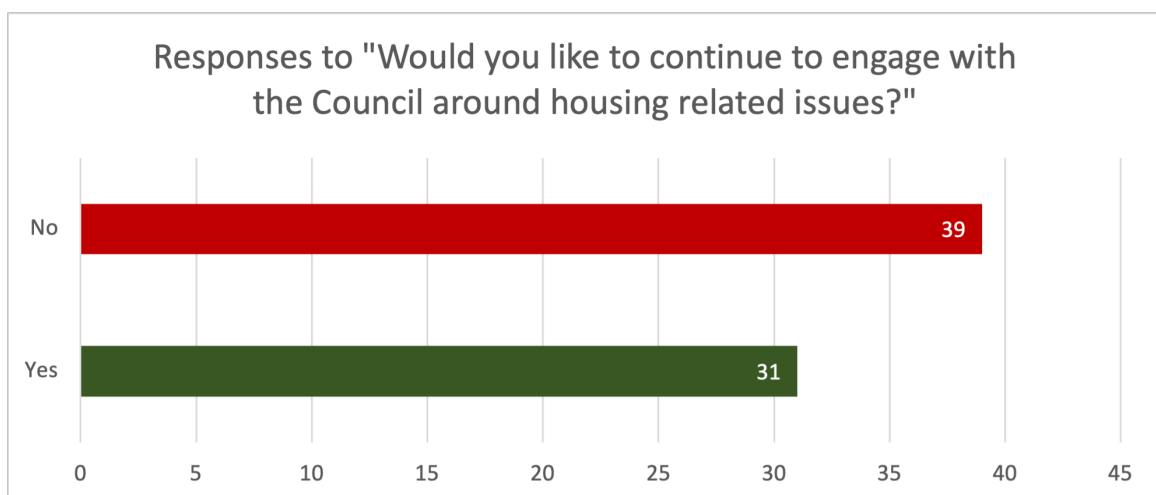
**Our response:** The Council's response to the ending of HRS provision is addressed in this strategy. A new Ipswich supported housing pathway is currently being developed and aims to include provision for complex needs individuals and young people. No changes are proposed due to this feedback.

## 2.3. Conclusion.

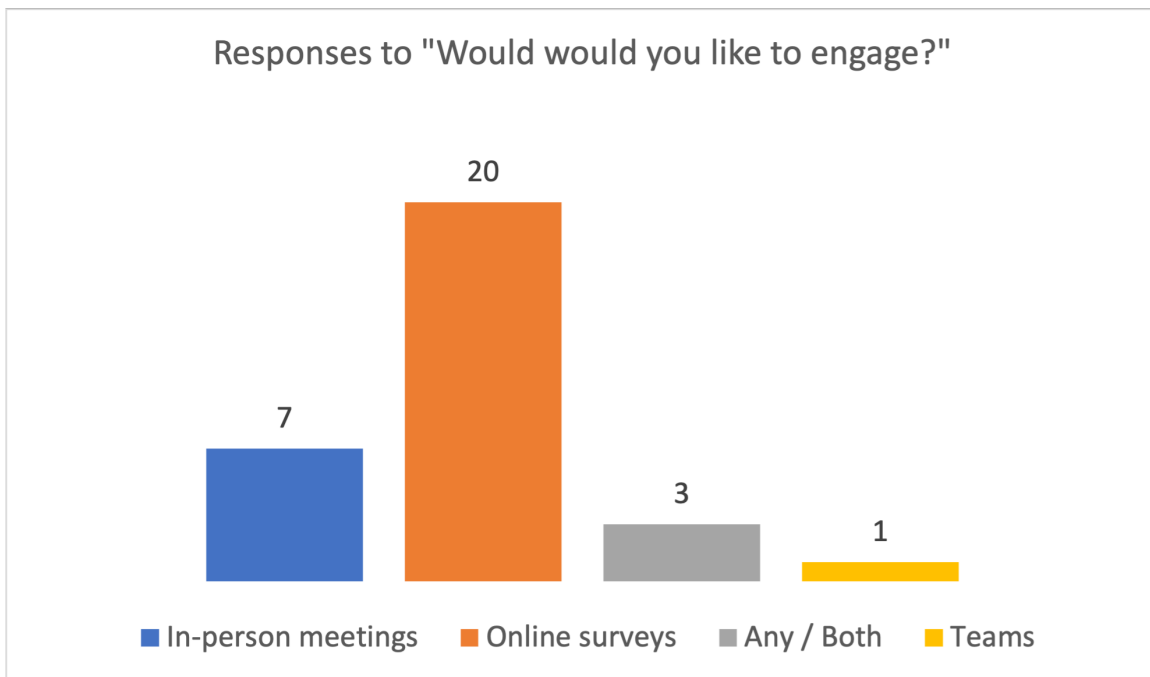
A few minor amendments were carried out to this strategy as a result of the feedback provided in the public consultation survey. The majority of responses regarded issues and concerns that were already addressed, reinforcing our view that this strategy already reflects the town residents' most pressing and relevant needs.

## 2.4. Future engagement.

At the end of the survey, participants were asked whether they would like to continue to engage with the Council regarding housing related issues. The chart below shows that responses were mixed, with a higher number of people stating 'No' than expected considering the level of engagement we received in the survey.



Those who stated 'Yes' were then prompted to select how they would like to engage. The majority of participants wished to continue using online surveys to provide feedback, but some preferred in-person meetings.



The Council is committed to consult regularly with relevant agencies and Ipswich residents throughout the life of this strategy, both to share our progress and to understand how best to address any future concerns. Based on the feedback from this consultation, this would be best achieved with a mixture of in-person meetings and online surveys for maximum engagement.

