



# **NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

## **Northamptonshire Adult Social Care (NASS) Prevention Services Visual Impairment Contract Consultation Consultation Analysis Report**

**November 2018**

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**Owner:** Northamptonshire Adult Social Services, Northamptonshire County Council

Currently, Northamptonshire County Council commissions a number of services through Northamptonshire Association for the Blind (NAB).

These services offer adults with sight loss advice, help and practical support to overcome the emotional and practical challenges of living with sight loss. This helps them to live as full, active and independent a life as possible in their own home and/or with their family or carer.

The services we buy from NAB helps those adults who require support due to their sight loss to:

- Receive help to overcome the emotional trauma of sight loss, maintain a positive outlook on life and retain personal independence.
- Receive advice on the availability, suitability and use of specialist aids and equipment.
- Receive advice on the use of suitable ICT equipment such as smart phones, tablets, computers and voice activated devices.
- Receive help on using the internet including online shopping and social media.
- Support people to meet and socialise with other people who have similar, or different levels of sight loss at various locations within Northamptonshire.
- Help people to learn new skills or to enjoy new hobbies, cultural activities, leisure pursuits and sporting activities.
- Discover how to make use of existing skills or how to enjoy again many of the activities and interests they used to enjoy before their sight loss.

NAB can provide their advice, guidance and support to those that need it at either one of NAB's sight centres or support within a person's own home. However, due to its current poor financial situation the Council agreed to consider if the above services should be stopped or provided in a different way.

A consultation was carried out between 4<sup>th</sup> October and 8<sup>th</sup> November. Feedback on the proposals was sought via a mixture of methods including a questionnaire and public events for service users. The questionnaire was made available in an accessible easy read format. The consultation was published on the Council's website.

This report gives an overview of the consultation findings.

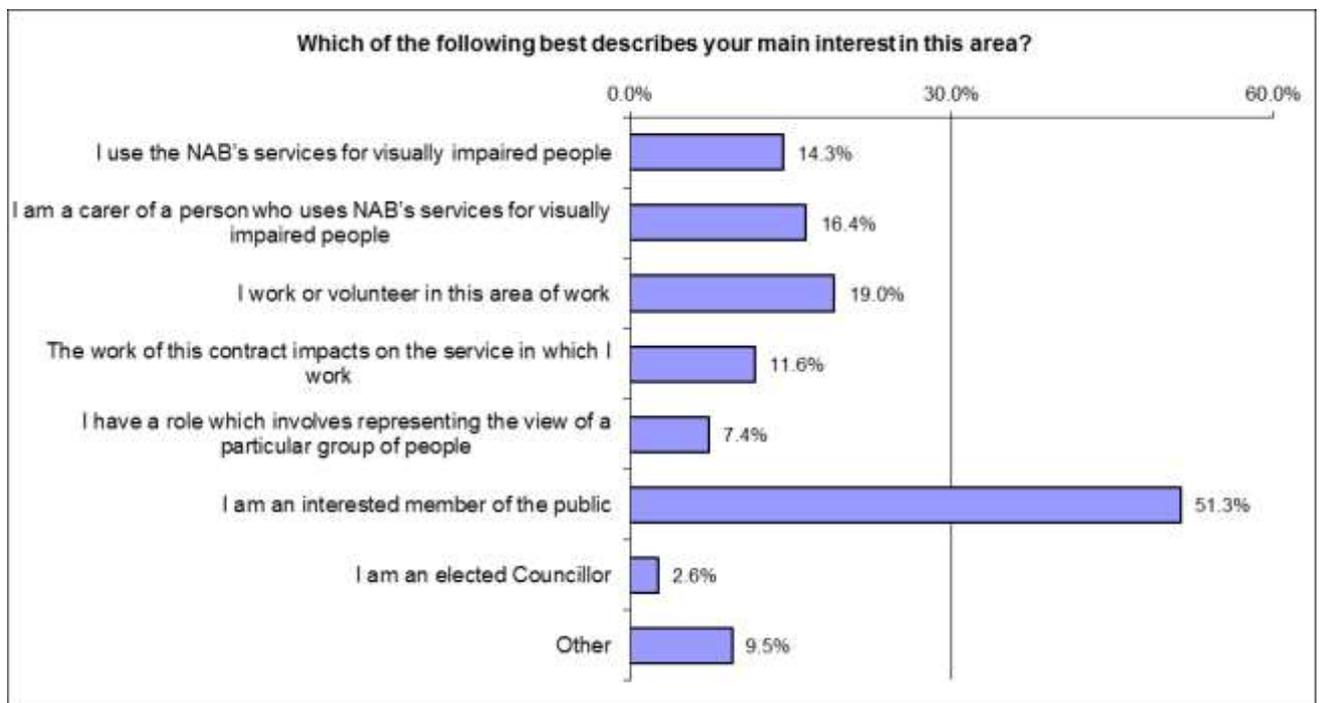
#### **Questionnaire feedback**

A total of 204 questionnaires were returned. This included responses from standard and easy read questionnaires.

It was brought to the attention of the Council, two thirds of the way into the consultation, that there was an issue with the easy read version of the questionnaire, in that multiple responses were not able to be selected in some questions where more than one response was possible. An attempt was made to correct this however, further investigation and changes would have compromised the responses already submitted.

**Which of the following best describes your main interest in this area?**

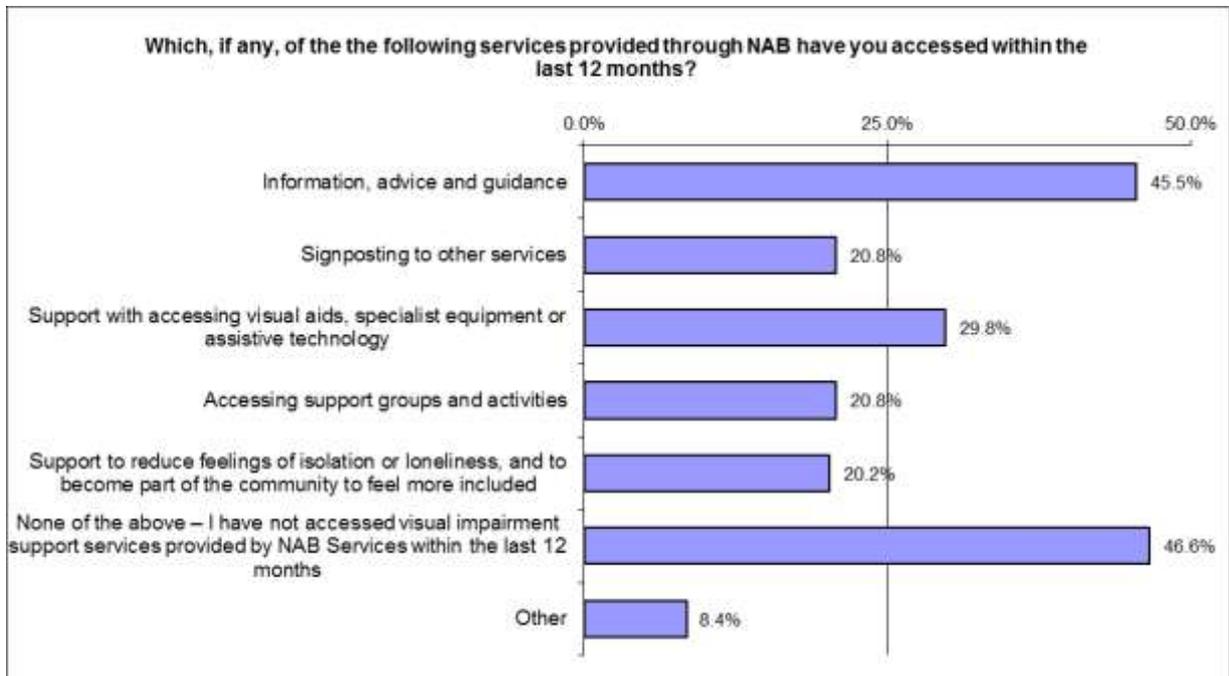
I use the NAB’s services for visually impaired people	14.3%	27
I am a carer of a person who uses NAB’s services for visually impaired people	16.4%	31
I work or volunteer in this area of work	19.0%	36
The work of this contract impacts on the service in which I work	11.6%	22
I have a role which involves representing the view of a particular group of people	7.4%	14
I am an interested member of the public	51.3%	97
I am an elected Councillor	2.6%	5
Other	9.5%	18
		189



People who commented ‘other’ are people who support and or refer others to NAB services or who will use NABs services in the future

**Which, if any, of the following services provided through NAB have you accessed within the last 12 months?**

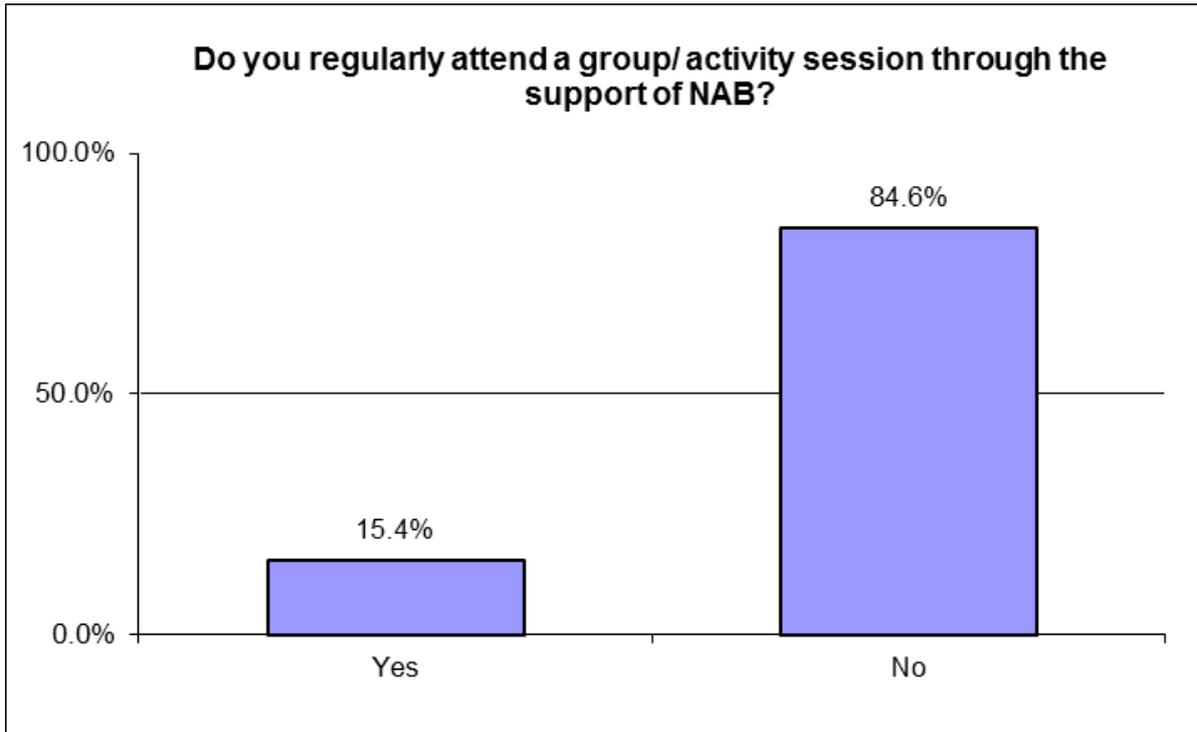
Information, advice and guidance	45.5%	81
Signposting to other services	20.8%	37
Support with accessing visual aids, specialist equipment or assistive technology	29.8%	53
Accessing support groups and activities	20.8%	37
Support to reduce feelings of isolation or loneliness, and to become part of the community to feel more included	20.2%	36
None of the above – I have not accessed visual impairment support services provided by NAB Services within the last 12 months	46.6%	83
Other	8.4%	15
		178



Respondents who indicated “other” commented that they either work with, signpost to or use NABs services.

**Do you regularly attend a group/ activity session through the support of NAB?**

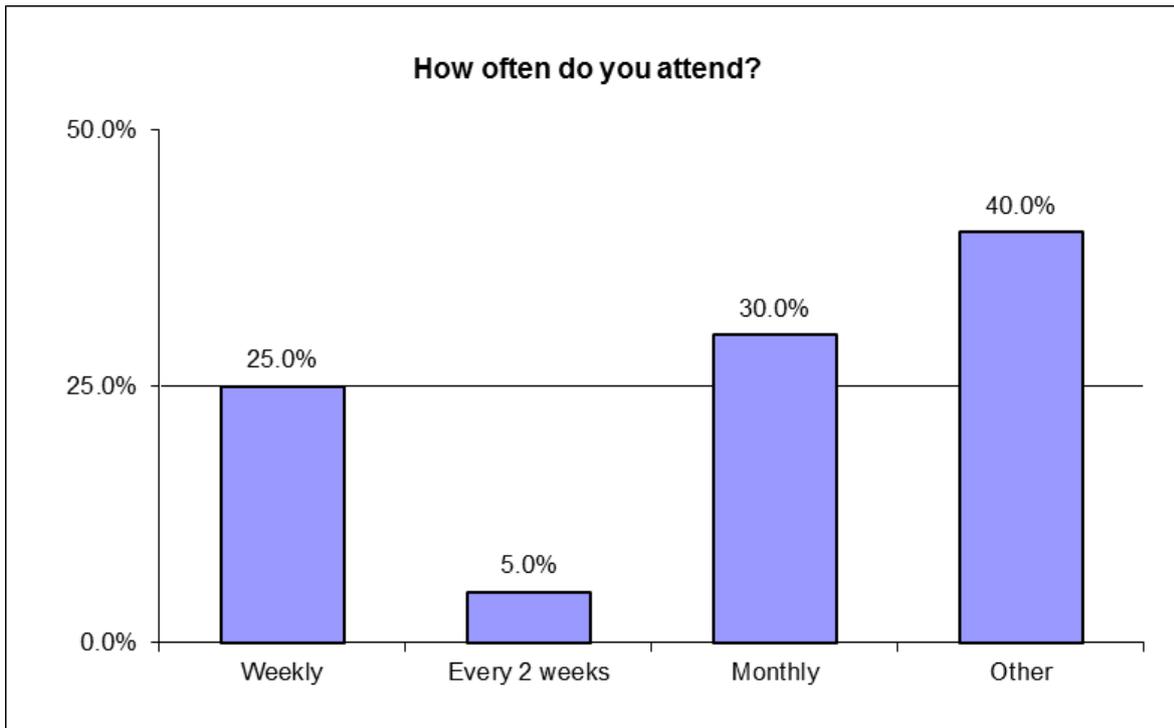
Yes	15.4%	25
No	84.6%	137
		162



Respondents who indicated “yes” were asked to name the group or activity; the list of activities included, yoga, talking newspapers, visiting places, computer and tech clubs, social groups and committee meetings.

**How often do you attend?**

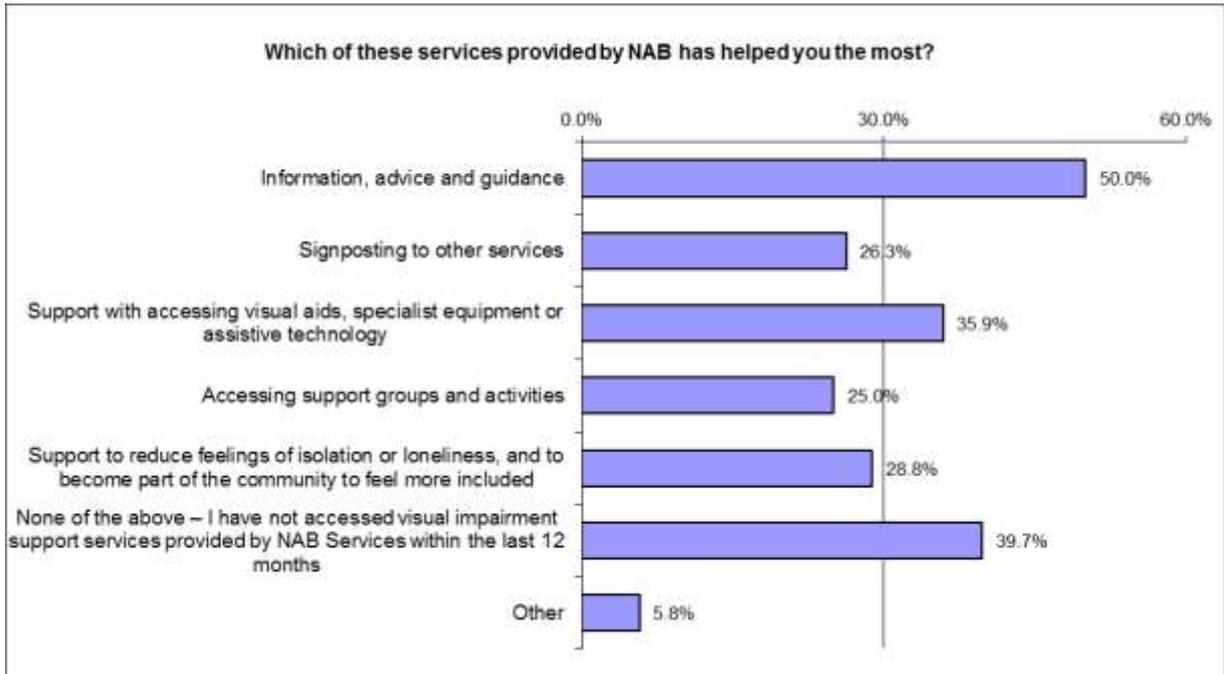
Weekly	25.0%	10
Every 2 weeks	5.0%	2
Monthly	30.0%	12
Other	40.0%	16
		40



Respondents who stated “other” indicated they attended whenever possible or through outreach services. Their attendance was limited due to transport access. Some commented that they had never attended a group or that this question was not applicable.

**Which of these services provided by NAB has helped you the most?**

Information, advice and guidance	50.0%	78
Signposting to other services	26.3%	41
Support with accessing visual aids, specialist equipment or assistive technology	35.9%	56
Accessing support groups and activities	25.0%	39
Support to reduce feelings of isolation or loneliness, and to become part of the community to feel more included	28.8%	45
None of the above – I have not accessed visual impairment support services provided by NAB Services within the last 12 months	39.7%	62
Other	5.8%	9
		156

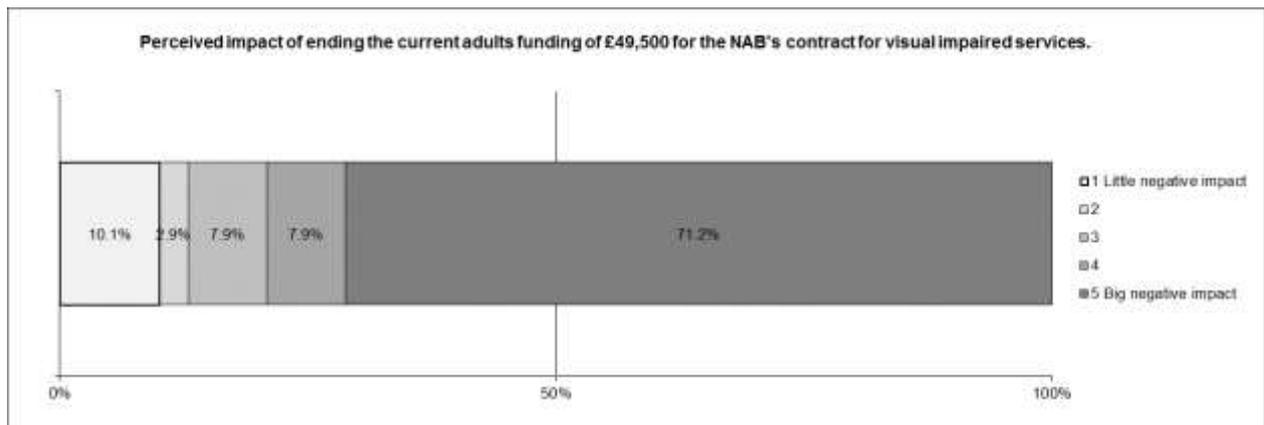


Some respondents who indicated “other” commented that they felt all of the services have helped them. Respondents also stated that they were professionals and/ or volunteers who referred people to attend. Some said that they were companions to those that attended. One commented that they did not feel welcomed.

We are considering ending our current adults funding of £49,500 for the NAB’s contract for visual impaired services (i.e. decommissioning). This sum currently helps fund a proportion, approximately 10%, of the overall NAB service provision within the county which is outlined in the introduction to the questionnaire.

Please could you tell us using a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being little and 5 being big, how much of a negative impact do you believe these proposed changes would make to you?

1 Little negative impact	2	3	4	5 Big negative impact	Total
10.1%	2.9%	7.9%	7.9%	71.2%	139



Respondents were asked why they had rated the impact in the way that they had.

Those who responded to this question said that NAB was the only local provider organisation who could cater for their specialist needs. They stated that NAB reached across all types of communities and age ranges.

Respondents said any cuts to the service would have a detrimental impact. In the short term this could be the loss of professional staff and a reduction in activities. However, many cited the long term losses and how it would impact society and the county as a whole. They felt that other services would suffer and that there would be an even greater burden on the public purse due to reduction in services.

Respondents spoke about the practical issues that would be affected in everyday living. Some said that their independence would diminish and that they would be affected socially, emotionally and physically. Some respondents said that they would become housebound and that their social interactions would be seriously affected with some having little to no interaction. Respondents spoke about the need to feel safe, to be a valued independent individual.

Professionals and volunteers responded by stating that rehabilitation, both social and psychological, was important. They said that NAB provided this valuable service. They continued by stating that NAB provided specialist support and had an expertise which would be lost and would need to be sought from elsewhere. Many respondents expressed that this expertise and knowledge could not be found from another provider.

Respondents expressed practical issues that would suffer as a consequence of decommissioning the service. They said that appointment times would get longer, that their social skills would suffer, that they would have difficulty in finding visual aids, and that they would be ultimately be isolated. They also said that they could see an increase in levels of anxiety and depression disorders.

Respondents consistently said that the service was vital and an integral requirement for those living with sight loss. Many said that they trusted NAB and this trust was based on their experience of the service. They felt confident in using the service. Respondents also said that it was the only way that they could meet other people like themselves – indicating that getting peer support /meeting people with the same type of conditions was important to their overall wellbeing.

Respondents said that if an alternative provider/ service was sought then it needed to be like for

like. Respondents questioned the need for the Council to be even thinking of withdrawing a necessary service and whether the Council was undertaking its legal equalities and social care duties.

Respondents said the Council was getting great value for money at the current contract level and that it should be looking elsewhere for savings. Others expressed the view that this very vulnerable community should not be paying for the perceived financial mismanagement of the Council.

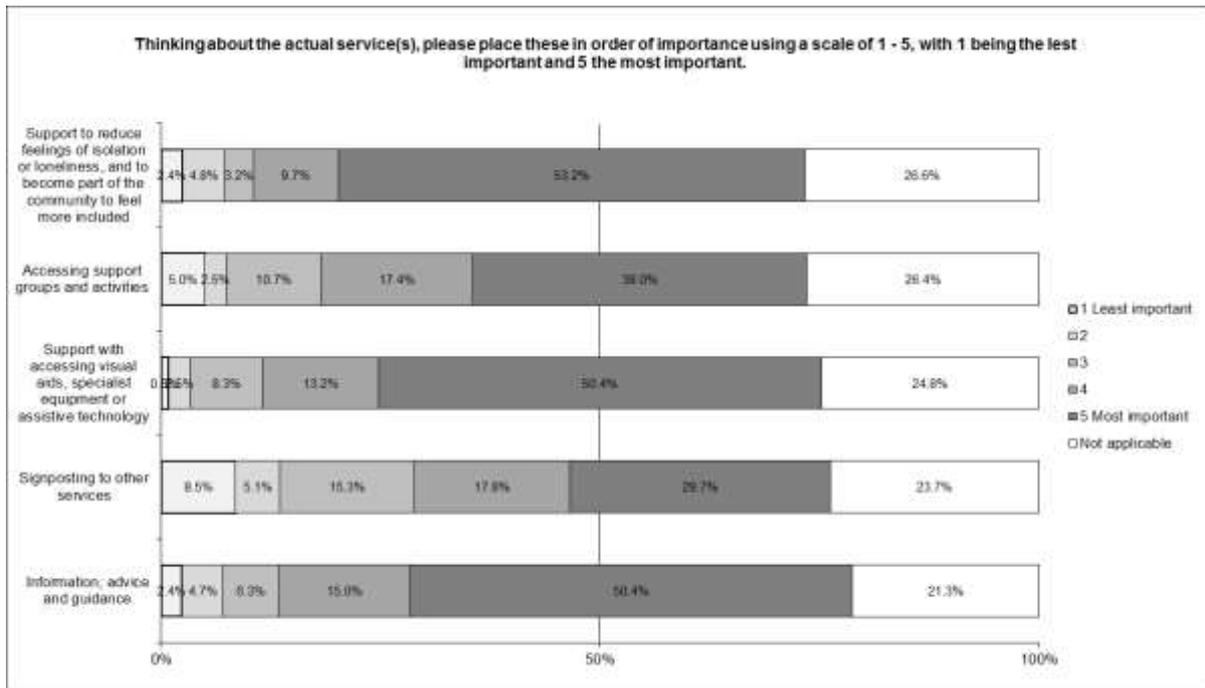
A respondent mentioned the risks they considered the Council would be taking in the possible decommissioning of the service and asked that it be flagged up on the Council’s risk register and another spoke of pursuing legal challenges if the service was decommissioned.

A few respondents did not give comments as they did not use the service and two respondents spoke of their negative experience with NAB.

**We know NAB has, in the past, been able to supplement the money received from the Council with funding from other sources and it may still be able to do so in future. In order for us to consider the future of the Council’s investments, we would like to understand which services you use and how important they are to you.**

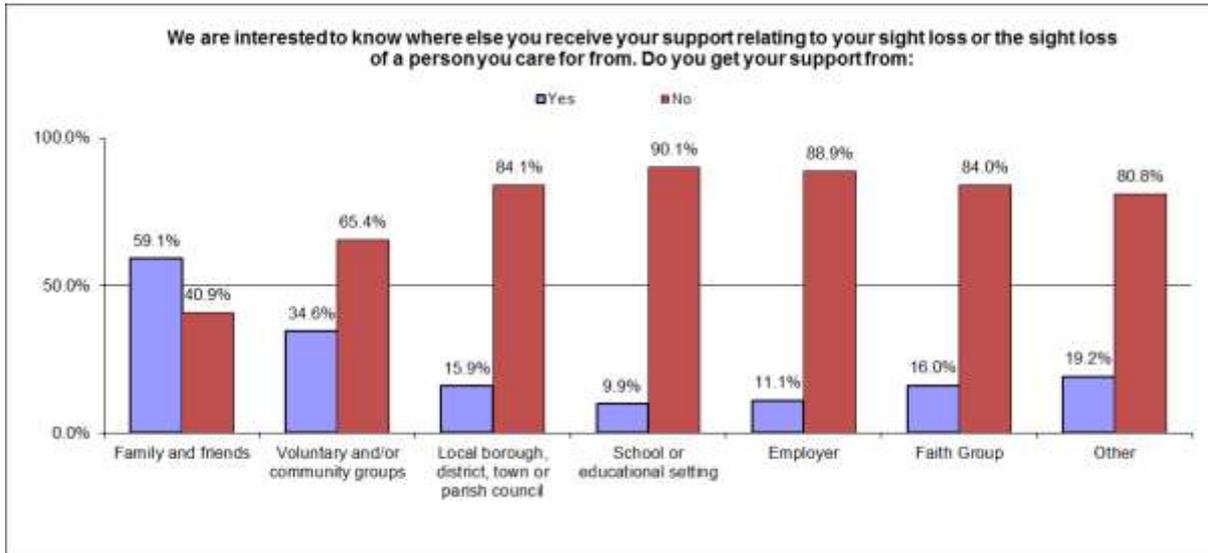
**Thinking about the actual service(s), please place these in order of importance (Please rank these in order of importance using a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being the least important and 5 the most important.**

	1 Least important	2	3	4	5 Most important	Not applicable	Total
Information, advice and guidance	2.4%	4.7%	6.3%	15.0%	50.4%	21.3%	127
Signposting to other services	8.5%	5.1%	15.3%	17.8%	29.7%	23.7%	118
Support with accessing visual aids, specialist equipment or assistive technology	0.8%	2.5%	8.3%	13.2%	50.4%	24.8%	121
Accessing support groups and activities	5.0%	2.5%	10.7%	17.4%	38.0%	26.4%	121
Support to reduce feelings of isolation or loneliness, and to become part of the community to feel more included	2.4%	4.8%	3.2%	9.7%	53.2%	26.6%	124



**We are interested to know where else you receive your support relating to your sight loss or the sight loss of a person you care for from. Do you get your support from:**

	Yes	No	Total
Family and friends	59.1%	40.9%	88
Voluntary and/or community groups	34.6%	65.4%	81
Local borough, district, town or parish council	15.9%	84.1%	82
School or educational setting	9.9%	90.1%	81
Employer	11.1%	88.9%	81
Faith Group	16.0%	84.0%	81
Other	19.2%	80.8%	73
Not applicable, I do not receive support from anywhere else			52



When asked to state other voluntary or community groups in addition to NAB, respondents included RNIB, Blind Veterans, VI Cricket, local church and WRVS.

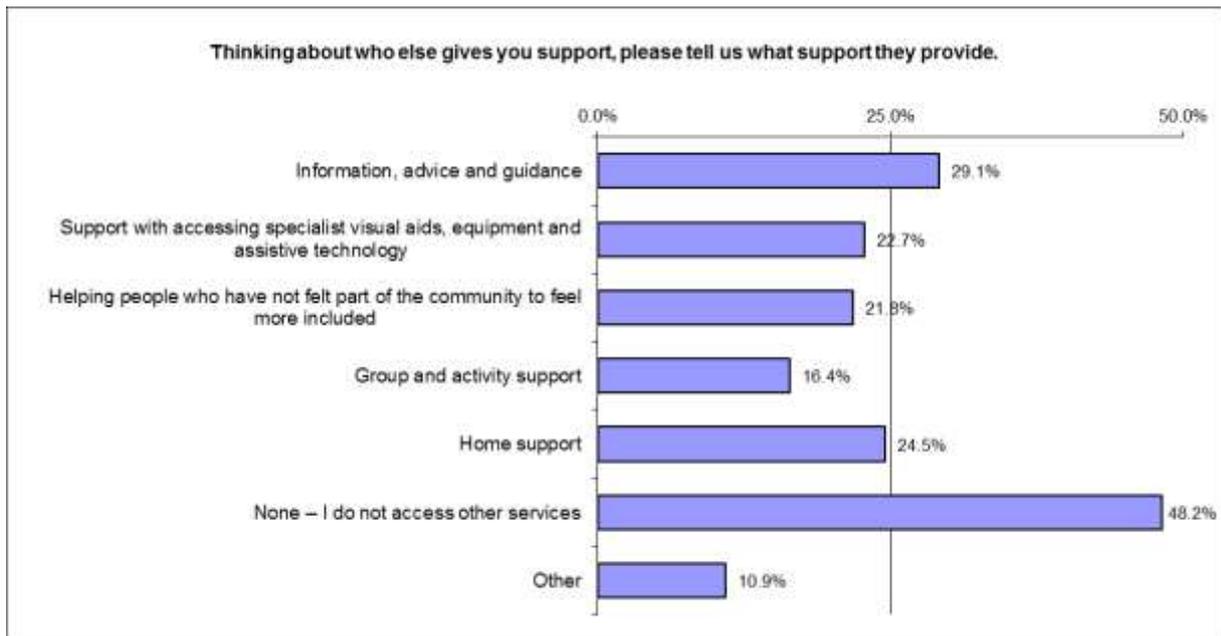
When asked to specify which local district, borough or parish/ town councils, respondents said Olympus Care Services, Visual impairment services provided by NCC Social Services, Northampton Law and Community health and local church.

When asked to specify which school or other educational settings, respondents said Northamptonshire VITAL Visual impairment teachers or Specialist College.

If respondents had indicated “other”, when asked to state what this was, respondents said word of mouth, family/friends and carers, professionals and other voluntary organisations.

**Thinking about who else gives you support, please tell us what support they provide.**

Information, advice and guidance	29.1%	32
Support with accessing specialist visual aids, equipment and assistive technology	22.7%	25
Helping people who have not felt part of the community to feel more included	21.8%	24
Group and activity support	16.4%	18
Home support	24.5%	27
None – I do not access other services	48.2%	53
Other	10.9%	12
		110



Respondents who selected “Other” commented that there are no other services apart from the ones NAB provide. A few commented that they did not think that that NAB would help them. Some respondents listed the type of service i.e. cleaning. Another respondent mentioned that independent support was better than relying on family support and also that not everyone had family to call upon.

Respondents were asked if the Council were to end its funding arrangement for adult services to NAB, what they thought needed to happen to make sure that the impact is minimal for those affected. Many responses were made to this question. Respondents said that there would be a substantial impact for some of the most vulnerable people who use the service. They considered that many people would be unable to maintain their independence and would become isolated and suffer further vulnerability.

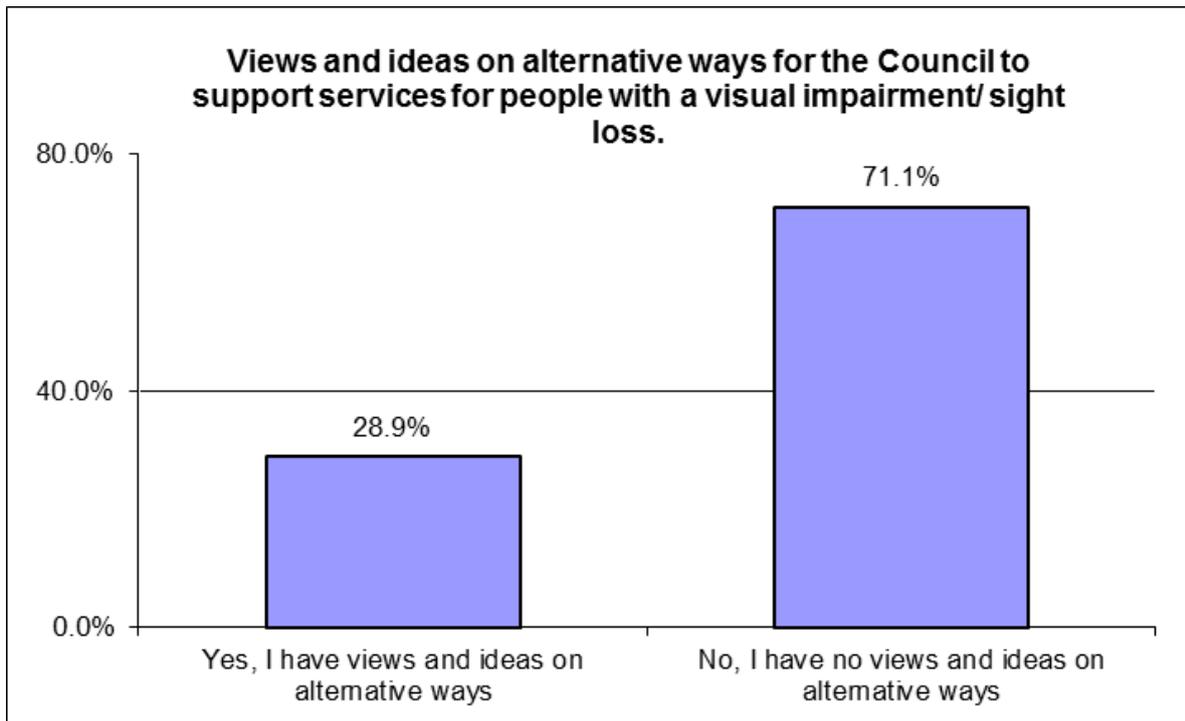
Respondents strongly felt that an alternative provider would need to be sought, with some emphasising that it would be need to be on a like for like basis. The alternative provider would need to have local knowledge as well as specialist knowledge and that a continuation of services should be provided. Consistently, respondents stated that the current services provided by NAB were of a good quality and were appropriate. They said that NAB was proactive and understood fully the needs of visually impaired people in the county and had adapted over the years to meet the need. They stated that the activities provided by NAB were intergenerational and could help cross boundaries; for example they mentioned activities such as computer sight impaired equipment, computer teaching, book clubs, yoga and therapeutic massage. Respondents were concerned about how the negative impact would be managed by the Council, as over time resources with sensory impairment had been severely reduced. Many respondents continued to say that services were vital. Other said that many users of the services were not in receipt of statutory local authority funding but needed the support to prevent them from becoming reliant on other support structures. Some respondents further expressed their own experiences of using the service. They said that they felt

that nobody would care about them and carers stated that they their loved ones would end up being trapped in their homes if it was not for the services of NAB. They added that communities would be destroyed and that it would be a disaster, creating more problems in the long run.

Respondents also felt that there was nothing around to replace the current service and expertise. Respondents also took the opportunity to state that the current perceived financial mismanagement of funds at the Council should not mean services provided for visually impaired should be lost. They said that vulnerable adults needed to be more supported, that services should be more equalised and invested in. Some suggested alternative methods of funding should be sought if the Council was not going to invest directly. This included the Council having a role in seeking funds from other sources i.e. business and then ensuring that provision continued seamlessly.

**If the Council were to stop its funding for adults services to NAB (i.e. decommission), we would be interested to hear your views and ideas on alternative ways for the Council to support services for people with a visual impairment/ sight loss.**

Yes, I have views and ideas on alternative ways	28.9%	26
No, I have no views and ideas on alternative ways	71.1%	64
		90



Respondents who answered yes were asked to provide details. They suggested that funding should be transferred from other areas like Olympus Care Services or that services could share overheads, for example share buildings with similar services or businesses. They said they wanted the Council to prioritise the funding for this very vulnerable group of people. They stated that the alternative

care/ provision would cost the Council more. Respondents felt that in times of financial hardship for the Council, the Council, it should not be removing its arrangements for visually impaired.

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to make any other comments. Overall, those respondents who did stated that they wanted the Council to maintain a contractual arrangement with NAB. They said that the Council must find resources to support these essential services. They felt that the amount of funding and resources attached to the contract was very minimal compared to the services that NAB provides. They said that NAB was a cost effective and efficient lean organisation and that it provided value for money. Respondents stated that people with visual impairment and sight loss are some of the most vulnerable and isolated members of the community. A loss in provision would, they said, mean a rise in loneliness and an increase in isolation. This would then present itself in poor mental wellbeing, which in the long term would be of higher cost to the public purse.

Respondents said that on the whole services were at minimal and that cutting the services back would have a profound effect on the quality of life of those living with sight loss. Respondents considered that that there should be more investment in the service is not less. With statutory services being squeezed, the view was that reducing funding to the voluntary sector is a recipe for disaster. They felt that the Council would experience an increase in the burden of care rather than a reduction of it.

Respondents said that NAB acted as a catalyst which enabled them to find support and work. This vital service, they said, would be lost. They considered that NAB acted as a linchpin without which they would not be able to access other support. The support they receive enables them to live independently and not rely on family. Without this support and advice they felt that many who use the service would fall through the net.

Respondents also commented around the need to ensure safeguarding practices existed within the charity sector who provided services to vulnerable. Respondents expressed their concern over the perceived poor financial management at the Council and how services for visually impaired should not suffer as a consequence. They said that the small amount of funding for this contract would not affect the overall deficit that the Council faced.

Respondents cited their concerns about the consultation. They wanted better to access opportunities to take part in the consultation and wanted more thought about how they could have their voices heard.

Overall respondents wanted the service kept without reduction in funding, they felt the service was unique and critically that it provided support and advice to a very vulnerable community.

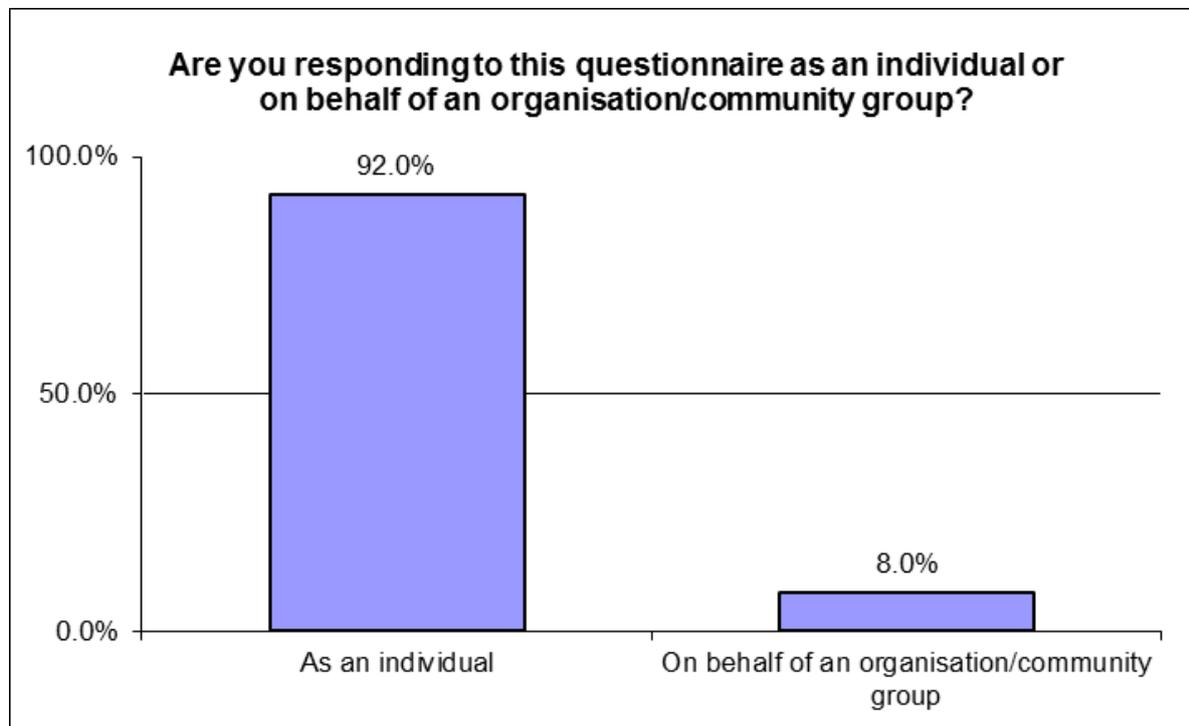
**Demographic questions**

**Are you responding to this questionnaire as an individual or on behalf of an organisation/community group?**

As an individual	92.0%	115
On behalf of an organisation/community group	8.0%	10
		125

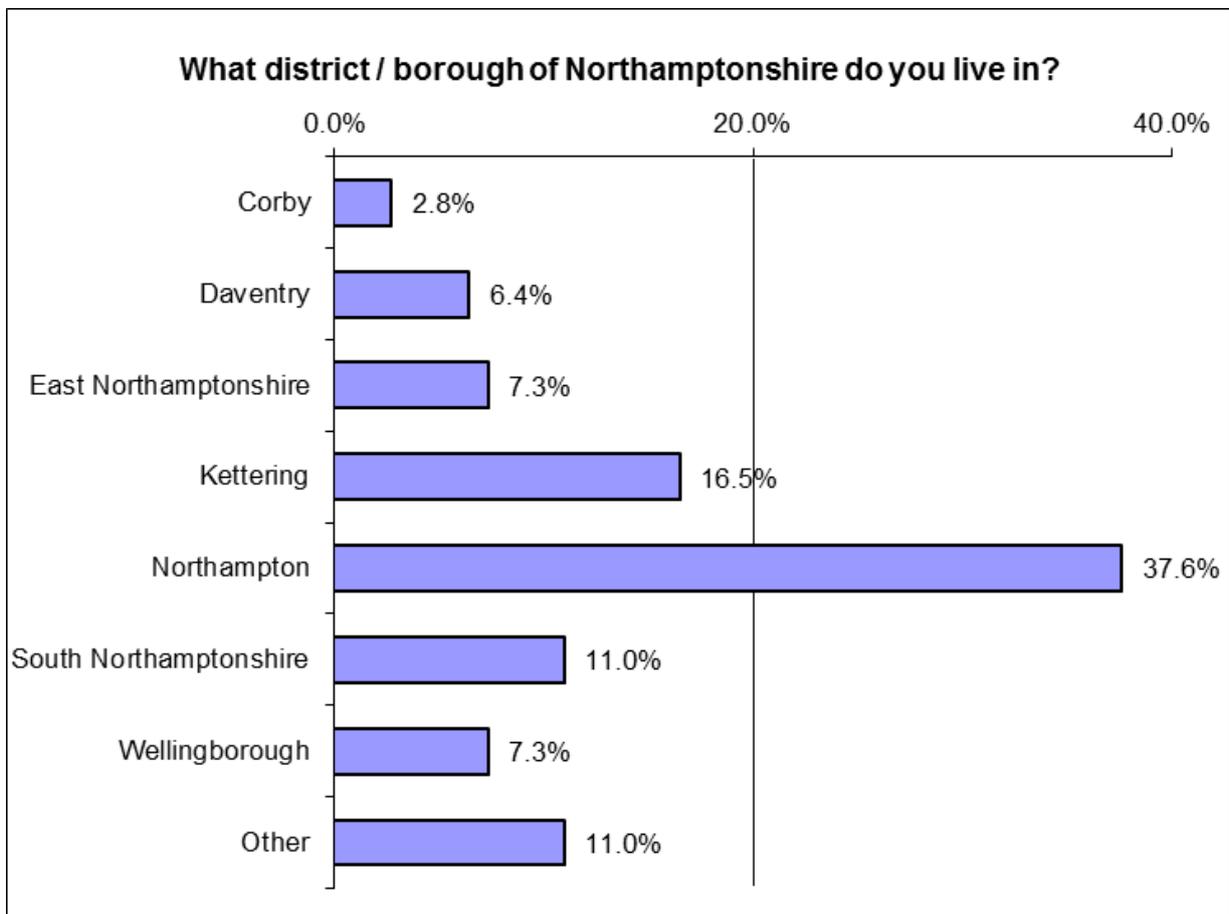
Organisations listed included England Vision Strategy, Nene & Corby Clinical Commissioning Groups, NAB and Rural Wellbeing Service - Northants ACRE

The respondents came from various positions in organisations which ranged from Chief Officers to volunteers.



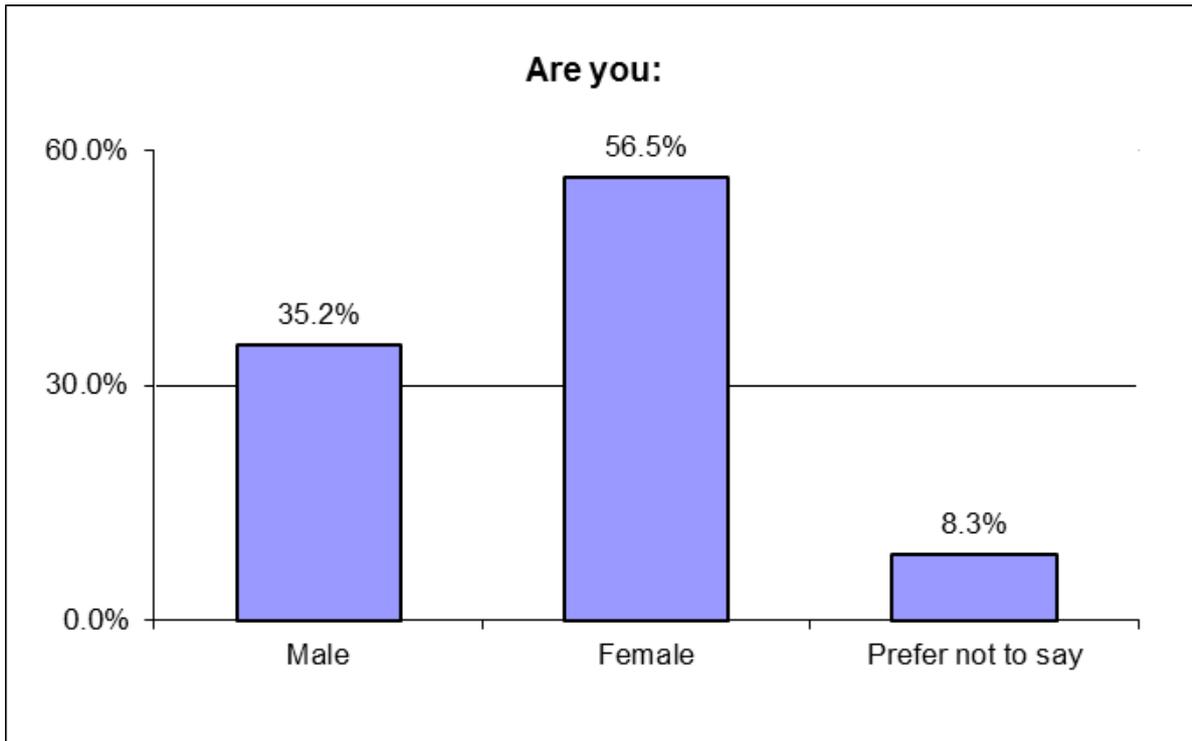
**What district / borough of Northamptonshire do you live in?**

Corby	2.8%	3
Daventry	6.4%	7
East Northamptonshire	7.3%	8
Kettering	16.5%	18
Northampton	37.6%	41
South Northamptonshire	11.0%	12
Wellingborough	7.3%	8
Other	11.0%	12
		109



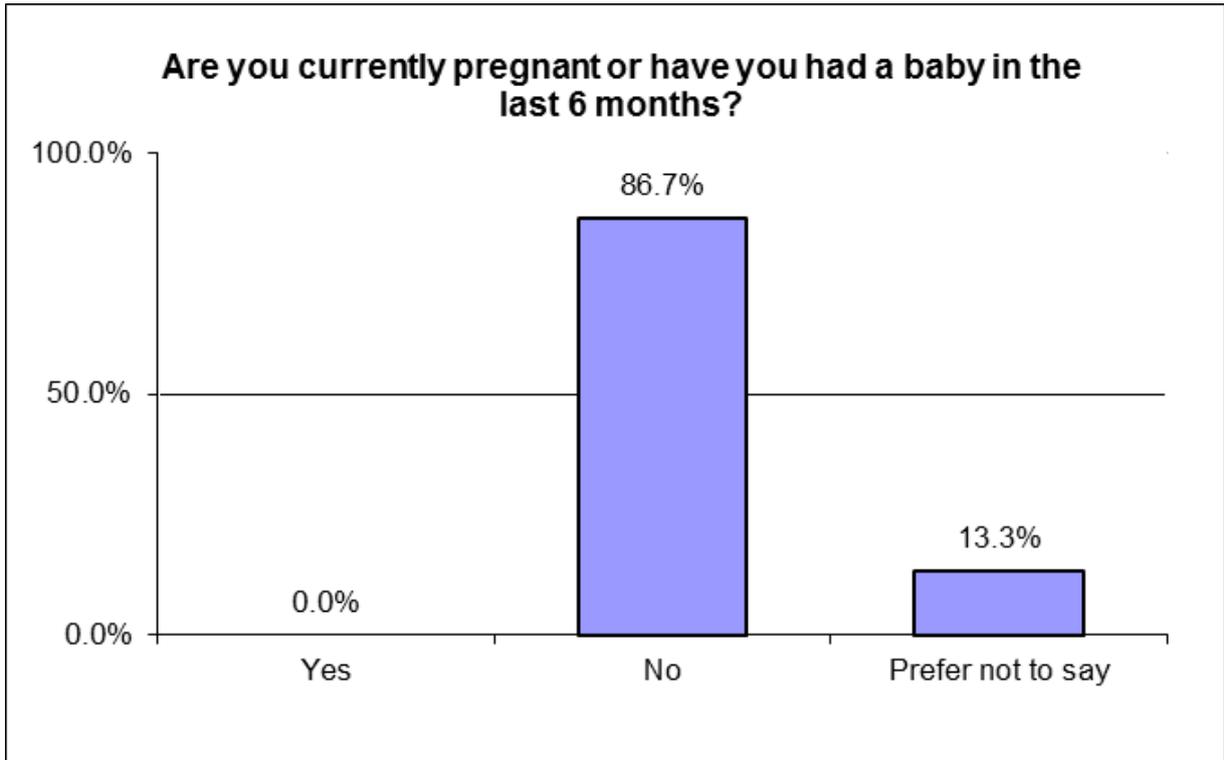
**Are you:**

Male	35.2%	38
Female	56.5%	61
Prefer not to say	8.3%	9
		108



**Are you currently pregnant or have you had a baby in the last 6 months?**

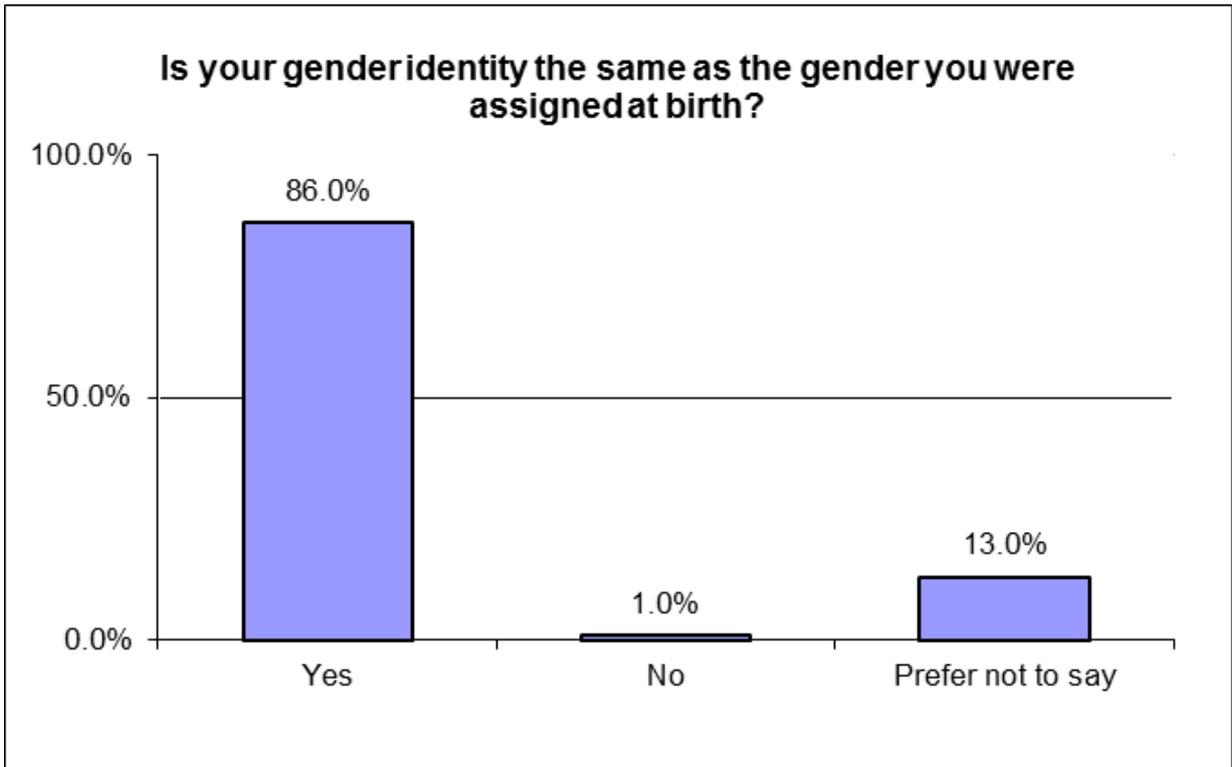
Yes	0.0%	0
No	86.7%	91
Prefer not to say	13.3%	14
		105



**Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?**

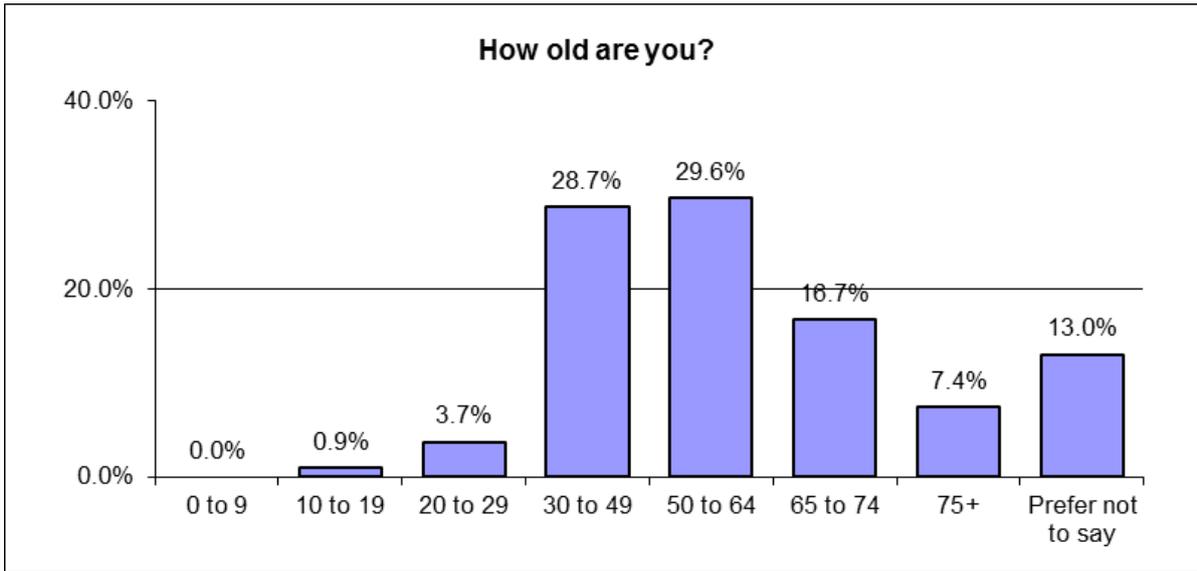
(This question was not asked in the easy read questionnaire)

Yes	86.0%	86
No	1.0%	1
Prefer not to say	13.0%	13
		100



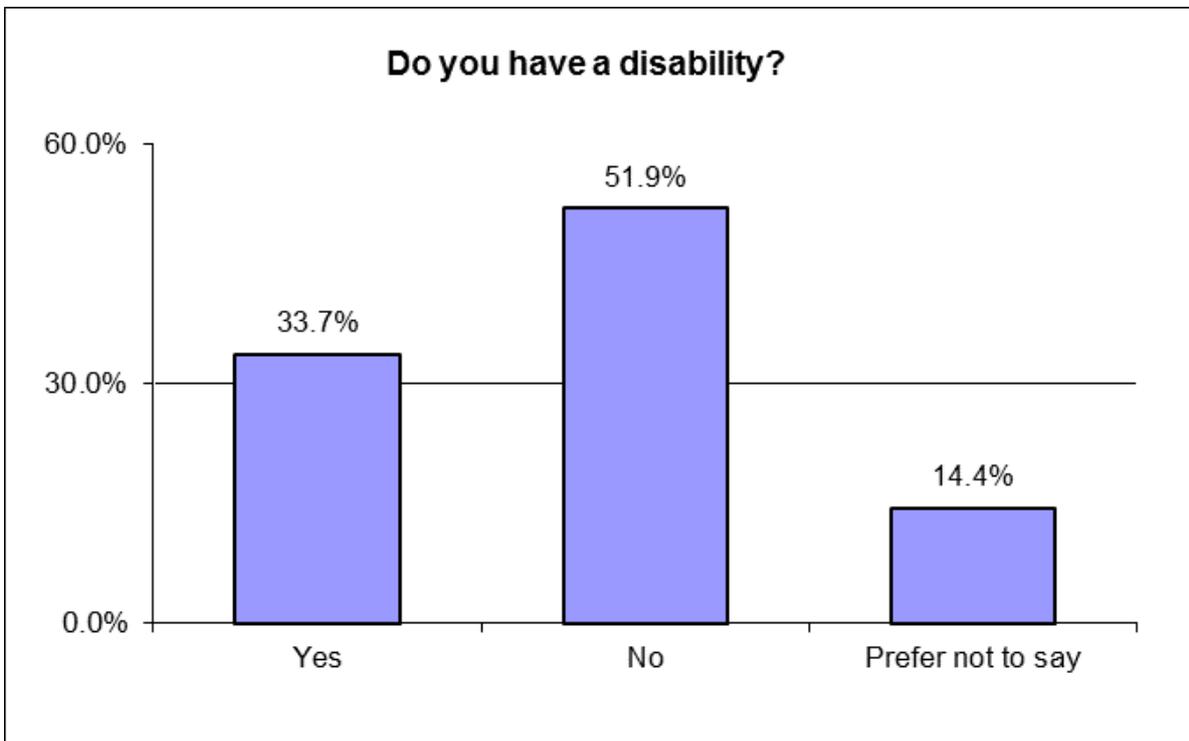
**How old are you?**

0 to 9	0.0%	0
10 to 19	0.9%	1
20 to 29	3.7%	4
30 to 49	28.7%	31
50 to 64	29.6%	32
65 to 74	16.7%	18
75+	7.4%	8
Prefer not to say	13.0%	14
		108



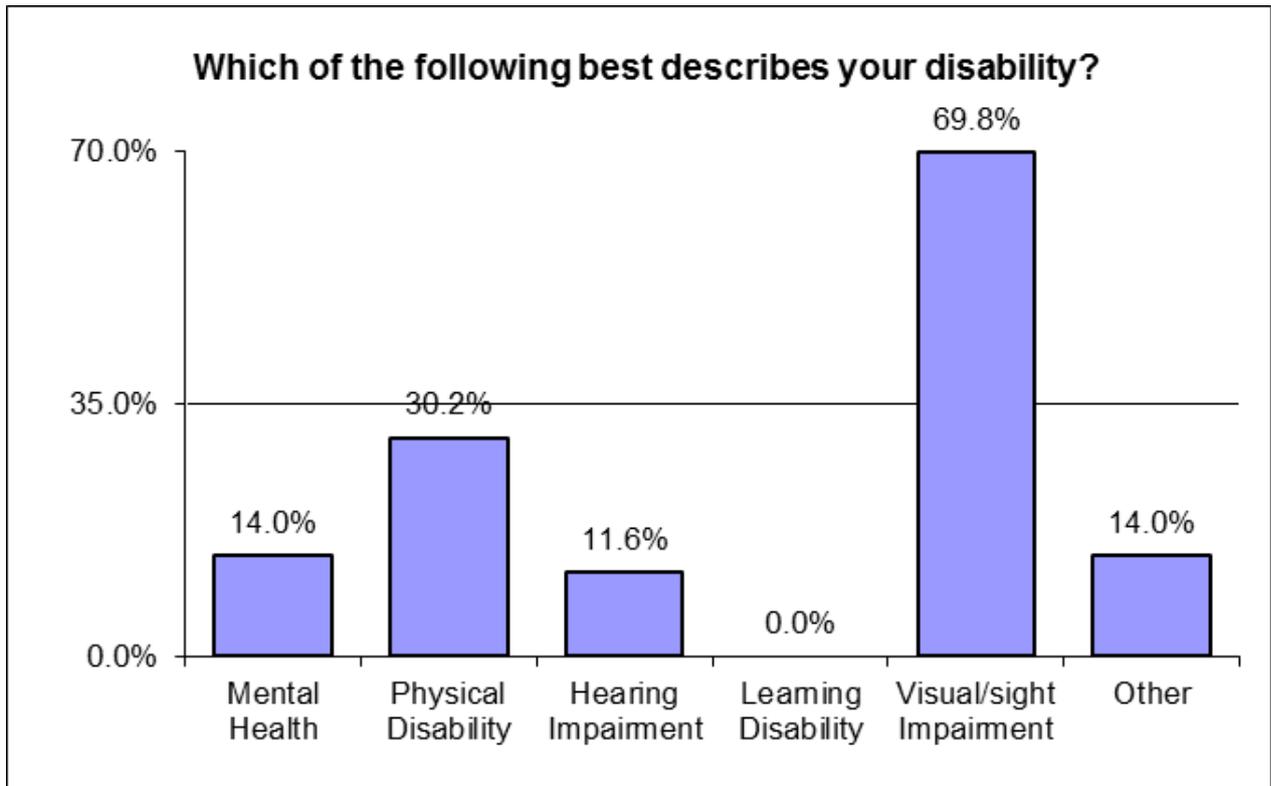
**Do you have a disability?**

Yes	33.7%	35
No	51.9%	54
Prefer not to say	14.4%	15
		104



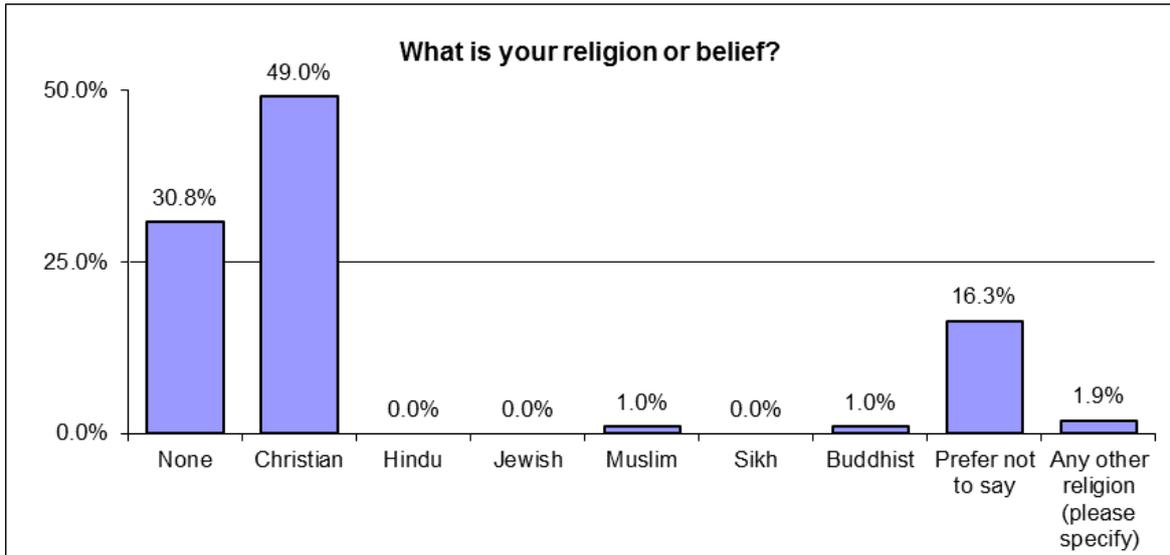
If Yes, please tick the appropriate box(es) which best describes your disability?

Mental Health	14.0%	6
Physical Disability	30.2%	13
Hearing Impairment	11.6%	5
Learning Disability	0.0%	0
Visual/sight Impairment	69.8%	30
Other	14.0%	6
		43



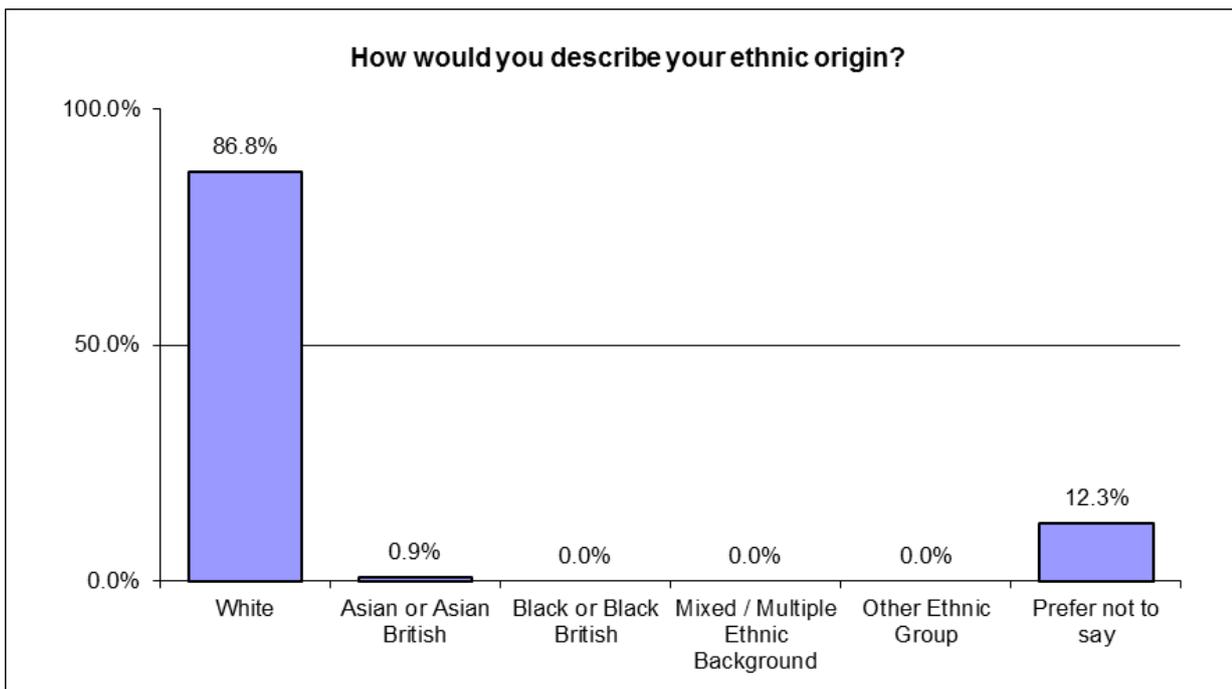
What is your religion or belief?

None	30.8%	32
Christian	49.0%	51
Hindu	0.0%	0
Jewish	0.0%	0
Muslim	1.0%	1
Sikh	0.0%	0
Buddhist	1.0%	1
Prefer not to say	16.3%	17
Any other religion (please specify)	1.9%	2
		104



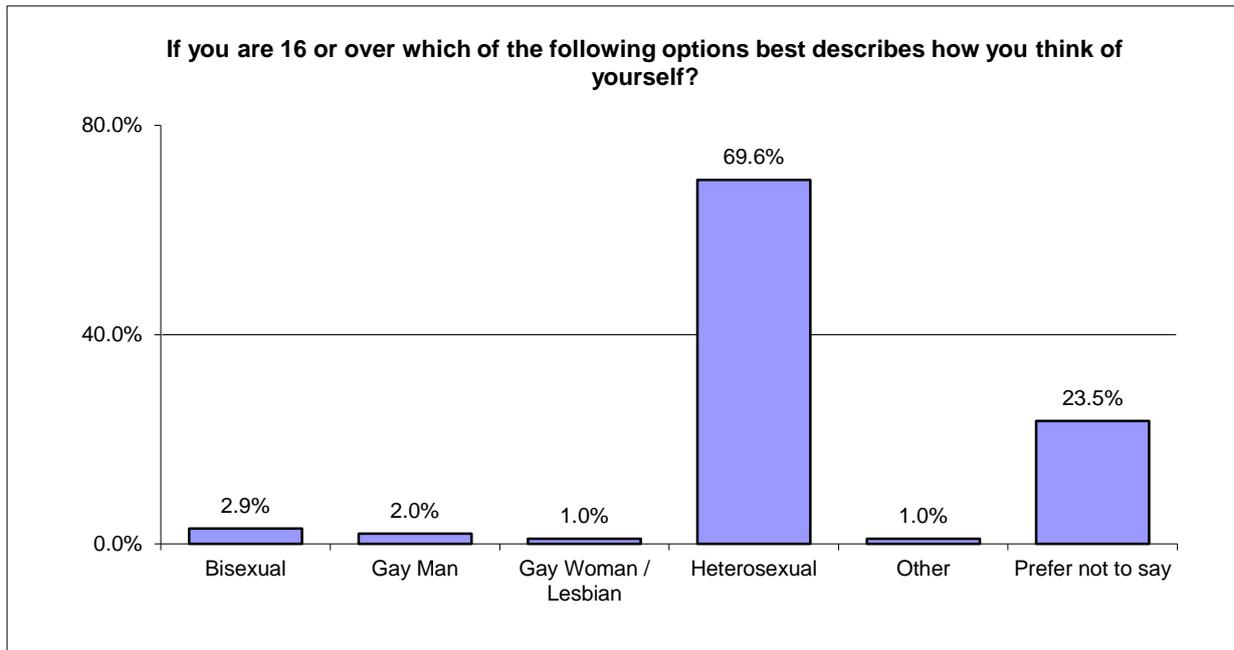
**How would you describe your ethnic origin?**

White	86.8%	92
Asian or Asian British	0.9%	1
Black or Black British	0.0%	0
Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Background	0.0%	0
Other Ethnic Group	0.0%	0
Prefer not to say	12.3%	13
		106



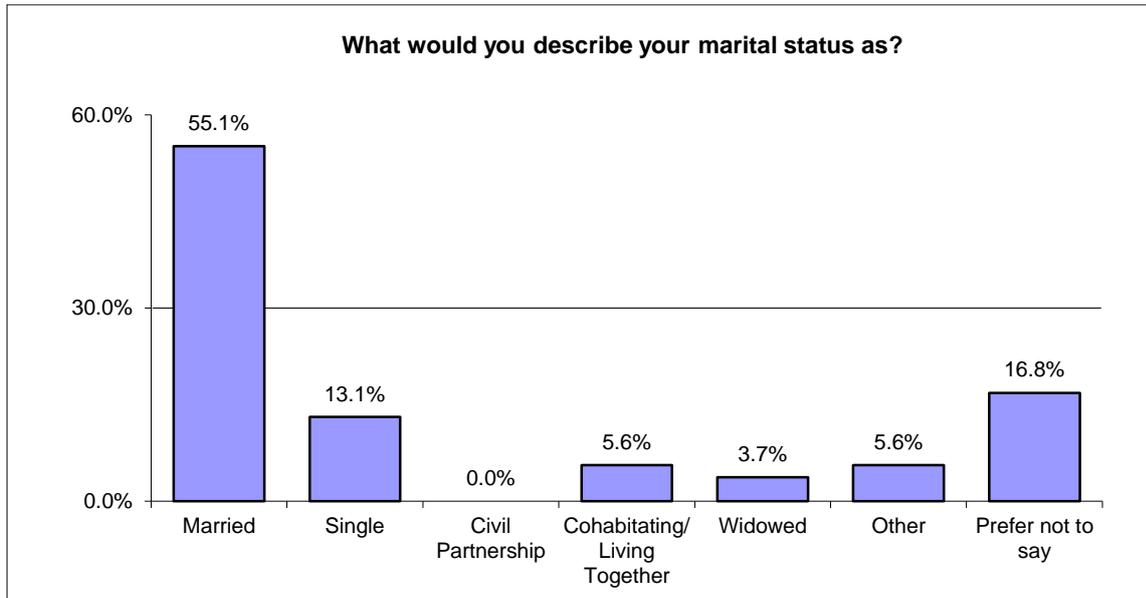
**If you are 16 or over which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?**

Bisexual	2.9%	3
Gay Man	2.0%	2
Gay Woman / Lesbian	1.0%	1
Heterosexual	69.6%	71
Other	1.0%	1
Prefer not to say	23.5%	24
		102



**What would you describe your marital status as?**

Married	55.1%	59
Single	13.1%	14
Civil Partnership	0.0%	0
Cohabiting/ Living Together	5.6%	6
Widowed	3.7%	4
Other	5.6%	6
Prefer not to say	16.8%	18
		107



**Feedback received at public events**

Two events were held for NAB customers, facilitated by officers from NCC, where they could ask questions and give their views about the proposed decommissioning of the contract.

The first was held at the Doddridge Centre in Northampton on 17 October, held over two sessions. The first of these was attended by 12 customers and two NAB employees. They felt that a lot of people are dependent on the support provided by NAB and that the organisation helps with independence and ongoing support, not just at the onset of visual impairments or when someone is registered blind. There was little awareness of any other local organisation that could provide the same support. They felt that the loss of funding would lead to a loss of staff and would ultimately leave people isolation. There was some discussion of the Council’s financial situation and that vulnerable people would have to pay the price. There was also a view that more people probably needed to access support from NAB than do so currently.

The second session on the same day was attended by two NAB employees. They felt that the emotional support provided by NAB was vital, and that many people don’t qualify for statutory support and this is why NAB is so important. They felt there would be further financial implications if match funding is lost. They also felt there would be wider implications because NAB supports families/carers not just the individual. There was some criticism of the online questionnaire (easy read version) which was mentioned earlier in this report.

The second event was held at Kettering MIND Centre on 25 October. It was attended by eight customers, two NAB employees, one ex-NAB employee and one Health professional. The emotional support provided by NAB was mentioned a number of times, with the view that NAB fills a gap that ‘just health’ services can’t provide and also for those who are not registered blind but who have an impairment. NAB provides ongoing support. There was also the view that this will impact on services being needed further down the line, and that it was a short-term solution because it carries out important prevention work that is cost effective. If anything they felt NAB needs more money, not

less and could support more people if it is promoted better. People felt that NAB staff go above and beyond what is expected of them.

They also felt there would be further financial implications if match funding is lost – and also that it will be difficult to negotiate with new unitary authorities (as proposed by the Secretary of State) if the support is lost now. It was considered that maybe NAB could manage on a funding reduction but not a total loss.

It was felt that NCC has a duty of care towards people with a visual impairment and that NAB is picking up support where NCC support has reduced.

NAB's work was considered important to help people with independence and their social wellbeing and that decommissioning the service would lead to a risk of isolation for those who live alone. People valued the fact that NAB has a lot of knowledge and information in one place. It was felt that there was nowhere else to go for this support and that national organisations can't fill the gap. NAB provides signposting for practical support e.g. IT support, assistive technology.

The partnership work NAB performs with hospitals was noted and that there were concerns that this would be lost. The provision of peer support and volunteering opportunities was mentioned and also the fact that NAB supports carers as well as the individuals, indicating a wider impact.

There was a lot of anger about this proposal. There was also some concern about the accessibility of the venue and the website hosting the consultation.

### **Written feedback received**

We also received written feedback from NAB itself and Healthwatch Northamptonshire, as well as an email from a member of the public.

The response from NAB raised concerns about accessibility of events and questionnaire (online and in hard copy) and also questioned whether the attendance at the events demonstrated the strength of feeling about the proposal. The letter also raised concerns about the accuracy of the equality impact assessment and proposed some alternative wording.

As background it also provided service user statistics that it felt should be considered as part of the feedback in terms of what was used by people and what was valued, and some views/research on the impact of sight loss and visual impairment.

The letter noted what it considered to be a lack of local alternative support, including from NCC/OCS – likely to lead to more (expensive) support required further down the line. There was an observation that investment in prevention is important and meets the Council's own priorities.

The response stressed the importance of NAB in supporting people to remain independent and with the emotional challenges of their condition. It was also noted that the need for support is ongoing and not necessarily on a regular basis – NAB is there whether someone needs support on a weekly basis or every now and again.

It noted that there was no guarantee of alternative future funding sources for NAB and that it would be impacted by not being able to match fund to NCC contributions. The response stated that it was important that, if as a result of the consultation a more effective way of supporting the needs of visually impaired people is identified, this must be introduced. It might need to include more NCC staff to directly support visually impaired people.

The response from Healthwatch Northamptonshire stated that the organisation considered that NAB's services are essential to allow people with sight loss to access adult services and stressed the importance of early support and preventative work (a key duty of Care Act 2014). It felt that the proposal was a false economy that will need to more costs/care required at a later stage.

It stated that Healthwatch Northamptonshire and NAB service users need to know what alternative will be put in place if contract decommissioned.

There were some concerns expressed about the consultation process, with the view that it was rushed and not accessible for people with sight loss. It urged the Council to consider impact on disabled people before decision is made (the response expresses concern at lack of equality impact assessment, however one was undertaken and promoted on the consultation register). The response ended by stating that Healthwatch Northamptonshire understands the Council's financial situation but that it must meet objectives and statutory duties.

Without specifying whether the response was in relation to the NAB consultation or Deafconnect consultation running at the same time, the email from a member of the public stressed how important the prevention services were to people who needed them and the impact of making cuts needs to be considered before the decision is made.

### **Conclusion**

The feedback from each consultation method was almost overwhelmingly in support of continued funding for NAB by NCC, and the impact of the removal of funding was stressed by service users, carers and professionals alike. There was a strong feeling that there is no suitable local alternative if NAB does not provide these services and so this should be considered before the service is decommissioned. The changing and ongoing needs of people with sight loss who might not meet statutory thresholds for support were noted and it was felt that the loss of such support would lead to more serious problems (and more cost) further down the line.