Council of Sanctuary Start and Finish Group 6th August 2025
Community Consultation Summary of Data
Report of the Senior Development Officer

WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL

SURVEY DATA: In order to provide members the opportunity to fully digest the information ahead of the meeting, the survey data was exported 28th July 2025 at 12:12pm. The survey closes officially on the 31st July. Upon completion, any additional responses will be consolidated and circulated in a supplementary report to be read alongside this report.

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1. In Person Community Engagement Sessions:

Two in person Community Engagement Sessions were held. These sessions were facilitated by council officers who listened to the attendees and made notes based on the discussion. Tickets were offered for the session, and whilst there was no payment required, it was necessary in order to ensure the sessions could be appropriately facilitated. Whilst the sessions themselves were fully booked, each session was only at around 50% capacity, with around 25 people (out of 50) attending each session.

In order to provide a summary, these notes have been consolidated and provided below. In an effort to gain a succinct point of view, each table were asked to provide one-word summaries. These have been summarised below also.

1.1. Session 1 - 07/07/2025 – One Word Summary Visualisation

1.2. Session 2 - 21/07/2025 – One Word Summary Visualisation

*the size of the word indicates the frequency – bigger words were mentioned more.

1.3. Summary of Community Engagement Sessions

1.3.1. 7th July 2025

Key Themes and Concerns

1. Process and Transparency

- Widespread concern about **why Weston-super-Mare Town Council** is leading the Council of Sanctuary process rather than North Somerset Council.
- Questions raised about the **lack of communication**, **short notice to Councillors**, and whether due process, **public consultation**, or **democratic procedures** have been followed.
- Calls for **leaflet drops**, a **referendum**, and **more engagement with less tech-savvy residents**.

2. Housing and Resources

- Strong concern about the **availability of housing**, particularly the fear that **local residents** are being deprioritised.
- Fears that the **City of Sanctuary designation will strain resources** such as **GPs, dentists, schools, social care**, and **policing**.
- Mention of **large organisations (e.g., SERCO)** and **hotel owners** benefitting financially by housing migrants, at the **expense of tourism and affordability**.
- Questions about **where funding is coming from** (e.g., UK Shared Prosperity Fund, council tax), and if Weston is expected to take a **quota**.

3. Safety and Crime

- Repeated concerns about **crime**, particularly **sexual violence**, **knife crime**, and the **perceived correlation between immigration and crime rates**.
- Fears that **insufficient ID or vetting** increases risks.
- Concern that **cultural differences**, especially around the treatment of **women and girls**, could lead to **integration difficulties** and **community tensions**.

4. Integration vs. Embedding

- Criticism of the term **"embed"** in the Council of Sanctuary language, with a preference for **"integration"**.
- Worry that **embedding implies enforcing values** without ensuring **mutual respect** or adaptation.
- Calls for clearer expectations that newcomers **learn English**, **work**, and **participate** in local culture.

5. National vs. Local Responsibility

- Repeated points that **immigration is a national issue**, not suitable for **town council-level intervention**.
- Concerns that **support charities** and Council of Sanctuary may be **working outside legal frameworks**, or even **encouraging law-breaking**, referencing their own charters or websites.

- Questions about **oversight**, **accountability**, and **the role of voluntary movements** like City of Sanctuary and UK100.

Diverse Perspectives

Concerns and Opposition

- Many participants expressed **trepidation**, **scepticism**, and **opposition**.
- Common keywords used: **unwanted**, **unnecessary**, **unfair**, **unsafe**, **divisive**, **misguided**, and **dangerous**.
- Some felt **silenced** or afraid to voice concerns for fear of being **labelled racist**.

Supportive Voices

- A smaller but present group expressed **support**, particularly for **inclusive**, **evidence-based**, and **empathetic approaches**.
- Suggestions included:
    - **Engaging directly with refugees**
    - **Sharing success stories and data**
    - **Learning from other towns like Taunton**
    - **Using positive messaging**
    - **Voluntary contributions** and **community fundraising**
    - Promoting **education, employment, and integration**

Key Questions Raised

- Who exactly is involved in City of Sanctuary and UK100?
- What is the **Town Council's legal or statutory obligation** here?
- Will there be a **cap on numbers**?
- Is there **dedicated funding** or is the cost falling on **local taxpayers**?
- Can **local services handle the increased demand**?
- What are the **safeguards** for both existing and incoming residents?

Conclusion

The community feedback reveals a deeply divided response to the proposal for Weston-super-Mare to become a Council of Sanctuary. While **some welcome inclusivity and humanitarian values**, many others are **concerned about the practical, legal, financial, and cultural implications**. There is a strong **call for transparency, wider public involvement, and clearer accountability**.

Data Summary[1][2]

[1] ChatGPT was used to summarise the data due to the sheer volume. The following prompt was provided:

"We have transcribed notes from a community engagement session. Using these notes, can you please summarise the discussions? Please do not embellish or assume anything with these notes"

[2] Raw Data is available upon request.

1.3.2. 21st July 2025

Key Themes and Concerns

1. Democracy, Process, and Transparency

- Repeated concerns about **a lack of democratic process**:
  - Some believed the **decision had already been made** before full public consultation.
  - Requests for **clarity on timelines**, decision-makers, and **who initiated** the process.
  - Belief that the **Council of Sanctuary process was politically motivated** (particularly by the **Liberal Democrats**).
  - Councillors were accused of **not consulting constituents**, **acting strategically**, or **rushing the vote**.
- Calls for **public meetings**, **leaflets**, and **direct communication** instead of relying on online platforms.

2. Costs and Resources

- Concerns over **financial burden**:
  - Reference to **Glasgow's financial strain** and concern that Weston could face similar outcomes.
  - Questions about **who pays**: council tax, government funding, or diverted council resources?
  - Requests for **cost-benefit analysis**, especially involving **policing**, **housing**, and **translation services**.
- Questions about whether **funding would bring extra staff**, and how **existing services** (NHS, schools, housing, police) would cope.

3. Crime, Safety, and Community Impact

- Fears over **crime linked to asylum seekers and refugees**, referencing:
  - Other towns like **Sheffield**, **Bournemouth**, **Southend**, and the **Casey report**.
  - Mention of **sexual violence**, **gang violence**, and safety concerns for **women, children, and LGBTQ+ groups**.
- Concerns that **cultural clashes** could create **division**, **tension**, or **community breakdown**.
- Comments about **residents feeling alienated** or **town culture being diluted**.

4. Integration vs. "Embedding"

- A continued preference for the term **"integration"** over "embed" (seen as forced assimilation).
- Uncertainty about **how integration would be achieved**, with questions about **monitoring**, **community involvement**, and **shared values**.
- Mention that **people are already arriving**, so focus should be on how to **integrate and support them**.

5. Identity, Culture, and Public Sentiment

- Fears that **British culture is being eroded**, with concerns about being **"displaced"**, **ignored**, or **labelled** (e.g., "racist" or "far-right").
- Comments that **resentment may grow**, particularly if **locals feel refugees are prioritised** in housing or services.
- Others argued that **diversity is a strength**, and integration would **support population growth**, **labour shortages**, and **community vitality**.

6. Confusion and Misinformation

- Several tables highlighted the **need for myth-busting**, **accurate data**, and **clarity about the Council of Sanctuary's purpose**.
- Requests for **more detail** on:
    - **How many refugees would come**
    - **Whether this would lead to a population increase**
    - **If there's an "opt-out" once signed up**
    - **What legal commitments are involved**
- Some participants described **fear being fuelled by misinformation**, especially online.

<u>Diverse Perspectives</u>

Concerns and Opposition

- Many participants expressed **fear**, **frustration**, **anger**, and **scepticism**.
- Common concerns:
    - It's an **undemocratic**, **politically driven**, and **financially risky** process.
    - It could lead to **rising crime**, **overstretched services**, and **damaged tourism**.
    - Questions about **cultural compatibility**, especially regarding **LGBTQ+ safety** and **women's rights**.
    - Concerns over **tokenism** or **"box ticking"** exercises.
    - Several comments mentioned **veterans**, **elderly**, and **existing residents** being deprioritised.

Supportive and Mixed Views

- Some participants voiced **hope**, **support**, or were **undecided but open-minded**.
- Positive comments focused on:
    - **Community cohesion** and **integration**
    - **Countering hate** and misinformation
    - **Learning from other towns**
    - **Helping vulnerable people**, especially those fleeing conflict
    - **Building on existing community work** (e.g., inclusive events, refugee support)
- Suggestions included:
    - **Lived-experience voices** in the process

- More **education**, **clarity**, and **public engagement**
- **Voluntary support schemes**, not enforced

Key Questions Raised

- Why now? Who started the process?
- What's the **real benefit** to Weston residents?
- Will there be a **cap on numbers**? Will it affect **housing policy**?
- How will this affect **tourism**, **reputation**, **public trust**?
- Is this about **reputational branding** or **practical outcomes**?
- Is the **designation reversible**?
- Can this be done in a **non-political**, **community-first** way?

Conclusion

The second session reflected **deep community division** over Weston-super-Mare's proposed application to become a Council of Sanctuary. While **some participants emphasised inclusion, education, and shared responsibility**, others voiced **strong concerns about democracy, cost, safety, and identity**. Many **called for greater transparency, public consultation, and clear communication**.

Data Summary[3][4]

[3] ChatGPT was used to summarise the data due to the sheer volume. The following prompt was provided:

"We have transcribed notes from a community engagement session. Using these notes, can you please summarise the discussions? Please do not embellish or assume anything with these notes"

[4] Raw Data is available upon request.

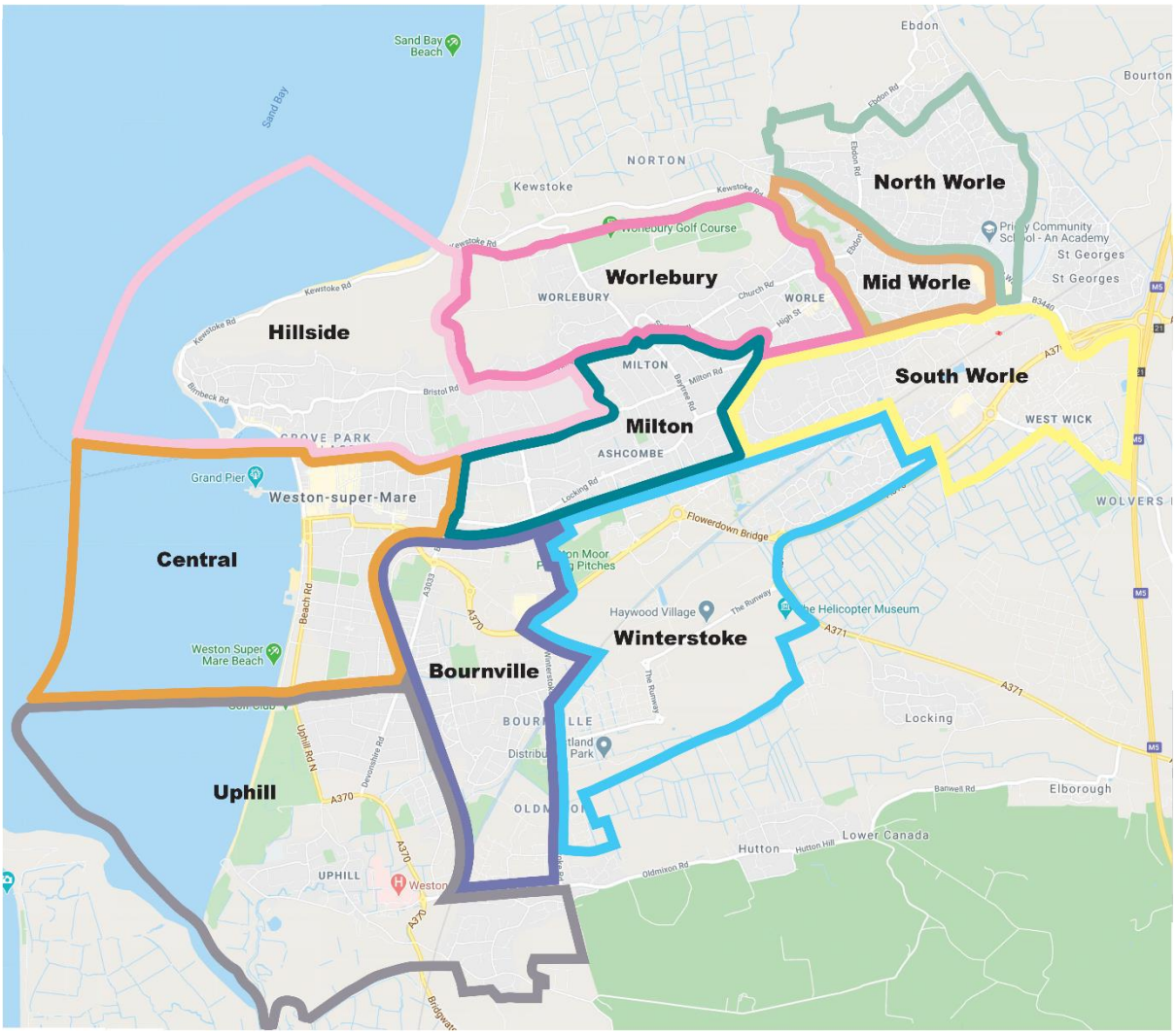
2. Survey Responses

In order to provide members the opportunity to fully digest the information ahead of the meeting, the following survey data was exported 28th July 2025 at 12:12pm. The survey closes officially on the 31st July. Upon completion, any additional responses will be consolidated and circulated in a supplementary report to be read alongside this report.

A survey went live 2nd July 2025, with the intention of being open alongside the in-person community engagement session, to close on the 31st July 2025. At the point of exporting data (28/07/2025 – 12:12pm), there were 482 responses. Of the 482 responses, 426 of them are from Weston-super-Mare residents. The remaining 56 responses are from out of parish areas: 'Hutton and Locking', 'Wick St Lawrence and St Georges', 'Banwell and Winscombe', 'Weston-super-Mare Kewstoke', 'Congresbury and Puxton' and some out of area or invalid postcodes.

Table 1 - Respondent Location Summary

Ward/Area	Responses
Weston-super-Mare South Worle	31
Weston-super-Mare Mid Worle	14
Weston-super-Mare Worlebury	45
Weston-super-Mare North Worle	47
Weston-super-Mare Winterstoke	30
Weston-super-Mare Milton	42
Weston-super-Mare Central	69
Weston-super-Mare Hillside	57
Weston-super-Mare South Ward	25
Weston-super-Mare Uphill	36
BS22	12
BS23	12
BS24	6
NOT VALID / Out of area	6
Hutton and Locking	18
Weston-super-Mare Kewstoke	6
Wick St Lawrence and St Georges	22
Congresbury and Puxton	2
Banwell and Winscombe	2



In order to ensure the views on the motion are strictly from Weston-super-Mare Town Council parishioners, these responses have been split into ‘in parish’ and ‘out of parish’. This will provide clarity, but also ensure that everyone who has taken the time to complete the survey can be viewed.

AI Software has been used to summarise data due to the sheer volume. This has also ensured impartial review. For transparency, the prompt provided for each data set has been provided. Raw data is available upon request.

Each question asked has been provided ahead of the summary data for your information.

2.1. Question 1

What is your postcode? Please note - this information will only be used to ensure we are collecting data from WSM residents only.

Information summarised as per table 1 above

2.2. Question 2

Do you believe you have enough information to understand what becoming a council of sanctuary would mean for Weston-super-Mare Town Council?

Do you believe you have enough information to understand what becoming a council of sanctuary would mean for Weston-super-Mare Town Council?	In parish	Out of parish
YES	303	40
NO	123	16

2.3. Question 3

If Yes, where did you get your information?

In parish

Top Information Sources cited by 253 survey respondents:

1. **Town Council website / communications** – 78 mentions
2. **City of Sanctuary website and documents** – 70 mentions
3. **Online general research (Google, internet, etc.)** – 62 mentions
4. **Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Nextdoor, etc.)** – 47 mentions
5. **Council meetings / direct engagement** – 35 mentions
6. **Media (newspapers, news websites)** – 32 mentions
7. **Discussions with others** – 29 mentions
8. **Government websites (gov.uk, NSC, etc.)** – 19 mentions
9. **Experience / background knowledge** – 14 mentions
10. **Reform UK or campaign pages** – 8 mentions
11. **Survey itself (via links or prompts)** – 7 mentions
12. **Petitions / activism** – 3 mentions

Out of parish

Top Information Sources cited by 48 survey respondents:

1. **Online general research (Google, internet, web, etc.)** – 13 mentions
2. **City of Sanctuary website and documents** – 12 mentions
3. **Media (news articles, newspapers, bulletins)** – 7 mentions
4. **Town Council websites and posts (WSM, NSC, etc.)** – 6 mentions
5. **Other towns' experiences / comparisons** – 5 mentions
6. **Social media and Facebook** – 4 mentions
7. **Reform UK / political sources** – 3 mentions
8. **Discussions / word of mouth / common sense** – 3 mentions
9. **Documents attached or linked in survey** – 2 mentions

Data Summary[5]

[5] ChatGPT – prompt: "We have responses to an open-ended question in a survey. Could you please summarise the responses? Please do not embellish or assume anything with these responses. could you please start by noting the number of individual open-ended responses"

2.4. Question 4

If no, what additional information would you like?

In parish

1. Requests for Clear, Detailed Information – 66 responses

- Requests for definitions of "Council of Sanctuary"
- Wanting transparency on objectives, actions, and decision-making
- Desire for facts in simple, accessible language
- Calls for published or mailed explanations

2. Financial Costs and Council Tax Concerns – 58 responses

- Questions about:
  - Total costs
  - Funding sources
  - Impact on council tax
  - Whether taxpayer money is being diverted

3. Housing and Accommodation – 44 responses

- Questions/concerns about:
  - Where migrants will live
  - Availability of social/affordable housing
  - Use of hotels or HMOs
  - Whether they will be prioritised over locals

4. Impact on Public Services and Infrastructure – 47 responses

- GPs, hospitals, dentists, mental health services
- Schools, teachers, class sizes
- Emergency services, traffic, and roads

5. Demographics and Safety Concerns – 34 responses

- Interest in:
  - Age and gender of newcomers (especially single young men)
  - Legal vs. illegal immigration
  - Concerns about women and children’s safety

6. Security, Vetting, and Background Checks – 29 responses

- Requests for:
  - Criminal record checks
  - Assurance of public safety
  - Vetting processes before arrivals

7. Local Priorities and Neglect of Existing Residents – 31 responses

- Comments about:
    - Council ignoring homeless and needy locals
    - Perceived imbalance in priorities
    - Lack of housing for current residents

8. Lack of Consultation or Transparency – 39 responses

- Frustration about:
    - Not being informed or consulted
    - Perception that this was decided behind closed doors
    - Calls for public vote or mailed notifications

9. Impact Assessments, Oversight, and Monitoring – 18 responses

- Requests for:
    - Risk assessments
    - Cost-benefit analysis
    - Oversight mechanisms and reporting
    - Transparency of any studies or audits

10. Public Information and Communication Campaigns – 19 responses

- Suggestions to:
    - Counter misinformation
    - Provide leaflets, social media, or public forums
    - Offer public Q&A sessions

11. Scepticism, Opposition, or Hostility Toward the Scheme – 37 responses

- Themes include:
    - Opposition to sanctuary concept
    - Belief that this encourages illegal immigration
    - Citing failures in other towns
    - Cultural or national identity concerns

12. Supportive but Seeking Clarity – 6 responses

- Supportive of humanitarian principles
- Wanting accurate information to counter misinformation
- Expressing concern about local backlash or racism

Out of parish

1. Request for Practical and Financial Information (6 responses)

- Questions about how the scheme will work, including:
    - Financial details
    - Caps on numbers
    - Safeguards for local residents
    - Strategic planning and local involvement (e.g., Weston College)

    - Impact on council tax
    - Housing availability for local people

2. Concerns About Public Services and Infrastructure (4 responses)

- Potential strain on:
    - Schools
    - Employment opportunities
    - Hospitals, doctors, dentists
    - Police, fire, and other emergency services
    - Council/community services (e.g., housing benefits, disabled access)

3. Requests for Numbers and Data (3 responses)

- Requests for:
    - Number of people involved
    - Where they will live
    - Cost implications
    - Evidence of why people are coming (e.g., fleeing danger vs. illegal immigration)

4. Concerns About Security, Legality, and Demographics (3 responses)

- Questions about:
    - Presence of illegal immigrants
    - Whether people will be identified
    - How many young males will arrive

5. Negative Sentiment or Scepticism (2 responses)

- Expressions of doubt or opposition to the scheme:
    - Scepticism about taking in people with "no skills"
    - Fears about crime or exploitation of the benefits system

6. Suggestions for Communication (1 response)

- A suggestion to run positive campaigns to counter misinformation and build public support.

Data Summary[6]

[6] ChatGPT – prompt: “We have responses to an open-ended question in a survey. Could you please summarise the responses? Please do not embellish or assume anything with these responses. could you please start by noting the number of individual open-ended responses”

2.5. Question 5

What benefits do you think could come from Weston-super-Mare Town Council becoming a Council of Sanctuary?

In parish

Thematic Summary of Responses (with counts):

Negative / No Perceived Benefit (Total: 343)

1. **"None" / "Absolutely none" / variations indicating zero perceived benefit** e.g., “None”, “Absolutely none at all”, “Zero”, “Nil” **263 responses**
2. **Concerns about stretched or insufficient local resources** e.g., housing, NHS, schools, policing, council budgets **38 responses**
3. **Belief that Weston is already welcoming –** so the title is redundant **11 responses**
4. **Concern that refugees/asylum seekers would worsen crime/safety/social cohesion - 16 responses**
5. **Suspicion of political motives / “virtue signalling” / wasted money - 15 responses**

Positive / Supportive Views (Total: 61)

6. **Promotion of inclusivity, diversity, compassion, and tolerance** e.g., “shows we’re welcoming”, “promotes understanding”, “encourages inclusion” **24 responses**
7. **Enhanced image and reputation of Weston (locally/nationally) -** 9 **responses**
8. **Potential access to funding, partnerships, or coordinated support - 6 responses**
9. **Support and safety for people fleeing violence or persecution - 12 responses**
10. **Cultural enrichment / shared values / sense of community - 10 responses**

Neutral, Unclear, or Conditional (Total: 22)

11. **Uncertain / "Not sure" / “Can’t think of any” / no clear position - 13 responses**
12. **Conditional support – e.g., only if it’s well-planned, doesn't strain services, etc - 9 responses**

Out of parish

Thematic Summary of Responses (with counts):

Negative / No Perceived Benefit (Total: 45 responses)

1. **"None" / "Absolutely none" / variations indicating no perceived benefit** - **39 responses**

2. **Concerns about local resource strain (housing, services, taxes, etc.)** - **3 responses**
    - e.g., "costing the taxpayers money", "more pressure on services", "dirty town"
3. **Fear of increased crime or worsening community** - **2 responses**
    - e.g., "more crime", "less of a town"
4. **Opposition based on priorities (e.g. help local people first)** - **1 response**
    - e.g., "we can't look after our own residents..."

Positive / Supportive Views (Total: 14 responses)

5. **Increased inclusivity, diversity, and understanding** - **6 responses**
    - e.g., "More inclusive", "Embracing and celebrating our differences", "Improving community diversity and compassion"
6. **Improved community cohesion or safety/support for vulnerable people** - **4 responses**
    - e.g., "Providing safe place", "Better and more diverse community"
7. **Improved reputation or public message** - **2 responses**
    - e.g., "Better reputation", "Makes the commitment to welcome everyone public"
8. **Economic or cultural benefits (e.g. revenue, labour)** - **2 responses**
    - e.g., "Cheap labour", "More revenue and cultural diversity"

Neutral / Unclear / Conditional Responses (Total: 5 responses)

9. **Unclear or uncertain (e.g. "Not sure", "Very few")** - **2 responses**
10. **Conditional or mixed views** - **3 responses**
    - e.g., "Honestly, I don't apart from overcrowding", "if you are talking about illegal immigrants, more crime"

Data Summary[7]

2.6. Question 6

What problems do you think could arise from Weston-super-Mare Town Council being a Council of Sanctuary?

In parish

Negative Themes

1. Pressure on public services — 73 responses

Concerns that local services like healthcare, education, and social care are already overstretched and cannot cope with additional demands.

- "Increased pressure on already stretched housing, NHS, and public services."

[7] ChatGPT – prompt: "We have responses to an open-ended question in a survey. Could you please summarise the responses? Please do not embellish or assume anything with these responses. could you please start by noting the number of individual open-ended responses"

- “Overcrowding & a general malaise amongst an already fed-up population of having too many foreigners.”

2. Increased crime or safety concerns — 100 responses

Mentions of fears around crime, antisocial behaviour, safety of women and children, or general public disorder.

- “There will be an increase of crime and disorder.”
- “Rise in crime, loss of tourism therefore causing the closure of businesses.”

3. Housing shortages / no local capacity — 31 responses

Worries about local housing shortages, displacement of existing residents, or overcrowding.

- “Currently shortage of social housing.”
- “Housing, schooling and integration.”

4. Cultural impact / lack of integration — 11 responses

Concerns about loss of British cultural identity or lack of willingness from newcomers to integrate.

- “Massive insurgence of migrants unfamiliar with the fabric of our British society.”
- “There is a concern that some groups may not seek integration... and may expect the wider community to adapt.”

5. Financial burden / cost to taxpayers — 14 responses

Fears that the scheme will place an unfair financial burden on local residents.

- “Is this a deliberate move to withhold information… so that the local taxpayer is denied an informed choice?”
- “We don't want to be invaded by migrants, thieves, drug dealers…”

6. No perceived benefits — 16 responses

Responses stating no benefits or entirely rejecting the premise.

- “None.”
- “Sanctuary cities and towns are a huge mistake.”

7. Other / unclear negative concerns — 158 responses

Vague or non-specific concerns that were still negative in tone.

- “Financial, social, possible change.”

- “Racism, fights, local people feeling pushed out.”

8. Concerns over illegality or vetting of arrivals — 9 responses

Specific fears about unvetted or undocumented migrants and associated security risks.

- “The problems with illegal immigrants… are well documented.”
- “It’s a blatant security risk to let undocumented men… roam our streets.”

9. Lack of consultation / undemocratic process — 1 response

Mention of lack of transparency or consultation in the council’s decision.

- “No consultation with the populace.”

Neutral / Positive Themes

1. Diversity, inclusion, and stronger community — 12 responses

Recognition that a Council of Sanctuary could promote understanding, community cohesion, and inclusivity.

- “Diversity.”
- “People listening and understanding clearly what it involves.”

Out of parish

Thematic Breakdown of Responses

Negative Themes (Predominant — 52 responses)

These responses express **concerns, fears, or objections**. They fall into the following major categories:

1. Pressure on Local Services — 25 responses

Examples of specific concerns:

- Overstretched NHS, schools, doctors, housing, infrastructure
- Loss of services for current residents
- Influx straining already limited resources
- Reduced availability of social housing
- Higher council taxes and costs to taxpayers

Examples:

"More burden for our already strapped council"
"Lack of affordable housing for local people"
"We are overpopulated as it is... and you want to add migrants on top of it?"

2. Crime & Safety Concerns — 20 responses

Types of fears:

- General crime increase
- Sexual harassment, organised crime, drug use
- Antisocial behaviour
- Unsafe environment, particularly for women and children

Examples:

"Increased crime, homelessness, increased prices for hotels and rent"
"Won't allow my grandchildren the freedom in their own town"

3. Cultural Conflict & Social Division — 14 responses

Themes include:

- Loss of British identity or values
- Ethnic/cultural tensions
- Fear of marginalisation of ‘our culture’
- Antagonism and potential racism from locals

Examples:

"We will exacerbate the issue as ‘our’ culture becomes marginalised"
"More discrimination and hatred on both sides"
"Issues of ethnic rivalry spilling into the community"

4. Economic Burden / Cost — 13 responses

Concerns around:

- Council spending diverted from locals
- Reduced income from tourism
- Economic prioritisation of newcomers over residents

Examples:

"Plenty. Lack of schools, doctors. Many services already stretched"
"Cost which is inevitable. We have no money!"
"Monies from tax payers being spent outside of the mandated remit of the council"

5. Legality, Control, and Distrust of Migrants — 10 responses

Common points:

- Fear of illegal migrants abusing the system
- Belief that migrants haven’t contributed or won’t integrate
- Concerns over vetting, legitimacy, and unknown backgrounds

Examples:

"Only people that can and will contribute... not freeloading foreigners"
"Illegal immigrants being pushed to the front of the queue"
"If they came here legally, absolutely no problems... but otherwise it's a disaster"

6. Political Frustration & Misinformation — 7 responses

These focus on:

- The council making decisions without public consent
- Far-right fear-mongering and media hysteria
- Distrust in leadership and process

Examples:

"Because you're not asking the public if we want this"
"Fake news and hysteria by those who are ill informed"
"Right wing extremism spreading misinformation"

Neutral to Positive / Constructive Responses — 4 responses

1. **Conditional support / Mitigated risk**

   "None if communicated correctly with correct support being put in place."

2. **Concern about public reaction, not migrants themselves**

   "Racists could object"
   "It could stir those against it to perpetrate hatred…"

3. **Concern about misinformation rather than migrants**

   "Misinformation… people not being supportive of it."

Data Summary[8]

2.7. Question 7

What do you feel are the advantages to the Town Council enabling the community to shape how people are welcomed to the Town?

In parish

Negative Perceptions or Opposition (Approx. 280 responses)

Main concerns:

[8] ChatGPT – prompt: "We have responses to an open-ended question in a survey. Could you please summarise the responses? Please do not embellish or assume anything with these responses. could you please start by noting the number of individual open-ended responses"

- **No advantages / outright rejection** of the policy or Town Council's role.
    - Phrases: “None,” “No advantages,” “Absolutely none,” “Cannot see any advantages,” “You will do it anyway,” “Waste of resources.” **160 Responses**
- **Belief that the Council is ignoring residents** or acting unilaterally.
    - “You don’t care what people think,” “Already decided,” “Lip service,” “Do what they want anyway.” **50 responses**
- **Concerns about overburdened local services**:
    - Schools, GPs, housing, homelessness, elderly, jobs, crime, policing. **35 responses**
- **Opposition to immigration** in general, particularly illegal migration.
    - Some refer to “illegal immigrants,” “economic migrants,” “draining our town,” or “changing the culture.” **25 responses**
- **Scepticism of funding use**:
    - “Money grab,” “funding will go to admin, not locals,” “waste of council tax.” **8 responses**
- **Concerns about town image, decline or ghettoisation**:
    - E.g., “Beautiful town becoming a slum,” “lawless,” “increase in ethnic minorities changing the area.” **6 responses**

Neutral or Critical but Constructive Responses (Approx. 80 responses)

Main themes:

- **Calls for transparency, proper consultation, and community vote**:
    - “Hold a referendum,” “residents must have a say,” “decisions were rushed,” “consult the people.” **35 responses**
- **Desire for clarity on objectives and implementation**:
    - “Needs more information,” “unclear question,” “not sure what this means.” **20 response**
- **Concerns about balance** between welcoming newcomers and supporting existing residents:
    - “Support local people first,” “only help those who contribute,” “look after our own first.” **15 responses**
- **Worries about process being dominated by extreme voices**:
    - “Risk of vocal minority taking over,” “must be carefully administered.” **8 responses**

Positive Perceptions or Support (Approx. **58 responses**)

Main themes:

- **Democratic values & inclusivity**:
    - “People should have a say,” “it fosters community involvement,” “true democracy.” **15 responses**
- **Trust-building and representation**:
    - “People will feel heard,” “strengthens social cohesion,” “builds trust with council.” **10 responses**
- **Practical benefits**:

    - “Better targeted resources,” “improved integration,” “access to funding,” “new skills and diversity.” **8 responses**
- **Humanitarian and moral support**:
    - “It’s the right thing to do,” “every human deserves safety,” “shows compassion.” **10 responses**
- **Existing successful integration**:
    - Mention of churches, support groups, neighbours, and past refugee experiences. **5 responses**

Mixed, Unclear or Unsure Responses (Approx. **20 responses**)

These include:

- “Not sure,” “N/A,” “No comment,” “???,” “See answer above.”
- Some express ambivalence or support with caveats.

<u>Out of parish</u>

Negative Perceptions or Opposition (Approx. 43 responses)

Main concerns:

- **No advantages / outright rejection of the policy or Town Council's role**
  Phrases include: “None,” “No advantages,” “Don’t see the point,” “Absolutely none,” “Waste of money,” “Council should focus on existing duties,” “Nothing good will come of this.”
  → **23 responses**
- **Belief that the Council is ignoring residents or acting unilaterally**
  Examples express distrust in the council's intentions or belief that decisions are already made regardless of feedback.
  “Council doesn’t listen,” “They’ll do what they want,” “Pointless exercise,” “Not interested in public views.”
  → **7 responses**
- **Concerns about overburdened local services**
  Focus on town infrastructure, housing, or service capacity already being stretched.
  Mentioned: lack of GP access, housing shortages, too many people already, poor town maintenance.
  → **4 responses**
- **Opposition to immigration or cultural change**
  Concerns about preserving British culture, town identity, or worry about changing demographics.
  “Not a refugee camp,” “They won’t integrate,” “Keep to their own kind,” “Foreign cultures changing our way of life.”
  → **6 responses**
- **Scepticism about funding use**
  Worry that money will be misused, wasted, or spent on political image rather than community benefit.
  “Funding will go to pet projects,” “Money grab,” “Used for virtue signalling,” “Admin overheads.”
  → **3 responses**

Neutral or Critical but Constructive Responses (Approx. 7 responses)

Main themes:

- **Calls for transparency, consultation, or clearer resident influence**
  Interest in local control and better communication.
  "Residents should have a say," "Listen to people," "Gauge local opinion," "Things need to come from the bottom up."
  → **4 responses**
- **Balancing support for locals and newcomers**
  Focused on helping those in need but only if local needs are addressed first.
  "Help those who contribute," "Support residents before new arrivals."
  → **2 responses**
- **Desire for clarity or better execution**
  Indirect concern that the current council process isn't well defined or thought through.
  "What is this really about?" "Needs better planning."
  → **1 response**

Positive Perceptions or Support (Approx. 6 responses)

Main themes:

- **Democratic values and inclusivity**
  Appreciation for involving residents in decisions.
  "We should have a say," "Important to take pride in local decisions," "Everyone deserves a voice."
  → **3 responses**
- **Trust-building and community empowerment**
  Participation builds engagement and sense of belonging.
  "People feel more in control," "Stronger community bonds."
  → **2 responses**
- **Humanitarian or dignity-focused support**
  Support for inclusion framed in moral terms.
  "Treat people with dignity," "Safe place for those in need."
  → **1 response**

Mixed, Unclear, or Unsure Responses (Approx. 4 responses)

Includes:

- Short or vague answers such as: "N/A," "Not sure," "No comment."
- Some hint at ambivalence or limited understanding without clear opposition or support.

Data Summary[9]

[9] ChatGPT – prompt: "We have responses to an open-ended question in a survey. Could you please summarise the responses? Please do not embellish or assume anything with these responses. could you please start by noting the number of individual open-ended responses"

2.8. Question 8

What do you feel are the disadvantages of the Town Council enabling the community to shape how people are welcomed to the Town?

In parish

Thematic Summary of Open-Ended Responses

1. Public Participation and Representation (83 responses)

A significant number of respondents expressed a desire for genuine community involvement in the decision-making process. Many were concerned that local voices would be ignored, or that a vocal minority would dominate outcomes. The importance of transparency and inclusive consultation was repeatedly emphasised.

2. Opposition to Council or Political Motives (80 responses)

Respondents often voiced distrust toward the council's intentions, with some suspecting that political correctness or national agendas were driving decisions rather than local priorities. Several questioned whether council decisions reflected the will of Weston residents.

3. Resource Strain and Volunteer Burnout (23 responses)

Many were worried about the strain this initiative might place on already-stretched local services—such as healthcare, waste collection, and infrastructure. There were also concerns that reliance on unpaid volunteers was unsustainable, and that it would increase pressure on community groups without additional funding or support.

4. Immigration and Cultural Change (12 responses)

Some responses raised concerns around immigration, particularly around perceived issues with illegal immigration, cultural shifts, and the vetting of new arrivals. There was also anxiety that the scheme could accelerate unwanted demographic or social change in Weston.

5. Delayed Decision-Making or Inefficiency (11 responses)

A recurring theme was scepticism about whether the engagement process would result in any meaningful action. Respondents felt that extended consultation could delay decisions and create unnecessary bureaucracy. Some doubted whether the council had the capacity to follow through effectively.

6. Exclusion of Migrant Voices (8 responses)

While most criticism came from concerns about local representation, a smaller group highlighted the irony that migrants and refugees—the subjects of the scheme—were often not consulted or included in these discussions, which some viewed as a critical omission.

7. Community Division or Tension (7 responses)

Several responses flagged the risk of increasing social division, especially if the process became politicised or polarised. Concerns were raised about potential conflict between different viewpoints within the community, and the emotional toll of heated debates around migration and identity.

8. Lack of Expertise or Capacity (4 responses)

A few respondents questioned whether the council or community had the necessary skills, experience, or information to implement such a scheme effectively. Some also mentioned concerns about wasting time and resources due to poor planning or misunderstanding.

9. Accountability and Fairness (1 response)

One response touched on perceptions of unfairness and lack of oversight in how businesses and newcomers are monitored. It reflected a broader concern that rules are not being enforced equally, leading to mistrust in local institutions.

Out of parish

Thematic Summary of Open-Ended Responses

1. Council Distrust and Political Cynicism (21 responses)

Many participants expressed a strong distrust in the town council's intentions and transparency. They perceived the project as a "box-ticking" exercise, driven by political motives rather than genuine community need. Several believe the council will push through the initiative regardless of community feedback, referencing a lack of prior communication and suggesting the council is "deaf to the community."

2. Resource Strain and Overpopulation (18 responses)

A frequent concern was the added pressure on already stretched services, such as healthcare, education, housing, and infrastructure. Respondents felt that Weston is already "overpopulated" and "falling apart," and that any new initiative—especially one welcoming newcomers—would worsen existing challenges and reduce quality of life for current residents.

3. Opposition to Migration and Cultural Change (14 responses)

Some respondents voiced strong opposition to migration, especially from different cultural backgrounds. These comments reflected fears about cultural incompatibility, crime, or unwanted changes to the identity of Weston. A few mentioned "illegal" migration or "unvetted individuals" as safety concerns, while others criticised media narratives celebrating multiculturalism.

4. Public Representation and Consultation (8 responses)

Respondents expressed frustration with what they saw as a lack of meaningful community consultation. Several called for a referendum, while others felt that their views were being ignored or misrepresented. Concerns were raised about who gets to speak and be heard—highlighting a sense that public voices, especially dissenting ones, are being sidelined.

5. Fear of Community Division and Misinformation (6 responses)

Several worried that the project could lead to increased division in the town, fuelled by misinformation or political agendas. The influence of social media and partisan media narratives was noted as a risk, particularly in framing migration negatively or exaggerating threats. Some worried about public meetings being hijacked by individuals with “agendas.”

6. Financial Concerns (Taxation and Priorities) (5 responses)

There were concerns about how the initiative would be funded, particularly when local services are already underfunded. Some feared increased council tax or service cuts. A few questioned why resources were being directed toward this project instead of improving Weston’s amenities or helping existing residents in need.

7. Process Scepticism and Ineffectiveness (4 responses)

A handful of comments suggested that the consultation was a “pointless exercise,” predicting that the council would proceed regardless of the feedback. Others viewed it as a waste of time, money, or resources that could be better used elsewhere.

8. Support for Inclusion, with Conditions (2 responses)

A minority of responses noted that the initiative could work if it was properly managed, with community support and clear communication. These responses often came with caveats, emphasising the importance of listening to local concerns and ensuring practical infrastructure is in place.

9. Other / Unclear (1 response)

One or two responses were ambiguous or off-topic and couldn’t be confidently assigned to a clear theme.

Data Summary[10]

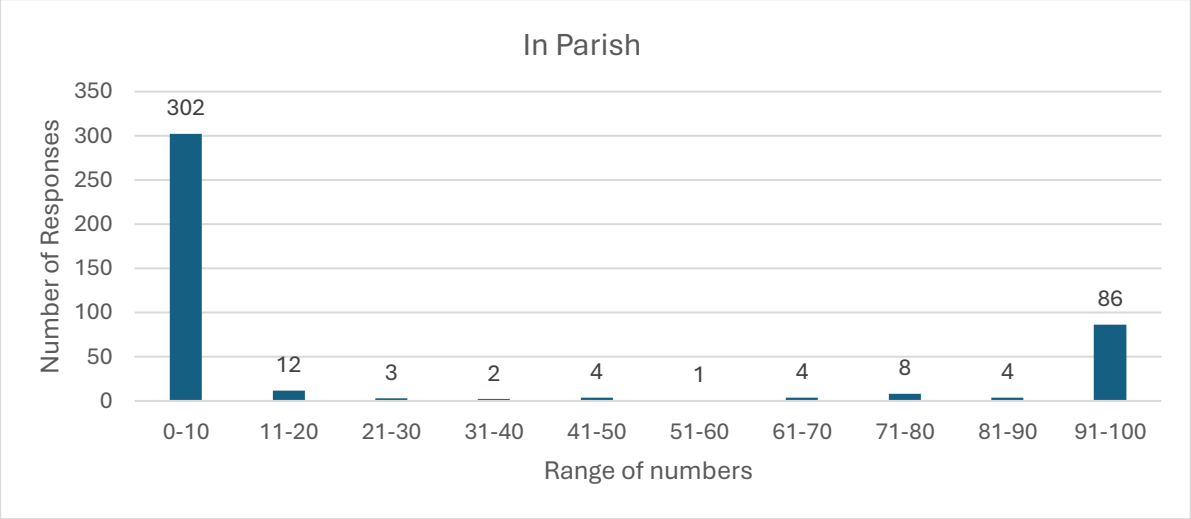
[10] ChatGPT – prompt: “We have responses to an open-ended question in a survey. Could you please summarise the responses? Please do not embellish or assume anything with these responses. could you please start by noting the number of individual open-ended responses”

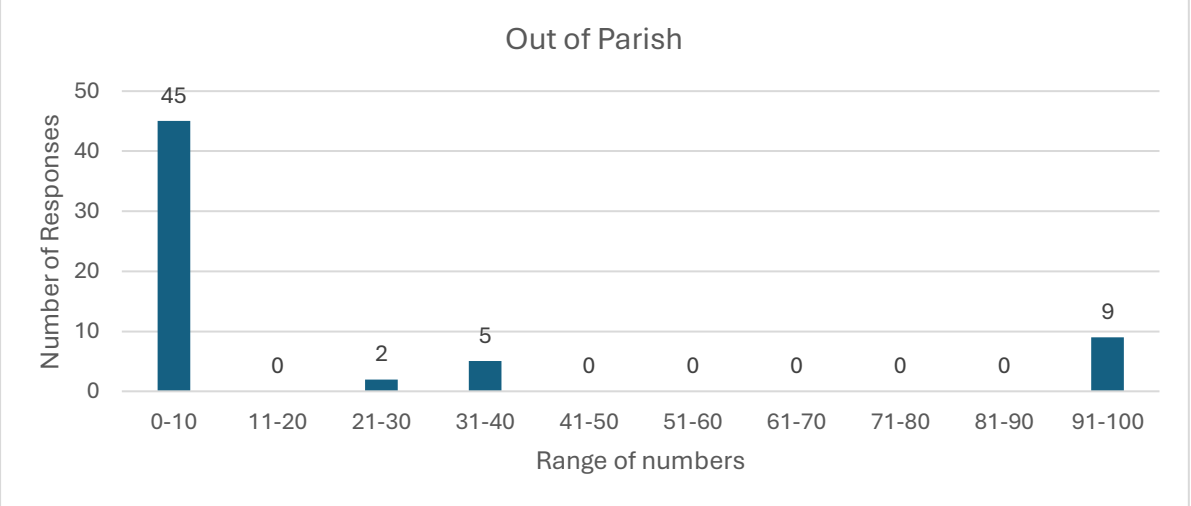
2.9. Question 9

Based on information available on the council of sanctuary motion made and passed by Weston-super-Mare Town Council, at present what is your position? (PLEASE NOTE: This question is just to gain understanding, and is not a formal vote)

The range provided was “I do not support” (0) to “I support” (100). For ease of counting, the range has been split into values of 10.

Range	In Parish	Out of Parish
0-10	302	45
11-20	12	0
21-30	3	2
31-40	2	5
41-50	4	0
51-60	1	0
61-70	4	0
71-80	8	0
81-90	4	0
91-100	86	9





Raw data available and held by Town Council – available upon request

2.10. Question 10

Will you be attending one of the public meetings in July?

Will you be attending one of the public meetings in July?	in parish	out of parish
Yes	96	10
No	68	13
I was not able to get a ticket	111	11
I could not attend for practical reasons (e.g. timing, location etc)	103	16
I do not like public meetings	15	1
I would be uncomfortable sharing my views in a public meeting	33	5

2.11. Question 11

Do you have any further comments which have not been covered above?

In parish

1. Opposition to the Proposal — 280 respondents

- Clear disagreement with the sanctuary or resettlement scheme.
- Some cited fear, cultural change, or loss of community identity.
- A number used emotional or defensive language (e.g., "disgrace," "danger," "not welcome").

2. Concerns About Local Services and Infrastructure — 156 respondents

- Mentioned overstretched services: housing, NHS, schools, policing, waste management.
- Highlighted that locals are already struggling to access basic services.

3. Lack of Transparency and Public Consultation — 129 respondents

- Criticised the council for making decisions behind closed doors.
- Many called for a public vote or local referendum.
- Some expressed distrust or accused the council of acting undemocratically.

4. Criticism of Council and Governance — 98 respondents

- Accused councillors of political virtue-signalling or acting for self-interest.
- Negative sentiments included claims of corruption, bias, or unfitness for office.

5. Financial Concerns — 83 respondents

- Objected to funding the scheme using local or national taxpayer money.
- Asked about cost breakdowns and long-term financial sustainability.

6. Social Cohesion, Safety, and Cultural Identity Fears — 92 respondents

- Concerns about safety, antisocial behaviour, or crime increasing.
- Fear of cultural changes, loss of "British values," or community disruption.

7. Procedural Suggestions and Alternatives — 35 respondents

- Called for elections, clearer communication, or stronger local planning.
- Some proposed alternative uses for resources (e.g., local homelessness support).

8. Supportive or Balanced Views — 11 respondents

- A small minority expressed support or urged a balanced view.
- Recognised value in diversity or saw benefits in helping vulnerable groups.

Out of parish

1. Opposition to the Proposal (Widespread Theme) – 25 responses

- **General Disapproval**: Many respondents strongly reject the proposal, often using emphatic language such as “No,” “not wanted,” and “bad move.”
- **Fear of Change**: Concerns were raised about the town’s identity, with frequent references to Weston being a traditional "Victorian seaside town" that could decline if its character changes.
- **Perceived Lack of Benefit**: Respondents believe opening the town to newcomers (under sanctuary schemes or otherwise) brings no clear benefit to current residents.

2. Concerns About Transparency and Democracy – 11 responses

- **Lack of Public Involvement**: Multiple comments criticise the council for allegedly pushing the proposal through without public consultation or a vote.
- **Demand for Public Vote**: Several people insist this decision should be subjected to a public referendum.

3. Criticism of Local Governance – 10 responses

- **Distrust in Councillors**: Many respondents accuse the council of ignoring public opinion and acting in their own interest.
- **Dismissal of Community Input**: Some feel public meetings are meaningless because decisions appear pre-determined.

4. Local Infrastructure Strain 12 responses

- **Struggles with Basic Services**: A recurring concern is that Weston already lacks adequate services (housing, NHS access, dentists, clean streets).
- **Prioritisation of Local Needs**: Many insist that local residents should be helped first, especially regarding housing.

5. Financial and Resource Concerns – 8 responses

- **Use of Public Funds**: Several responses question how the scheme would be funded and argue that public money should prioritise existing residents.
- **Council Tax Complaints**: There is frustration over rising council taxes without visible improvements in town services.

6. Social and Cultural Fears – 9 responses

- **Fear of Incomers**: Some respondents express anxiety over "unknown individuals" being settled in the town, citing safety, cultural erosion, or social instability.
- **Accusations of Virtue Signalling**: The council is accused by some of adopting the proposal for political or symbolic reasons rather than practical benefit.

7. Minority Views Acknowledged – 1 response

- **Recognition of Diversity**: At least one respondent calls out discrimination in the community and values the cultural contribution of migrants.

8. Requests for Clarity and Accountability – 2 responses

- **Specific Questions**: A few individuals ask for financial transparency, such as how much money the council receives per individual under the "sanctuary" scheme.

2.12. Question 12

Would you like to be involved in future?

Would you like to be involved in future?	in parish	out of parish
I would like to be kept informed of progress	237	32
I would like to discuss progress in meetings	53	7
I would prefer to share my views via online surveys	100	16
I am not interested in being involved in future	61	3

2.13. Additional question

If you have answered yes to any of the above (question 12), please leave your email address here.

275 people who completed the survey provided their email addresses to be kept up to date for Council of Sanctuary updates.

Members are requested to:

1. Note the initial summary report
2. Await a supplementary report with the final survey responses (recognising the 31st July 2025 deadline) – information to follow.
3. Upon receipt of both this report and the corresponding supplementary report, provide direction and future considerations for the start and finish group