



# **NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

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

**November 2018**

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

Currently, Deafconnect has a contract with Northamptonshire County Council to provide a number of services to help deaf and hard of hearing adults to continue to live independently in their own home, with their family or carer(s).

Deafconnect offers an information, advice and support service to promote independence including access to specialist equipment and interpreting services. Deafconnect also provides opportunities for people to:

- meet and socialise, taking part in a variety of activities
- get access to health and care services
- develop skills for independence, employment and hobbies

Due to Northamptonshire County Council’s poor financial situation however, we need to understand the impact of stopping this contract with Deafconnect or the services being provided in a different way. We would like to hear your views on this.

This consultation seeks to gather feedback and evidence about the impact of ending the Council’s current funding arrangements only for the **adults** support service (Children’s First will look separately at funding arrangements for children).

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 and a BSL translation was made available on via a link on the Consultation Register. The consultation was published on the Council’s website.

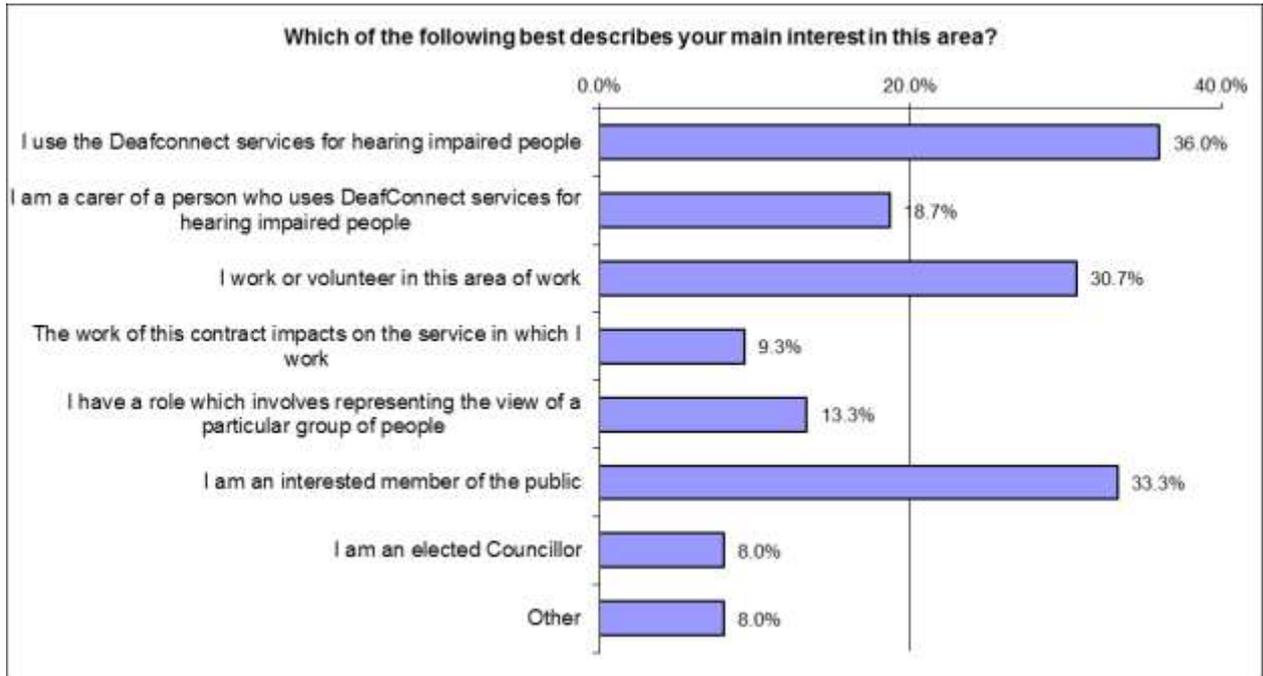
This report gives an overview of the consultation findings.

**Questionnaire feedback**

A total of 77 questionnaires were returned. This included responses from standard and easy read questionnaires.

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

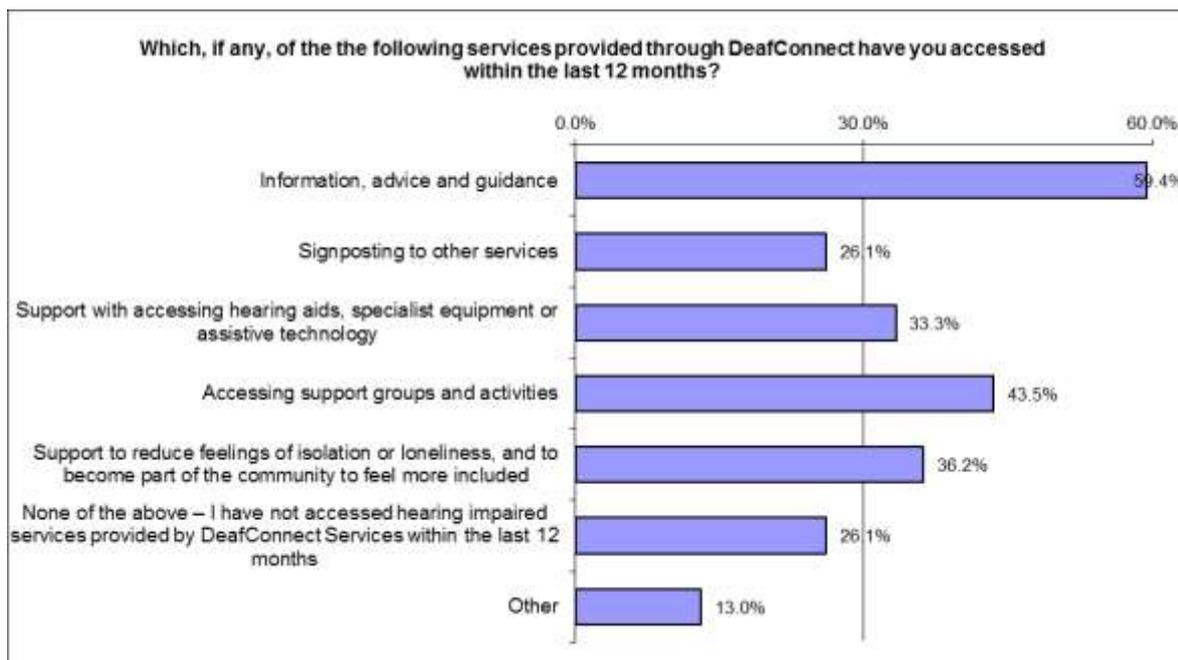
I use the Deafconnect services for hearing impaired people	36.0%	27
I am a carer of a person who uses Deafconnect services for hearing impaired people	18.7%	14
I work or volunteer in this area of work	30.7%	23
The work of this contract impacts on the service in which I work	9.3%	7
I have a role which involves representing the view of a particular group of people	13.3%	10
I am an interested member of the public	33.3%	25
I am an elected Councillor	8.0%	6
Other	8.0%	6
		75



People who commented ‘other’ are people who support or care for those with a hearing impairment or who consider they will use Deafconnect’s services in the future.

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

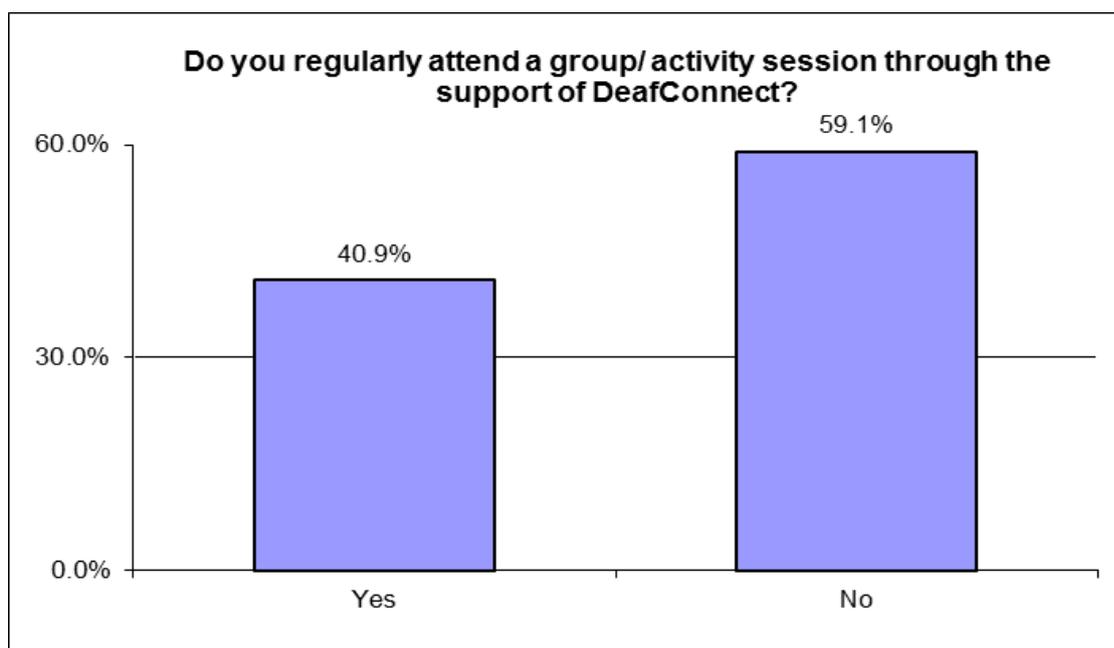
Information, advice and guidance	59.4%	41
Signposting to other services	26.1%	18
Support with accessing hearing aids, specialist equipment or assistive technology	33.3%	23
Accessing support groups and activities	43.5%	30
Support to reduce feelings of isolation or loneliness, and to become part of the community to feel more included	36.2%	25
None of the above – I have not accessed hearing impaired services provided by Deafconnect Services within the last 12 months	26.1%	18
Other	13.0%	9
		69



Respondents commented that they either work with, signpost to or use services. Respondents also stated the value of the service for booking interpreters, acting as a bridge between services. Another respondent said that the impact of not having a service would be felt on their patients or their own health as well as wellbeing and social engagement.

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

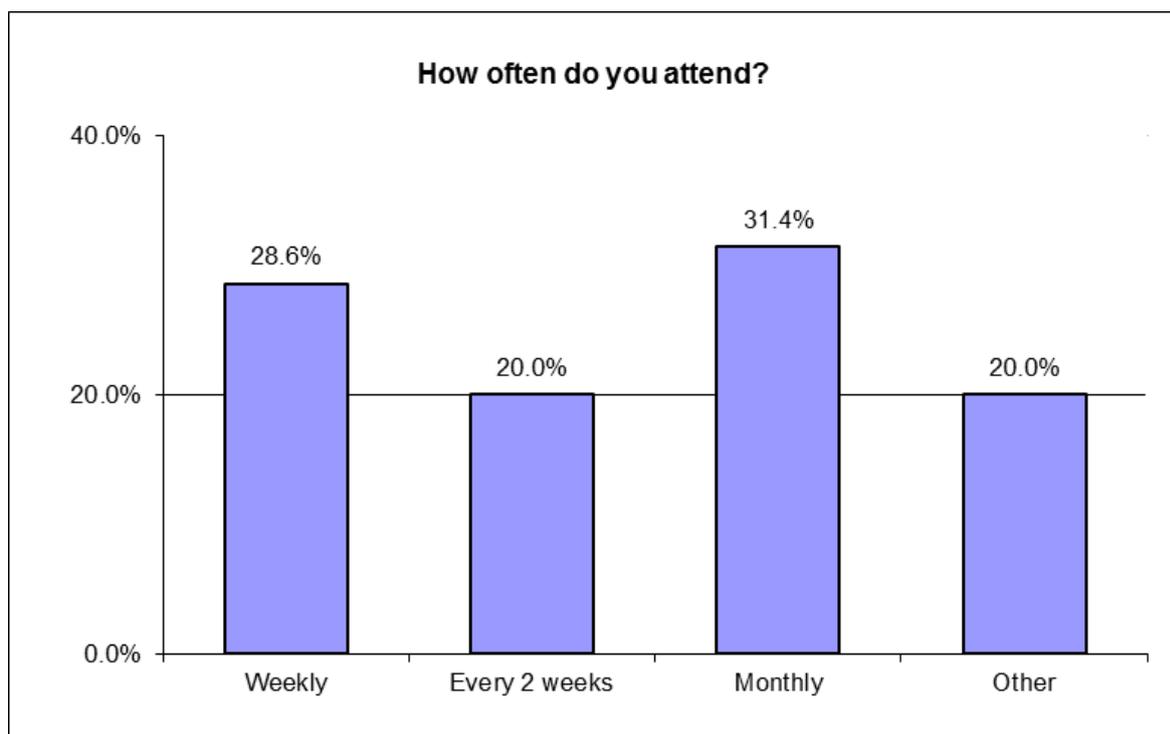
Yes	40.9%	27
No	59.1%	39
		66



List of activities included Youth Group, Tinnitus group, deaf café, 50+ group, BSL group, drop in and one to one support, Funky Friday, Under 5’s coffee morning, family outings and Job Club.

**How often do you attend?**

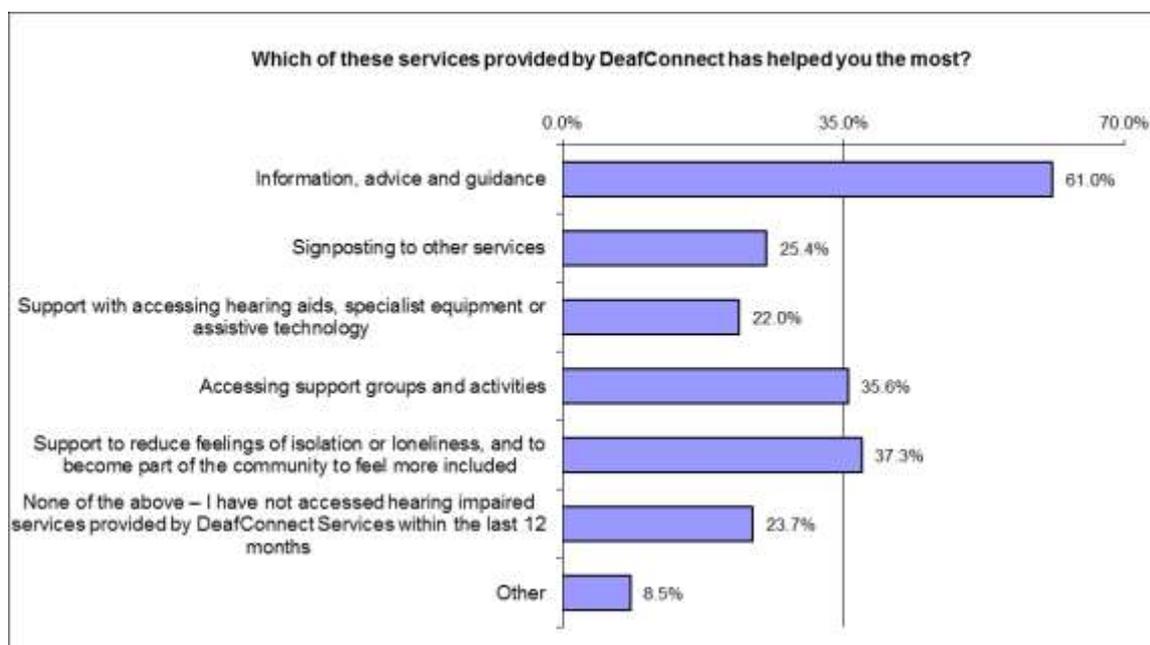
Weekly	28.6%	10
Every 2 weeks	20.0%	7
Monthly	31.4%	11
Other	20.0%	7
		35



Additional comments indicated people attended whenever possible and in between, contact was through telephone calls. Their attendance was limited due to transport access but at times they could access services, such as in school holidays. Some commented that they had never attended a group.

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

Information, advice and guidance	61.0%	36
Signposting to other services	25.4%	15
Support with accessing hearing aids, specialist equipment or assistive technology	22.0%	13
Accessing support groups and activities	35.6%	21
Support to reduce feelings of isolation or loneliness, and to become part of the community to feel more included	37.3%	22
None of the above – I have not accessed hearing impaired services provided by Deafconnect Services within the last 12 months	23.7%	14
Other	8.5%	5
		59

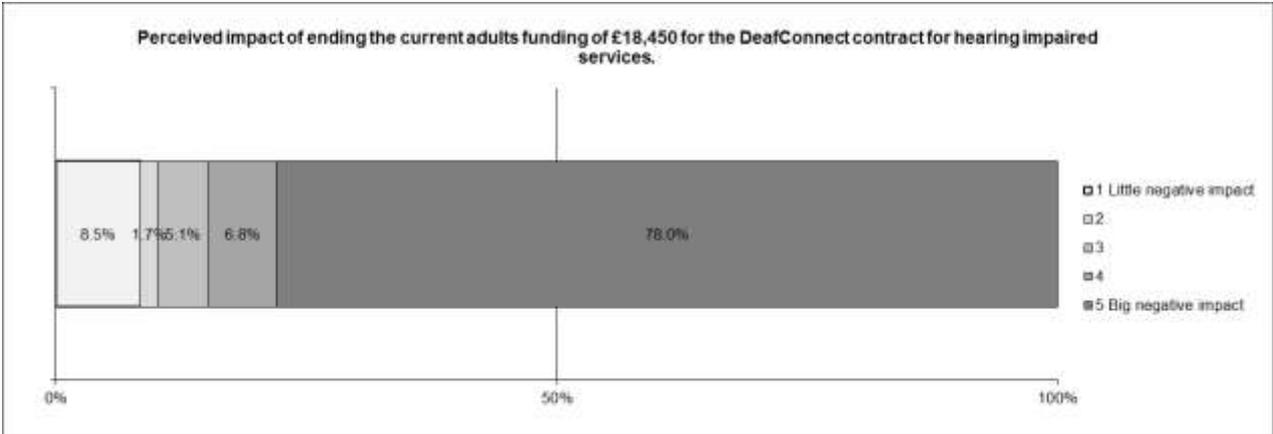


Respondents commented that they has the opportunities to access the work environment including support and training. One respondent said that Deafconnect had helped them find a job or develop a new skill. Other stated that they had sought assistance with equipment.

We are considering ending our current Adult Services funding of £18,450 for the Deafconnect contract for hearing impaired services (i.e. decommissioning). This sum currently helps fund a proportion, approximately 12.5%, of the overall Deafconnect service provision within the county which is outlined in the introduction of 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
8.5%	1.7%	5.1%	6.8%	78.0%	59



Respondents who provided comments when asked said that they valued the services provided by Deafconnect. They stated how they felt about their disability, with some describing it as “hidden” and not easily recognised in a world built for the hearing. They said that the deaf are often misunderstood by those that are hearing. Respondents stated that they would be isolated, depressed and anxious if they did not receive support and advice. Many spoke about the need for British Sign Language (BSL) and their need for interpretation and translation services in order for them to lead a normal everyday life.

Respondents expressed with passion their use of Deafconnect services to help them and their family cope and manage their hearing impairment. Respondents said that the amount of money allocated and invested was small in comparison to the work that was being from the Deafconnect contract. Some went on to explain that they felt that people would be put at risk as they would be further isolated as a minority group. They said that the specialist and unique services Deafconnect provided enabled them to access mainstream services. Many stated that the service was vital and it was unfair and short sighted of the Council to think that it could decommission the service. They consistently said that there would be no support, guidance, advocacy and training opportunities for deaf people. Some felt that Deafconnect was the only place for them to go to and that the Council should be considering more investment in deaf provision as it was important.

Respondents stated that through activities and services provided by Deafconnect it enabled them to meet others in the same situation. They said that this social interaction was important in helping to

reduce isolation and increase their awareness of support networks, training and job opportunities. They described the service as a lifeline which helped them develop positive self-esteem and aspirations. Respondents said that they relied on the service - which was in a safe environment - and that there were very few other places where they could access support locally and where the cultural needs of deaf people could be met.

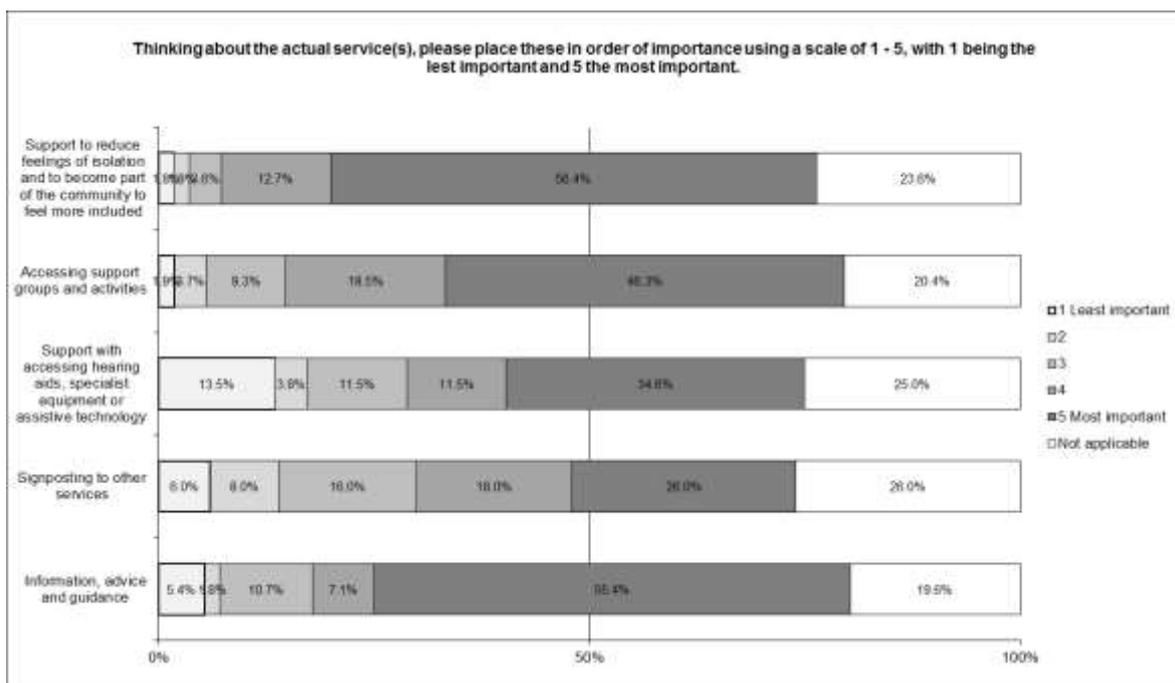
Respondents stated that deaf people are more likely than hearing people to suffer from mental health problems and that taking away their only social interaction that involves people who speak their language could be devastating. Respondents once again commented on the withdrawal of funding being a backward step for the Council, where it was perceived that the Council’s cuts have already impacted on the very vulnerable. They also said that that if the services were to stop that it would impact on NHS budgets further down the line.

Respondents also said that their requirements for services changed as their hearing impairment conditions changed over time.

**We know Deafconnect has, in the past, been able to supplement the money it receives from the Council with funding from other sources and it may still be able to do so in the 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.**

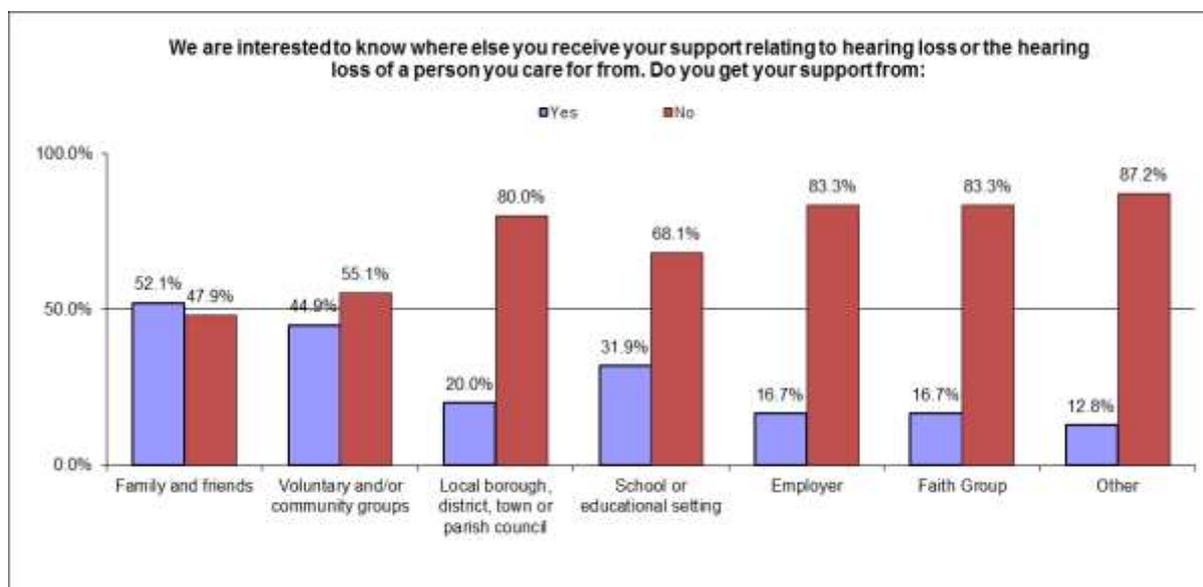
**Thinking about the actual service(s), please place these in order of importance (Please rank these in order of importance using a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being the least important and 5 the most important.**

	1 Least important	2	3	4	5 Most important	Not applicable	Total
Information, advice and guidance	5.4%	1.8%	10.7%	7.1%	55.4%	19.6%	56
Signposting to other services	6.0%	8.0%	16.0%	18.0%	26.0%	26.0%	50
Support with accessing hearing aids, specialist equipment or assistive technology	13.5%	3.8%	11.5%	11.5%	34.6%	25.0%	52
Accessing support groups and activities	1.9%	3.7%	9.3%	18.5%	46.3%	20.4%	54
Support to reduce feelings of isolation and to become part of the community to feel more included	1.8%	1.8%	3.6%	12.7%	56.4%	23.6%	55



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

	Yes	No	Total
Family and friends	52.1%	47.9%	48
Voluntary and/or community groups	44.9%	55.1%	49
Local borough, district, town or parish council	20.0%	80.0%	45
School or educational setting	31.9%	68.1%	47
Employer	16.7%	83.3%	48
Faith Group	16.7%	83.3%	48
Other	12.8%	87.2%	39
Not applicable, I do not receive support from anywhere else			18



In addition to Deafconnect, other groups used included Northamptonshire Deaf Childrens Society, Northants Shine Group, Marlow House, Deaf Hub CIC, local church and self-help groups.

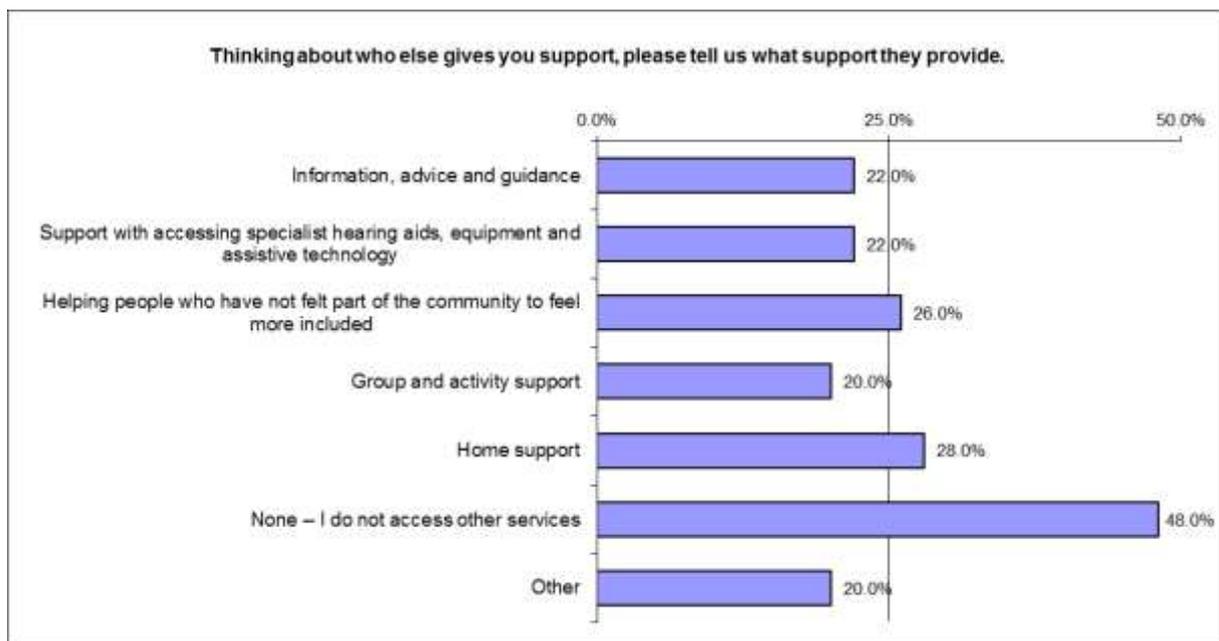
When asked to specify which district/borough/town/parish council provided them with support, respondents said Northampton Hospital, Daventry and Local Offer listings found at Deaf Hub.

When asked to specify which school or educational setting provided them with support, respondents said out of county deaf school, Northampton College, Specialist Deaf College, specialist secondary school, parent supporting child at school, or that they were teacher of the deaf or provided the name of school.

When asked to specify which other source people received support from, they mentioned other clubs and groups but not deaf groups, internet, through friends and Deafconnect.

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

Information, advice and guidance	22.0%	11
Support with accessing specialist hearing aids, equipment and assistive technology	22.0%	11
Helping people who have not felt part of the community to feel more included	26.0%	13
Group and activity support	20.0%	10
Home support	28.0%	14
None – I do not access other services	48.0%	24
Other	20.0%	10
		50



Some respondents commented that there are no services other than those which Deafconnect provides which helps them communicate and understand things.

Some respondents listed the type of service i.e. cleaning, interpreting, audiology, support with technology. Others said that they could not communicate and another said their partner helped them. One respondent said that although they did not use the service themselves, Deaf Hub provided most of the services listed.

Respondents also commented on the longevity of Deafconnect of almost 150 years of operation within the county.

Respondents were asked if the Council were to end its funding arrangement for adult services to Deafconnect, what they thought needed to happen to make sure that the impact is minimal for those affected.

A number of respondents said that the impact of withdrawing funding for Deafconnect and hearing impaired services could not be minimised.

Respondents wanted the service and current contract to remain. They stated that the safety of deaf people could become compromised. They were not sure where else people would go for their activities and receive support.

Respondents said Deafconnect understood their needs and requirements, which included understanding the rights of deaf people. Many respondents said that the impact would be devastating. They wanted the Council to find the funding from elsewhere. They stated they wanted the Council to enter into building partnerships with others including the NHS to see what elements of the contract be taken over by them.

Many respondents said that any replacement service or re-provision of the service needed to be on a like for like basis. They said the Council would end up spending more money rather than saving small amount of money attached to the contract. One respondent said that the Council would need to set up and fund specialist mental health services to cope with an increase in demand from the deaf community. Respondents, again, said as a result of stopping funding, deaf people would be isolated, frustrated and lonely.

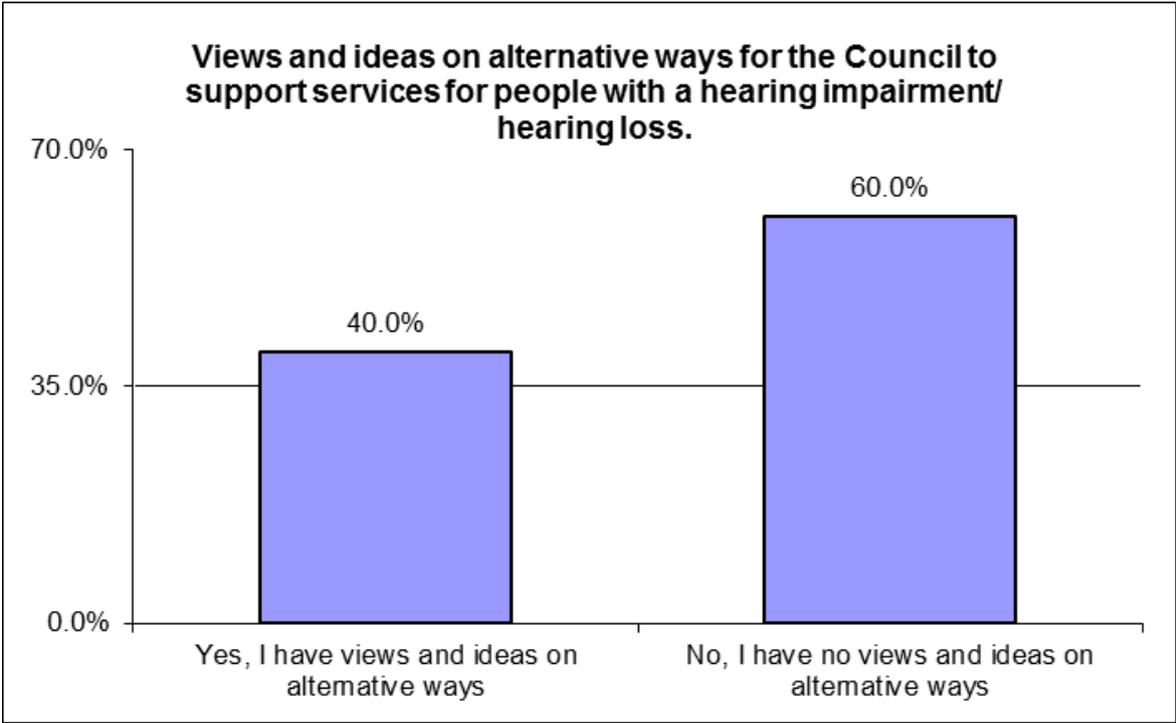
Respondents said that the overall impact would be detrimental and would undo the good work that the Deafconnect had done over many years. They said that Deafconnect was a trusted specialist organisation which be hard to replace.

Respondents also said to minimise the effect of potential decommissioning there would be a requirement to have more advocates, more volunteers who understood deaf issues, and more robust frontline training for public bodies on deaf matters. They said that Council would need to find safe places where deaf people could meet for social and supportive interaction, whereas another respondent said that individual deaf people may need to seek out for themselves safe places to meet, but that they did not know where these were.

Respondents also spoke about the need for the Council to have direct dialogue with the deaf community to work out which services they needed to use the most. Respondents stated that BSL needed to be provided across council services and that people would need to be communicated with and be informed about where services exist and how they could access them.

If the Council were to stop its funding for adult service to Deafconnect (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 hearing impairment/hearing loss.

Yes, I have views and ideas on alternative ways	40.0%	16
No, I have no views and ideas on alternative ways	60.0%	24
		40



Respondents were asked if they had any views or ideas on alternative ways for the Council to support services for people with a hearing impairment or hearing loss. Some respondents commented they wanted the funding arrangements to stay, whilst another suggested that the funding be on a project by project basis. They said that the deaf community needed to have a voice and that the hearing community, in particular the Council and other public organisations, needed to remove barriers. Public bodies needed to be more deaf aware and therefore be able to better communicate and have access to their services.

A respondent suggested increasing the council tax to fund the service, whereas another respondent said the worst case scenario could be that the deaf community would need to pay / contribute for services and that to help this a local co-operative organisation could be set up.

When asked whether they had any other comments to make, respondents said that it is an absolute travesty that the Council was considering whether it needed to stop the service. They said that currently, public money was well spent on prevention services which were empowering and improving lives for deaf people and their families and carers. They also said that removing the funding would have a greater impact on a group of people that were a vulnerable minority and that the Council would be discriminating against the deaf and hearing loss community. Respondents also questioned the amount of funding attached to the contract in that they said the proportion of

funding provided by the Council to Deafconnect made up a more significant amount of funding of the total for Deafconnect. They added that the overall funding level was small.

Respondents expressed that it was a vital and essential service which allowed deaf people to participate in society. Furthermore they added that deaf people have insights and skills and abilities to offer society and that opportunities should be provided to enable deaf people to be part of the wider community.

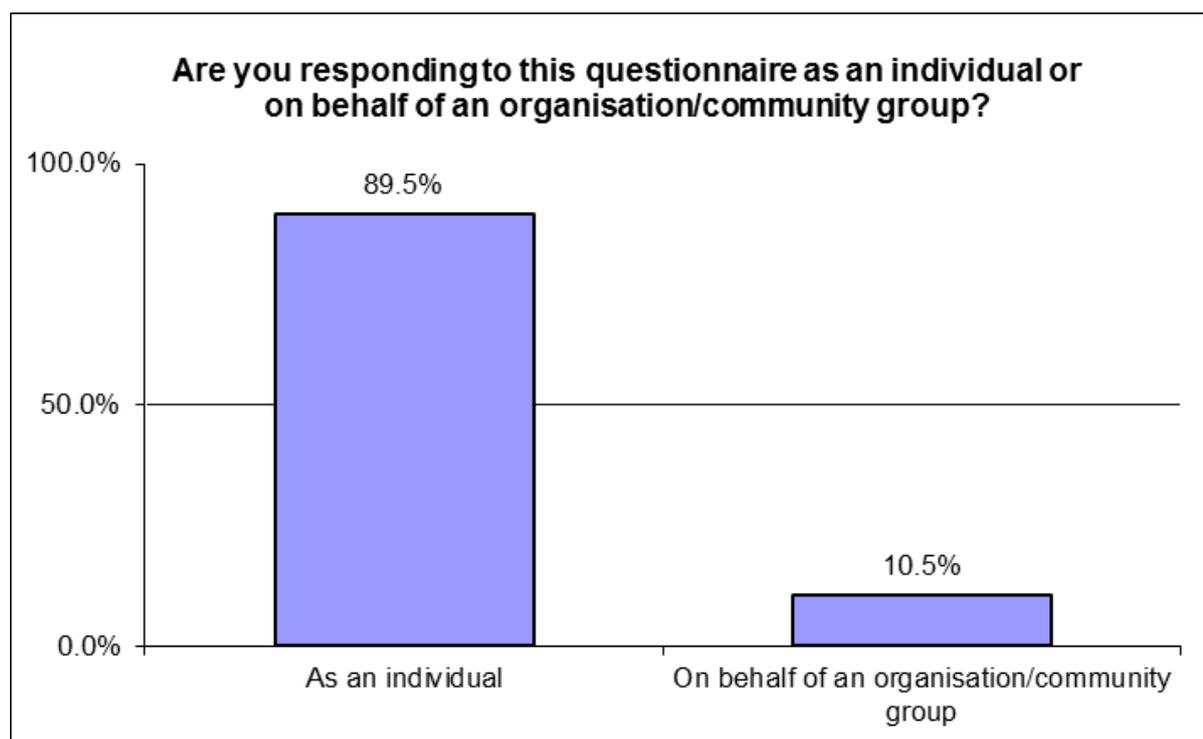
Respondents stated that they felt that the consultation was not inclusive and accessible. They felt it was rushed. They commented on the cost of consultations and legal fees faced by the Council when the consultation was challenged. They said that this did not match up to any of the savings the Council was trying to make and that the Council needs to evaluate their funding more.

One respondent commented that the current provider was not suitable and that there was little accountability in funding arrangements. They said that they were not sure what work was being carried out by the provider and what impact this had on the community. The respondent added that the same small number of clients were provided services year on year without listening to the needs of new clients, who effectively then stopped accessing services or went elsewhere.

**Demographic questions**

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

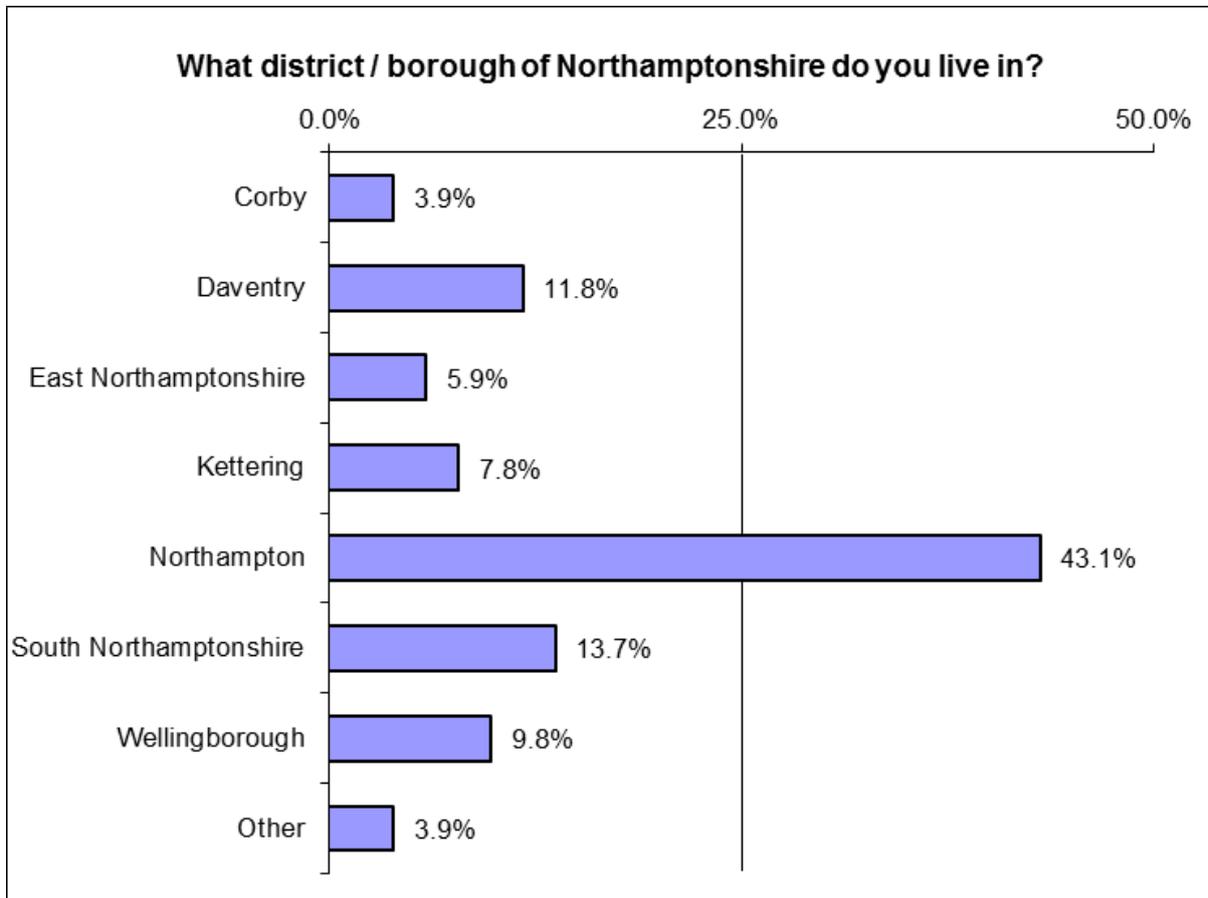
As an individual	89.5%	51
On behalf of an organisation/community group	10.5%	6
		57



Organisations/positions listed included Parish Councillor, volunteer group leader, rural fieldworker and BSL interpreter.

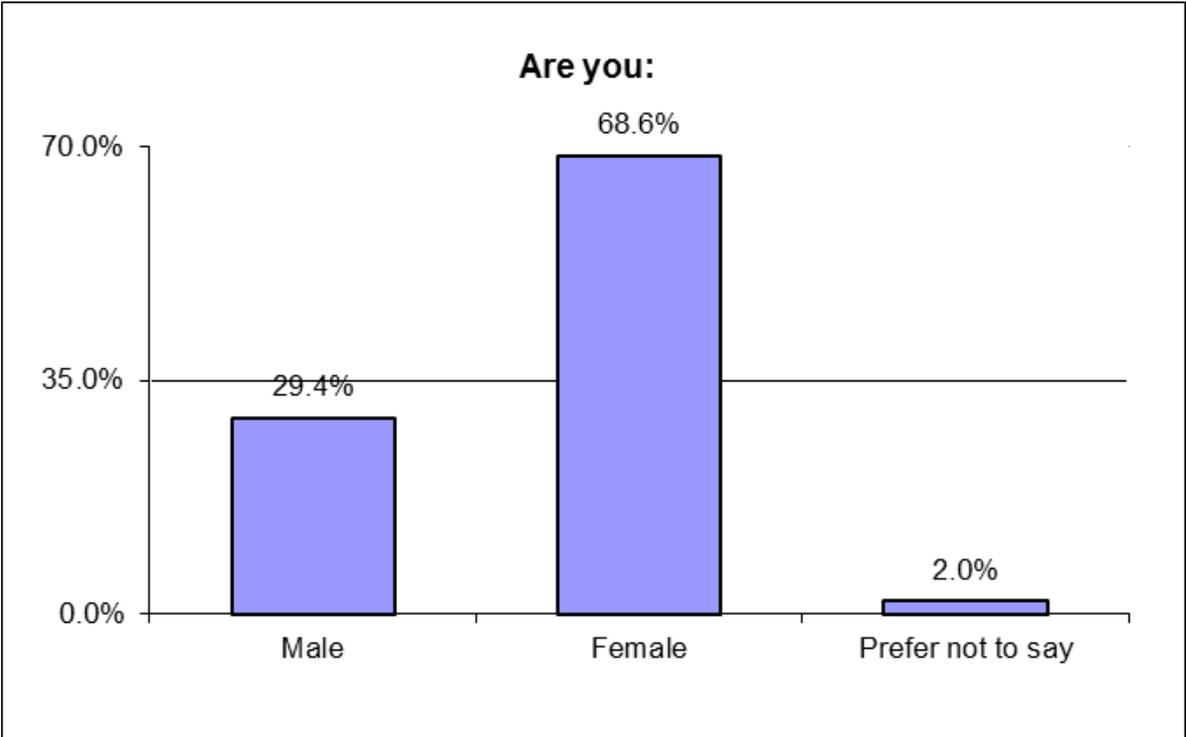
**What district / borough of Northamptonshire do you live in?**

Corby	3.9%	2
Daventry	11.8%	6
East Northamptonshire	5.9%	3
Kettering	7.8%	4
Northampton	43.1%	22
South Northamptonshire	13.7%	7
Wellingborough	9.8%	5
Other	3.9%	2
		51



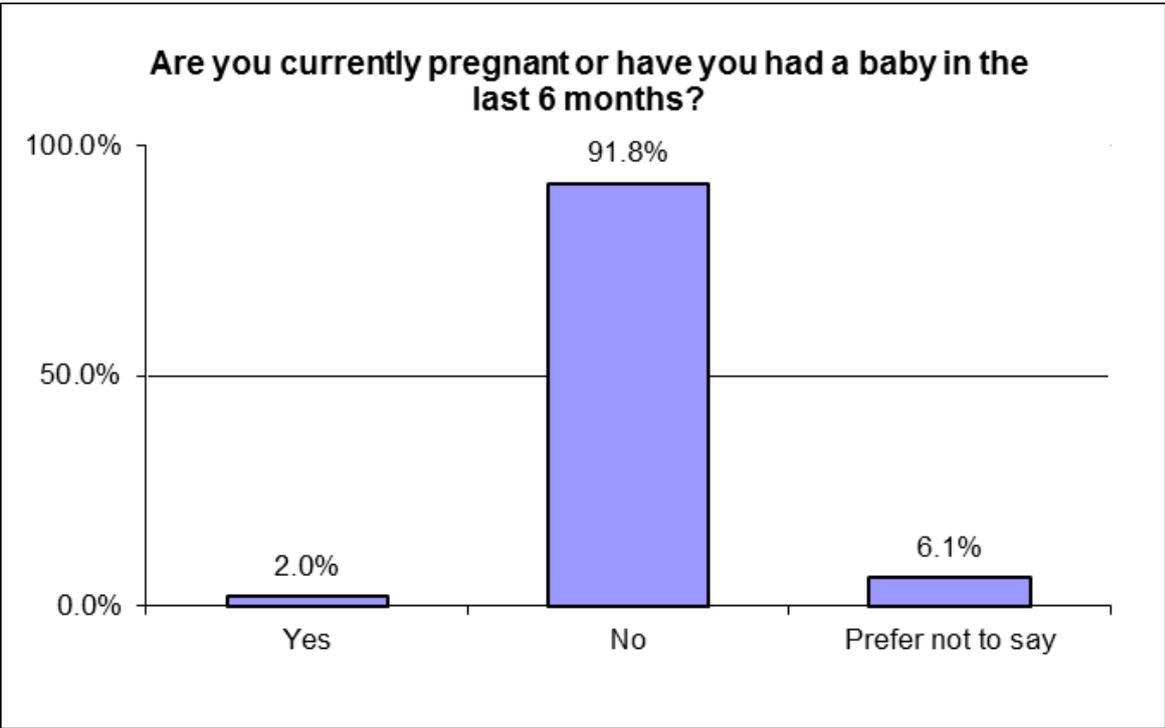
**Are you:**

Male	29.4%	15
Female	68.6%	35
Prefer not to say	2.0%	1
		51



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

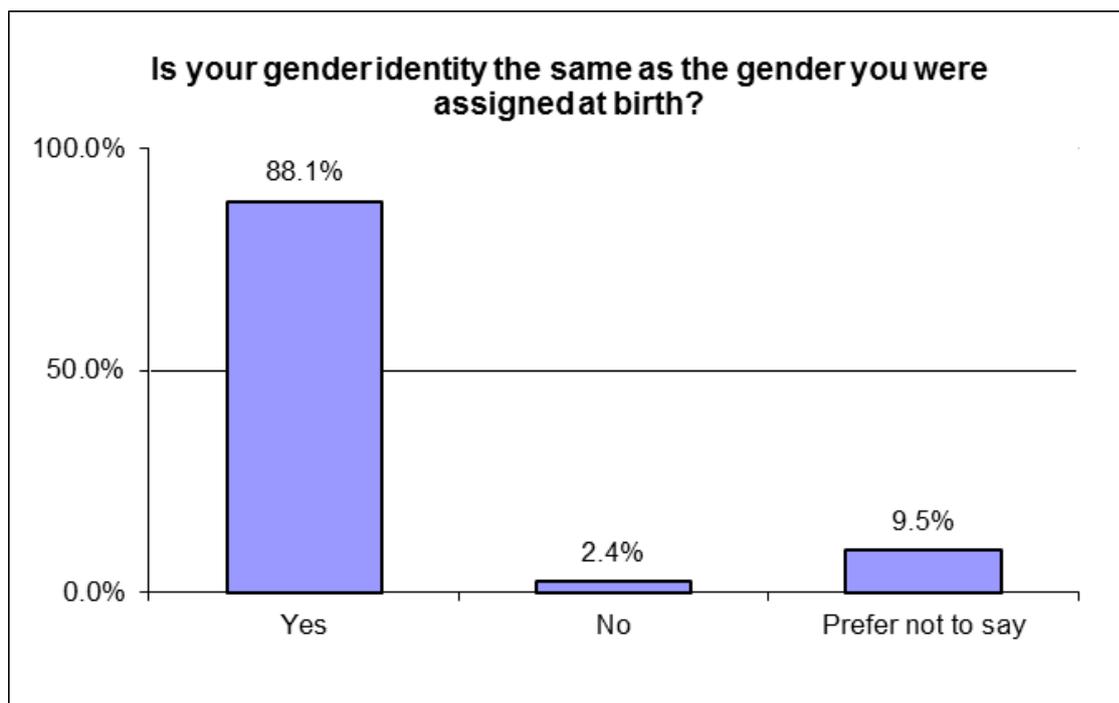
Yes	2.0%	1
No	91.8%	45
Prefer not to say	6.1%	3
		49



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

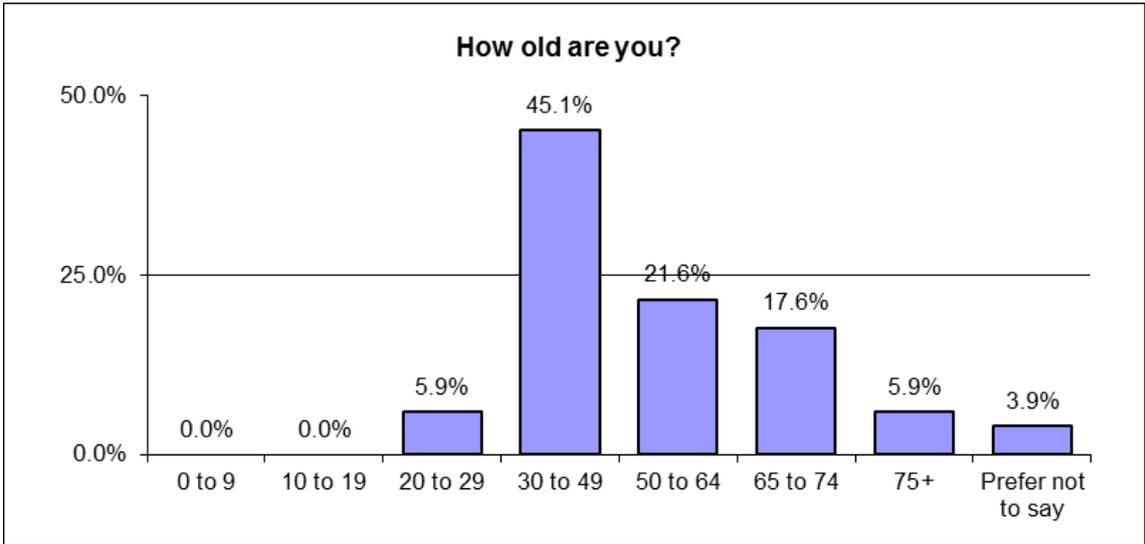
This question was not asked in the easy read questionnaire.

Yes	88.1%	37
No	2.4%	1
Prefer not to say	9.5%	4
		42



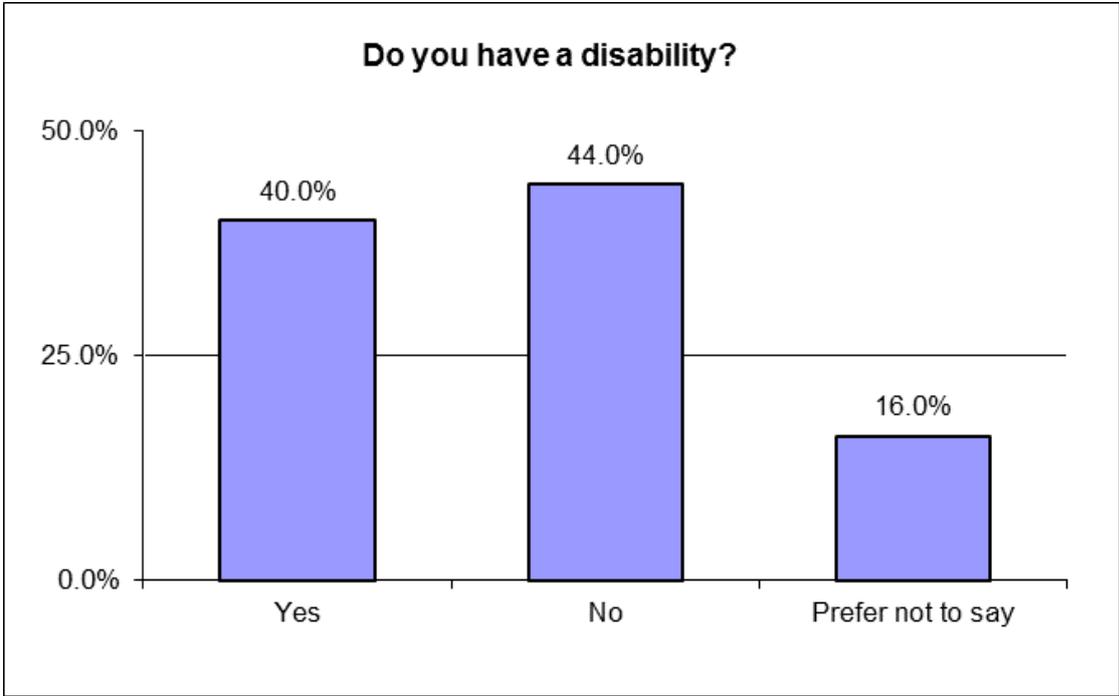
**How old are you?**

0 to 9	0.0%	0
10 to 19	0.0%	0
20 to 29	5.9%	3
30 to 49	45.1%	23
50 to 64	21.6%	11
65 to 74	17.6%	9
75+	5.9%	3
Prefer not to say	3.9%	2
		51



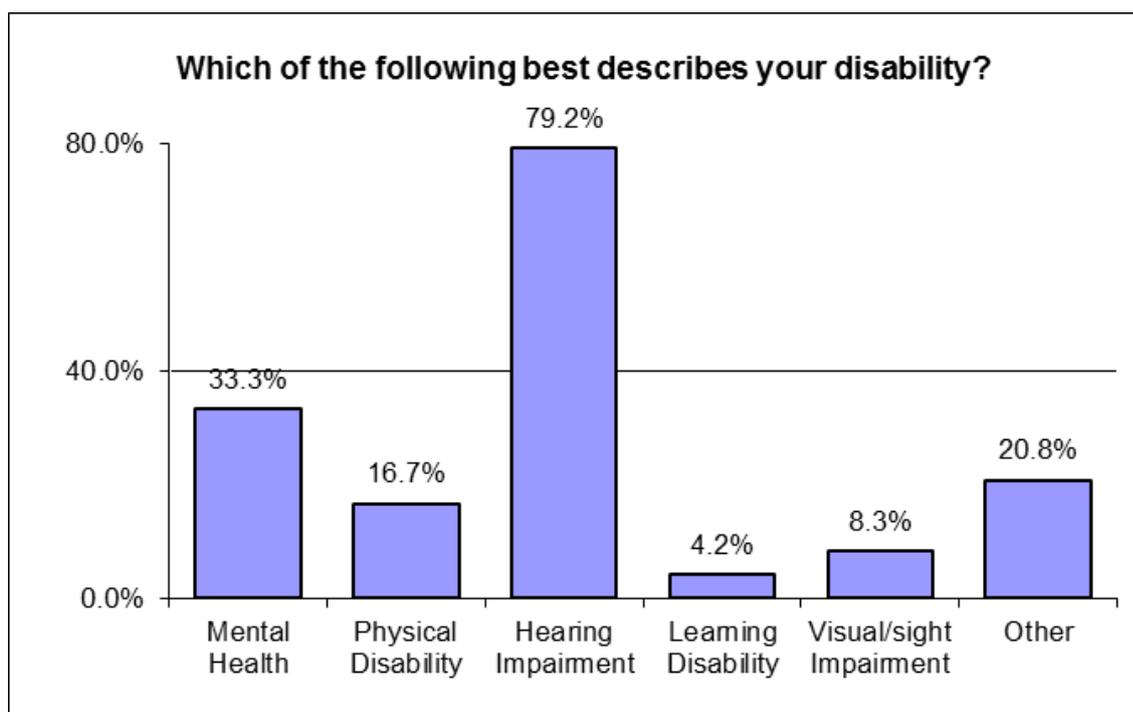
**Do you have a disability?**

Yes	40.0%	20
No	44.0%	22
Prefer not to say	16.0%	8
		50



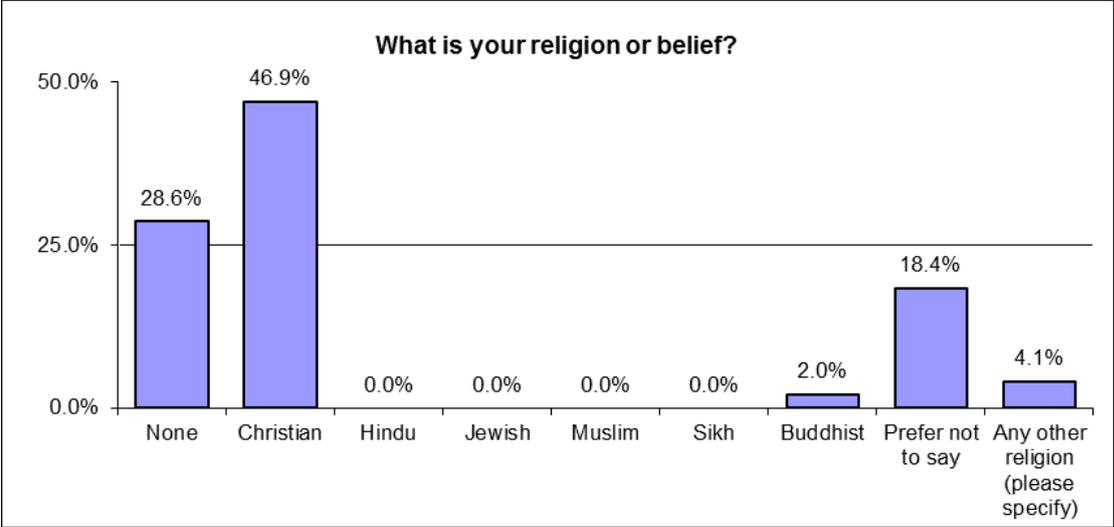
If Yes, please tick the appropriate box(es) which best describes your disability?

Mental Health	33.3%	8
Physical Disability	16.7%	4
Hearing Impairment	79.2%	19
Learning Disability	4.2%	1
Visual/sight Impairment	8.3%	2
Other	20.8%	5
		24



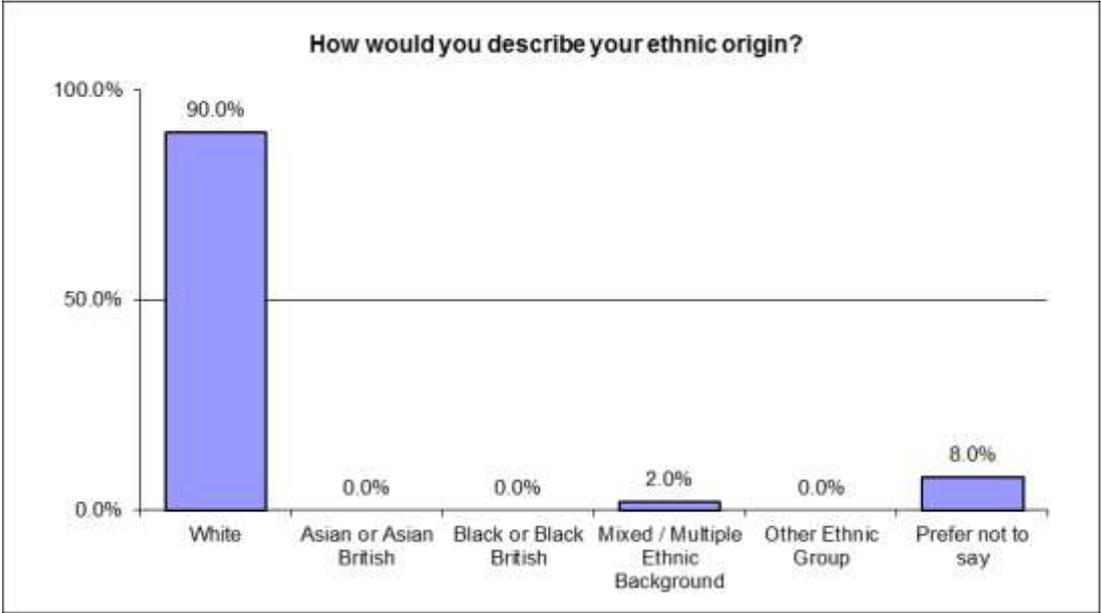
What is your religion or belief?

None	28.6%	14
Christian	46.9%	23
Hindu	0.0%	0
Jewish	0.0%	0
Muslim	0.0%	0
Sikh	0.0%	0
Buddhist	2.0%	1
Prefer not to say	18.4%	9
Any other religion (please specify)	4.1%	2
		49



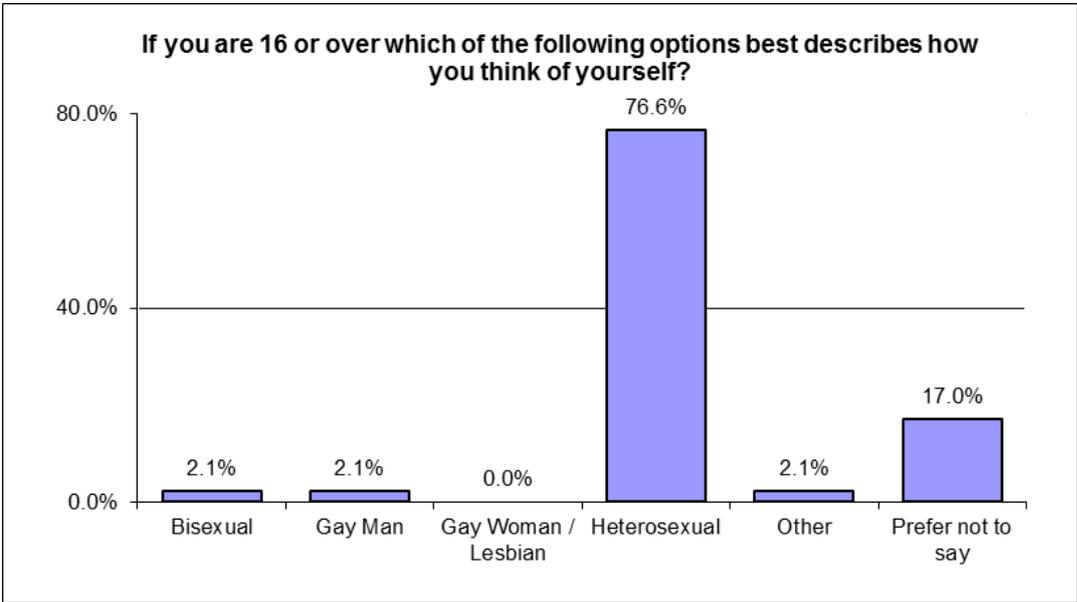
**How would you describe your ethnic origin?**

White	90.0%	45
Asian or Asian British	0.0%	0
Black or Black British	0.0%	1
Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Background	2.0%	0
Other Ethnic Group	0.0%	0
Prefer not to say	8.0%	4
		50



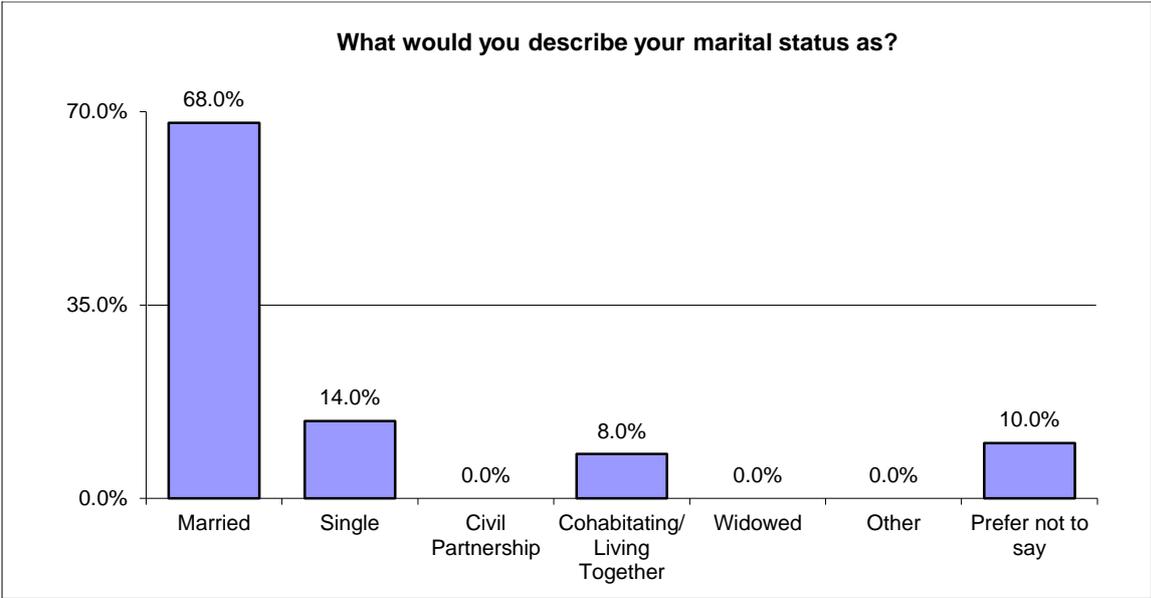
**If you are 16 or over which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?**

Bisexual	2.1%	1
Gay Man	2.1%	1
Gay Woman / Lesbian	0.0%	0
Heterosexual	76.6%	36
Other	2.1%	1
Prefer not to say	17.0%	8
		47



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

Married	68.0%	34
Single	14.0%	7
Civil Partnership	0.0%	0
Cohabiting/ Living Together	8.0%	4
Widowed	0.0%	0
Other	0.0%	0
Prefer not to say	10.0%	5
		50



**Feedback received at public events**

Two events were held for Deafconnect 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 29 October. To make the event more accessible and to give more time for signing, the event ran as a single session over the two sessions originally arranged. Approximately 30 people attended, which was a mix of those who work for Deafconnect, Deaf Professionals, Service Users and Carers/family. There were two interpreters present.

Some concerns were raised about the accessibility of the event (e.g. no video camera, no platform) and the notice given for the event. It was also felt that more information should have been available at the event.

Some of the financial information used in the consultation were challenged by one of the professionals present, and this was followed by comments around the importance of NCC for match funding.

There was a general view that Deafconnect services are valued by the deaf community – they provide a lifeline and prevent isolation. It is a trusted service and one which provides support when people don't meet statutory criteria. Deafconnect also provides a lot of safeguarding support that no other local organisation provides.

Service users said that family doesn't always have the expertise – there was also a feeling of not wanting to have to rely on family, and a sense of independence that comes from being able to access support themselves.

It was noted that peer support really important – being deaf in a hearing world e.g. being deaf in a care home where most others are from the hearing community, is very isolating. The support of Deafconnect was considered really important for socialisation/mental health.

People were not aware of who else can help locally. It was felt that the needs of the deaf community are not well understood by the hearing community and that there is an assumed level of understanding which is incorrect. They felt accessibility to services will be affected and that interpreters really important – a reduction in numbers could lead to crisis point for deaf people. It was considered that there are already not enough interpreters.

The drop-in service was thought to be vital, and that it removes barriers to everyday life. They felt that Deafconnect also provides practical support e.g. fire alarms advice.

Deafconnect was considered to provide an important understanding of the culture of the deaf community with its specialist knowledge. Also there is a local deaf 'dialect' which would be lost with interpreters from outside. It was also noted that interpreters coming from further afield will put costs up.

It was felt that cutting funding now will lead to more costs for support later on and have a knock-on effect re safe discharges from hospital or longer stays because the support isn't there.

It was noted that a number of service users have multiple conditions e.g. also a learning disability and that the deaf community is not a homogenous group - there are many different communication needs. Deafconnect caters for this diverse group.

It was felt that a cut in funding will result in losing deaf professionals which will then affect employment prospects for deaf people

It was considered that there could be grounds for legal challenge if funding is cut and that the Council has a legal duty under the Care Act for specialist prevention services. People felt that the Council needs to understand the negative impact on individual and families. It was noted that Deafconnect provides support regardless of age.

There was a perception that the Council doesn't care about deaf people.

The second event was held at Kettering MIND Centre on 30 October. There was one attendee and one interpreter from Deaf Hub. The attendee handed over a sheet of paper containing eight points he wanted to be considered as part of his feedback. These included concerns about the events and the questionnaire, the communication support available, challenges to the facts in the consultation. He also considered that the loss of funding from NCC could not be mitigated by alternative funding sources and that losing NCC would mean the loss of match funding from elsewhere. He also felt that the removal of funding could be challenged legally.

### **Written feedback received**

We also received written feedback from Deafconnect itself, Healthwatch Northamptonshire and South Northamptonshire District Council, as well as emails from two members of the public.

The response from Deafconnect raised concerns about accessibility and appropriateness of the events, the promotion of the consultation and the questionnaire including the desire that the questionnaire should have been translated into BSL. There was a perception that NCC did not understand the needs of the deaf community in this consultation.

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. The letter also challenged some of the financial information used in the equality impact assessment.

The view was expressed that there is no other local organisation that can provide the support given by Deafconnect, especially who are in a position to provide interpreters in the way that Deafconnect does. It was considered that the removal of funding would have a negative impact.

It noted that there was noted that future funding sources would be impacted by not being able to match fund to NCC contributions. It also felt 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 noted that the Council has a legal duty under the Care Act for specialist prevention services.

The growing numbers of people with hearing loss was mentioned, indicating that there is a growing need for such support. The impact on mental health, social isolation and employment prospects was also mentioned, as well as the view that the support from Deafconnect empowers people and allows them to make their own decisions and have some independence, especially with regard to accessing other services. It was noted that people's needs change over time and as their condition develops. The need for specialist staff who understand the needs of people with hearing loss was emphasised to prevent them being unable to access services.

The letter also referenced the particular support required for people who now have to live with hearing loss having previously been able to hear. It was felt there is a general lack of understanding of the needs of people living with hearing loss by the hearing community. It felt that cutting funding would ultimately lead to the loss of Deafconnect at a point when its services are increasingly in demand.

The response from Healthwatch Northamptonshire stated that the organisation considered that Deafconnect's services are essential to allow people with hearing 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 Deafconnect service users need to know what alternative will be put in place if contract decommissioned and that NCC does not provide a viable alternative without specialist staff.

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 also challenged some of the information provided by NCC in the consultation. 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.

The response from South Northamptonshire District Council stated that the Council makes use of Deafconnect services when contacting deaf customers and how this enables much more effective communication between the Council and deaf customers. It considered that the removal of funding would be a false economy as the service is still needed and stressed that if funding is removed, sufficient notice needs to be given.

Without specifying whether the response was in relation to the Deafconnect consultation or the NAB consultation running at the same time, one 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. The other email stressed the importance of

support for deaf people to prevent them becoming isolated and expressed a wish for funding to continue because of the specific needs of deaf people.

**Conclusion**

The feedback from each consultation method was almost overwhelmingly in support of continued funding for Deafconnect 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 Deafconnect does not provide these services and so this should be considered before the service is decommissioned. It was felt that the alternatives would end up costing more money. The increasing and diverse needs of people with hearing 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.