

# Birmingham Food System Strategy 2022-2030: Consultation Findings Report

## Summary:

The consultation on the Birmingham Food system Strategy 2022-2030 was successful. We received 87 responses on BeHeard and engaged citizens through more than 10 events. Overall, feedback on the strategy was consistently as positive, with high levels of agreement throughout. Key suggestions for improvement included:

- Making the vision, principles, ambitions and aims link together more clearly
- Add additional groups into the Big Bold City approach
- Add Food Safety as a workstream
- Recognise the overlap between some of the workstreams with others
- The need to be precise regarding what FADMAP is and who it is for
- Suggestions for things to be included in the 9 different workstreams.

With regards to the vision of “creat[ing] a bold, fair, sustainable and prosperous food system and economy, where food choices are nutritious, affordable and desirable so all citizens can achieve their potential for a happy, healthy life”, 68% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement and a further 26% agreed, demonstrating a high level of agreement. Qualitatively, people commented positively, for example:

- “An excellent goal, articulates all key elements necessary for change and for success.”
- “It's great to see the vision statement includes the need for a fair system and the focus on nutritious and affordable food. It's also great to see the reference to 'all citizens'.”
- “We welcome the opportunity to contribute to Birmingham City Council’s food strategy, and we strongly agree with the vision statement

The feedback given on the strategy was specific and actionable, and we have written the strategy based on this feedback. We are taking the above suggestions seriously, including adding an additional workstream on food safety and standards and making the four areas with overlap (food skills and knowledge, food behaviour change, food resilience and security and food innovation, research and partnerships) into cross-cutting themes to explicitly recognise their cross-cutting nature with the 5 main workstreams. We have also added in a clearer focus on data in the food innovation, research and partnerships workstream. We are also working to link more clearly the vision, ambition, aims and principles. We aim to go to Cabinet with this strategy in April of next year, with a view to publish the final strategy in early summer.

We also want to note that an encouraging moment on our journey with creating the Birmingham Food System Strategy, is that in October 2022, the Birmingham Food System Strategy was recognised internationally by Hellbars Sustainability Research Institute and Gourmand Awards, as Winners in the Local Free Food Publications for 2022 and the only UK city in this award level and category to be recognised. The Birmingham Food System Strategy was platformed at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization Headquarters and at the World Food Forum in Rome in November and will be showcased internationally as a winning approach to food system strategic direction.

## Full consultation report

There were 87 respondents on BeHeard. We received responses from a number of key national organisations including The Food Foundation, NFU, Sustain, Sustainable Food Places, BiteBack 2030, Sorted Food, Feeding Britain, the Mandala Consortium and the Urban Agriculture Consortium; we also received responses from key regional organisations including The Trussell Trust (Midlands), Foodcycle and FareShare Midlands. We also had feedback from a number of individuals representing Birmingham organisations including BCC, Birmingham FoodCycle, Slow Food, Aston University, Clean Cuisine, Pip's Hot Sauce, Minor Weir and Willis, Birmingham and District Allotments Confederation, Fircroft College of Adult Education, Bring it on Brum. We also received a high level of responses from members of the public.

Overall, there was a good spread of respondents across the age groups. The age group with the most respondents was 65-69. There were no respondents from the 55-59 age category and only one respondent in the 20-24 category and the 75-79 category. With regards to ethnicity, respondents were strongly skewed towards white ethnicities, with the majority reporting "English/ Scottish/ Welsh/ Northern Irish" or "White" as their ethnic group. Similarly, respondents tended to be Christian or have no religion, and there were no respondents identifying as Muslim or Hindu. However, it should be noted that we engaged with a wider range of ethnicities & religions during the consultation events where we did not record demographic data.

We undertook more than ten consultation events – these consisted of presentations to education settings, the BVSC Energy & Environment Network, BCC Employees through a Lunch and Learn, the Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust clinical council, and a handful of community events (including the Birchfield Festival and a Commonwealth Games-related Jamaican celebration).

In order to ensure a holistic view of feedback, we have combined the quantitative and evidence from the BeHeard survey and qualitative feedback from the events. Therefore, quantitative details below relate to the BeHeard survey only, while the qualitative feedback relates to both BeHeard responses and feedback at events.

# Qualitative and Quantitative Results from Be Heard Survey

## Vision:

Create a bold, fair, sustainable and prosperous food system and economy, where food choices are nutritious, affordable and desirable so all citizens can achieve their potential for a happy, healthy life.

**93% of BeHeard respondents agreed with this statement**

Overall, qualitative feedback on the vision was very positive, for example:

- “An excellent goal, articulates all key elements necessary for change and for success.”
- “It's great to see the vision statement includes the need for a fair system and the focus on nutritious and affordable food. It's also great to see the reference to 'all citizens'. “
- “We welcome the opportunity to contribute to Birmingham City Council’s food strategy, and we strongly agree with the vision statement
- “It is ambitious & inclusive”
- “Let's make it happen!”

Key qualitative feedback on the vision included:

- The strategy was very ambitious, and may possibly too ambitious
- The vision was too wordy/long
- The importance of defining certain terms so readers are on the same page (for example, defining ‘nutritious’
- Some respondents gave specific suggestions, which included:
  - Food should be accessible and ethical as well as nutritious, affordable and desirable,
  - Citizens and visitors,
  - Change food choices to food options to represent role of environment rather than personal responsibility

## Principles:

Collaborate – strengthen partnerships and build on existing good practice.

Empower – remove barriers and facilitate solutions.

Equalise – focus actions where they are needed most to reduce inequalities

**92% of BeHeard respondents agreed with this statement**

Overall, qualitative feedback on the vision was very positive, for example:

- “Great list ... let's make it real in the mind of every decision maker, officers and elected. Really get out and engage with citizens and groups. BCC can be very conservative. Be bold!”
- “We agree with the principles of empower, collaborate and equalise.”
- “Three very well chosen principles, especially empower, which will be key moving forwards”
- “In our experience working in a partnership and collaboration is significantly more effective than companies working individually.”
- “...As for empower... 100%... give the ability to the citizens by teaching/showcasing.”

Key qualitative feedback on the vision included:

- Regarding the existing three principles (collaborate, empower, and equalise)
  - The importance of being clear the principles are for actioning of the strategy not writing it
  - Needing to make it clearer how these will achieve the vision, aims, etc.
  - One respondent commented that the principles were too vague, and examples could help.
- Suggestions of additional principles included: local, education, decentralisation and seeing the bigger picture.

## Ambition:

A thriving food system is built on a strong foundation where we regenerate and improve our environment, communities and economy. It is no longer enough to reduce negative outcomes by being sustainable or neutral. If we do this nothing will improve so we must aim higher.

**97% of BeHeard respondents agreed with this statement**

The qualitative feedback to the ambition was overwhelmingly positive:

- “Fantastic - this should be a UK wide objective with the investment, leadership & partners to deliver.”
- “I agree with the ambition but think it will be very difficult to achieve”
- “If it works then this strategy is a win-win for everyone and the environment.”
- “Regenerate is so powerful. We are not going to let climate change rip, we are no going to manage decline, we are going to work positively, together, to improve our environment, our communities and our economy.”
- “We agree with these ambitions, particularly a future where every citizen, no matter their circumstances, can eat an affordable, healthy, and sustainable diet. This is not currently the case. “
- “The ambitions of the Birmingham Food Strategy go hand in hand with the ambition to end the need for food banks. “

Key qualitative suggestions were:

- Noting that 8 years is a short timeline for these changes and therefore the strategy has an aspirational framing; but also the need to manage timelines and give context regarding the association plan and timeframes
- That it would be helpful to have more clarity on how ambitions will be achieved; greater links links/signposting between vision, principles, ambitions and aims
- Recognising the limitations of the strategy due to the importance of central government in the food environment and food policy
- Use objective not subjective language e.g. “fair salary” being subjective.

## Aims:

- Grow the Birmingham Food Revolution
- Build a sustainable, ethical and nutritious food system and a thriving local economy
- Build stronger resilient communities that support those who most need it, and mitigate food insecurity
- Empower citizens to consume a sustainable, ethical, healthy and nutritious diet

**95% of BeHeard respondents agreed with this statement**

The feedback to the aims was generally very positive:

- “Generally the aims highlights the main areas of the city’s food system that need improving from production to waste/reuse, education and greater involvement in it.”
- “All excellent aims- glad to see life course emphasis - from birth onwards.”
- “All great points, the link to both diet and a healthy lifestyle including exercise is such a critical link which can support nutrition in itself.”
- “With everyone on-board, a win-win situation will be created.”
- “If people are able to access good healthy local food and receive support the quality of life in Birmingham will be even better than it is now.”
- “Yes, sustainable, ethical and nutritious are the right values to put at the heart of these aims. An empowering City Council can do so much to help make a reality of these values.”

Key feedback on the aims included:

- While ambition is good, the process will rapidly lose momentum if there are not the resources and investment needed which is commensurate with achieving the aims.
- The need to be realistic about how big the challenges are and how long it takes to make changes on the scale needed.
- Highlight the importance of monitoring and measuring impact
- Recognising the importance of national and international food businesses in this area
- The importance of co-designing plans and resources with communities not to communities
- Clarifying that it is good to build stronger and more resilient communities, but people shouldn’t have to rely on their communities for support
- Mentioning growing/allotments and education in aims

## Big Bold City Approach

Taking action...

- Across people and communities
- Across the life course
- Across the city
- Across settings – food businesses, supply chain, third sector & not-for-profits, community & faith settings, education settings, further education settings. Birmingham City Council, public services, research and innovation, workplace and employers, industry networks, home.

**92% of BeHeard respondents agreed with this statement**

Overall, the feedback to this approach was positive, for example:

- “Be fabulous if everyone got on board.”
- “It is certainly Big and Bold. This makes it essential that the City Council makes a reality of the collaboration and empowerment and partnerships that will be needed to make a reality of the vision.”
- “We agree with this approach as it cannot be just the City Council's responsibility to bring about change.”
- “There is a lot we can link together here, and will take a lot of dedicated resource and management to do this, but if done effectively, it will be very powerful and impactful.”
- “Yes, this cannot work in at the absence of collective effort”
- “The Bold City approach correctly recognises that to achieve a revolution in attitudes then active engagement with the citizens of Birmingham is essential to ensuring the proposed actions are accepted and acted on.”

There was some useful feedback, for example:

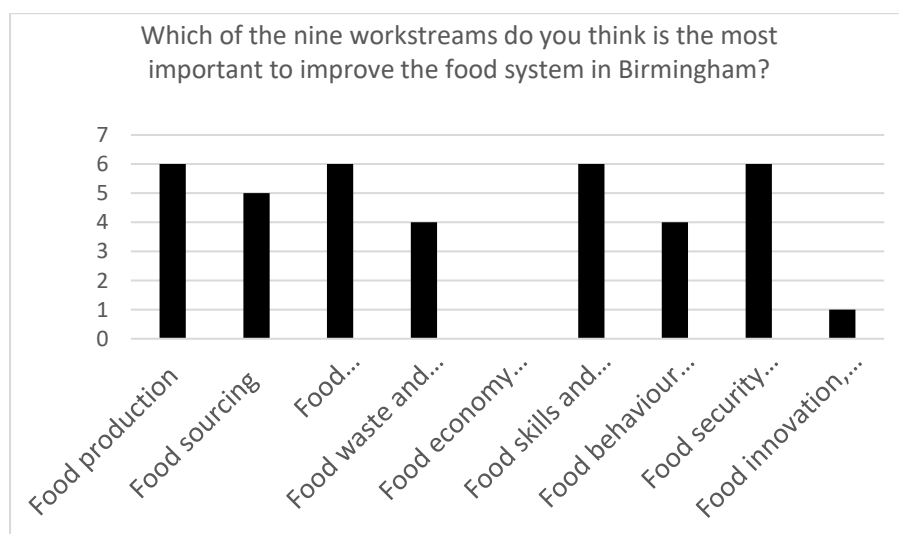
- There was consensus that health should be listed as a separate partner - health visitors, community & school nurses, dietitians, nutritionist, dentistry and other therapists could be key in encouraging and supporting change.
- That this was a comprehensive approach but a respondent queried would it be wiser to focus on a few settings and do them well.
- The need to clarify the what role citizens will play
- Give a greater emphasis on the food cycle as well as the human lifecourse
- More details on childcare settings – childminders, holiday clubs, after-school clubs, leisure centres
- Include: homeless shelters, refuges, care homes, food banks, slaughter houses, factories, incinerator

## Framework for action:

- Food production – empower citizens and local producers to grow and preserve food and connect to the city's food system
- Food sourcing – increase sourcing of local, environmentally sustainable, ethical and nutritious foods across the food system
- Food transformation – transform diets to contain more diverse and nutritious ingredients, and less fat, salt and sugar
- Food waste and recycling – maximise the repurposing and distribution of surplus food and minimise waste and unsustainable packaging
- Food economy and employment – create a thriving local food economy for all and maximise training and employment opportunities
- Food skills and knowledge – empower citizens with knowledge and skills in relation to the food system from farm to fork
- Food behaviour change – ensure the capability, opportunity and motivation for key behaviours that will enable long term change
- Food security and resilience – ensure all citizens in every community, at every age, have access to sufficient affordable, nutritious and safe food.
- Food innovation, partnerships and research – gather insights and facilitate innovation, collaboration, learning and research across the food system.

**93% of BeHeard respondents agreed with this statement**

We also asked respondents which of the 9 workstreams they thought was the most important to improve the food system in Birmingham. While not all respondents responded, overall there was a good spread across the workstreams, with the exception of food economy and employment. This may represent the values of people taking part in the consultation rather than the importance of the workstream itself (e.g. despite attempts to get BID managers to fill in the consultation, we did not receive any responses from them).





Generally, the framework for action was well received, for example:

- “The 9 workstreams complement each other and hopefully there will be cross-workstream collaboration too. I would choose food skills and knowledge as the key underpinning basis for making progress across all 9 workstreams.”
- “I strongly support the 9 workstreams proposed.”
- “I think it’s really comprehensive.”
- “Outstanding list. Valuable guide to concerted local community action. people are passionate about grow and their environment. How can we best build from that.”

Key feedback included:

- That nine was perhaps too many workstreams and may hinder making strategic choices and prioritising.
- Some workstreams framed as outcomes, some as actions; be clearer with language (e.g. all vision statements starting with “-ing”
- The importance of more explicitly linking the framework of action to the vision, ambitions, aims etc.
- Two additional workstreams were suggested
  1. **Preparedness for food shortages and scarcities** – early warning system for supply disruption and reference to local resilience forum (*could go under workstream 8*)
  2. **Food safety, assurance and integrity** – promote FHRS scheme, tackle food crime, monitor data submitted to the Local Authority Enforcement Monitoring System

We then gave people the opportunity to give feedback on each of the workstreams. The number of response to each varied as some only gave feedback to workstreams that they perceived to be relevant to them, for example, the Urban Agriculture Consortium only gave feedback on the Food Production and Food Sourcing workstreams.

## Food production

Food production – empower citizens and local producers to grow and preserve food and connect to the city's food system

**95% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement**

Key feedback on this workstream included:

- Highlighting the importance of food growing in improving lifestyles generally, including learning where food comes from, and considering initiatives to empower people to grow food.
- Consider addressing the spraying of pesticides and herbicides by council, especially on allotments. Also, considering soil quality solutions within growing spaces.
- The importance of protecting allotment sites and improving the BCC allotment service
- The need to identify space that can be used for growing and enable use of that land by making the process and procedures easier to engage with. Also, the allocation of additional land for growing and protect its use long term.
- Share and promote pathways for people to get into farming and agriculture (e.g. apprenticeships, colleges).
- Build more into the workstream to have a more specific focus on fruit and vegetables.

## Food sourcing

Food sourcing – increase sourcing of local, environmentally sustainable, ethical and nutritious foods across the food system

**98% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement**

Key feedback included:

- The need to be more explicit it what we are trying to achieve within the workstream and be more proactive with engaging with the Shires around Birmingham.
- The importance of using hyperlocal partners to help people access good food (including community centres for youth).
- Birmingham to bring back local food and produce markets and a suggestion to use empty lots to home the local food and produce markets.
- A potential intervention of allowing people with allotments to sell their produce to the public or encourage people to donate their produce to food projects within the city.
- The importance of using procurement strategies, techniques, and actions to enable local suppliers within the city/region.
- Highlighting the role the food and farming has on the climate and its connection to the climate emergency.
- Consider developing visitor actions that directly benefit the food offer of Birmingham, building a positive impact for our food industry.

## Food transformation

Food transformation – transform diets to contain more diverse and nutritious ingredients, and less fat, salt and sugar

99% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement

Key feedback included:

- There is a need to define what healthy eating means and what it is by focusing on both the positives, as well as negatives.
- Restrict development of cheap fast food outlets and promote healthy food offers across Birmingham.
- Greater publicity of local, good food around consumers within Birmingham (e.g. where is my nearest greengrocer?).
- Building local protocols and legislation that tackles local “High in Fat, Salt, Sugar” HFSS advertising through direct and clear restrictions.
- Working with Birmingham based businesses and in public settings, in using a range of strategies to help these companies more towards a better health profile of their food sales, e.g., healthy catering commitment, implementation of school food standards, creating incentives and support packages for small retail settings).
- Within this workstream, you must recognise the importance of central government in this area of the food system.
- Food transformation to a healthier, more sustainable food system, needs to be focus on solutions and by making them the easiest option or change won’t happen.

## Food Waste and Recycling

Food waste and recycling – maximise the repurposing and distribution of surplus food and minimise waste and unsustainable packaging

**99% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement**

Key feedback included:

- The creation of redistribution pathways and systems for surplus food. Organisation such as BCC, businesses, volunteer schemes, food pantries, and others could lead in this area.
- More needs to be done in educating people about sustainability and how not to waste food.
- The strategy needs to facilitate composting and household food waste collection for all of Birmingham.
- Consider the entire food system process by promoting energy saving in food preparation, not just in food waste.
- A wider focus on how we can address the issue of single use plastics and packaging within our food system.
- For this workstream to be a success, it needs buy-in from communities and needs to represent major shift in habits.
- Create process and support that helps zero waste food businesses to thrive within Birmingham.
- Embed zero waste throughout food's lifecycle (not just when utilised by consumers), this will require the consideration of secondary markets and others.

## Food Economy and Employment

Food economy and employment – create a thriving local food economy for all and maximise training and employment opportunities

**98% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement**

Key feedback included:

- Consideration of funding for positive food businesses and CICs within Birmingham.
- Making it clear the need for Living wage across our entire food system, including apprenticeships and other training routes into work.
- Embedding how we can change the narrative around farming and agriculture, so it is seen and understood as skilled work.
- Development of sustainable food systems can help boost social employment by offering training and creating jobs at restaurants and with producers. Access to start-up support could enable new enterprises to develop and innovate, increasing the number of food-related jobs and training opportunities.
- Considering how we can take an entrepreneurial approach to branding, building on cultural and tourist brands like the Balti Triangle
- Building greater links between the food industry and education settings, such as universities and colleges.
- Exploring how we can ensure we celebrate businesses that are doing well in areas of sustainability, diversity, health, and more.

## Food Skills and Knowledge

Food skills and knowledge – empower citizens with knowledge and skills in relation to the food system from farm to fork

**96% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement**

Key feedback included:

- Consider an approach to making the workstream clearer, such as including how it will be implemented, and what it could be measured against to show success.
- The focus seems to be primarily on citizens and there is a risk of adopting victim blaming and individualistic behaviour change approaches that may be marginally effective and widen inequalities. Thinking more upstream suggests that a greater focus is needed on upskilling food professionals in food skills to better support human and planetary health and ensures addressing systemic barriers which frame & dictate behaviour
- Many respondents simply stated school settings and children's education, as a need for the future of the food system.
- Considering interventions such as cooking lessons for Birmingham citizens (online and in person).
- Consumers' knowledge and skills will underpin the achievement of a great deal of the ambition set out in the consultation document.
- Embedding a positive narrative, such as building emphasis on the enjoyment of learning new skills & keeping it fun for learners.
- Taking a life course approach by establishing positive food relationships from birth.
- Treading a careful balance between providing enjoyable, non-patronising opportunities for skills development without assuming all the problems we face regarding our food choices and consumption are due to poor awareness and a lack of skills.

## Food Behaviour Change

Food behaviour change – ensure the capability, opportunity and motivation for key behaviours that will enable long term change

**94% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement**

Key feedback included:

- When considering this workstream, the Social determinants of health are key to ensure it is effective.
- Looking further than just short-term change. For behaviour change to make a real impact once it has been achieved, needs to be supported to maintain the changed behaviour and become a normalised habit.
- Should this workstream be a crosscutting theme? For example, education and behaviour change, go hand in hand (e.g. schools play important role in children's behaviour).
- Social prescribing is a good idea, however is their evidence of it being effective in action?
- Robust planning is important in behaviour change and in ensuring that it is effective.
- Build stronger communication strategies and plan such as social campaigns.



## Food Security and Resilience

Food security and resilience – ensure all citizens in every community, at every age, have access to sufficient affordable, nutritious and safe food.

**98% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement**

Key feedback included:

- There needs to be a focus on the long term and future, such as a need to mention the negative direction of travel that currently exists. Our aim has to be reducing reliance on foodbanks and not allowing them to become the norm.
- One way to tackle food security and resilience, is to integrate the workstream with key poverty tackling initiatives such as Real Living Wage.
- Building real support for people on the fringes of society, such as those who don't qualify for Healthy Start vouchers, those experiencing in-work poverty, and others.
- We need to consider and be aware of the importance of income, benefits, wider determinants, that effect people's food security and resilience.
- Going further than just tackling the symptoms, such as building in clear approaches to reducing stigma and shame.
- Ensuring that we invest in community initiatives at every opportunity.
- Food security and resilience is more than just poverty, it needs to connect to the climate emergency and how that influences food insecurity and shortages.
- A clear acknowledgement of where, and how, this strategy interacts and intersect with other strategies and workstreams would be hugely beneficial.

## Food Innovation, Partnerships and Research

Food innovation, partnerships and research – gather insights and facilitate innovation, collaboration, learning and research across the food system.

100% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement

Key feedback included:

- As this workstream explores innovation, there needs to be an explicit mention of technology and its role in the food system.
- The workstream needs to look at all areas of the food system, such as the hospitality industry, who are key innovators and partners but are often overlooked in the food system.
- “has previously all been said” & “this workstream seems to be primarily about learning rather than innovation. I would suggest that this doesn't warrant being a standalone workstream, but rather learning should be built into the whole strategy “– *cross cutting theme?*”
- Right to focus on research as a key driver of understanding, innovation and seizing future opportunities to achieve the strategy's goals and go further.

## We also asked some overall questions relating to partnership:

**“To what extent do you agree or disagree with our approach to involving food system partners and aligning to other strategies and priorities?”**

**99% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement**

Key feedback:

- Be clear how people can engage
- Transparency of decision-making
- Don't use alienating language
- Specify funding attached
- Top down – needs to be bottom up

**We also asked who else we should be communicating with. The answers included:**

- Charities that offer food
- BDAC
- PAN-UK
- Soil Association, Bee-friendly Brum, Wildlife trusts, allotment owners, & BCC allotment department
- School food suppliers (including Cityserve)
- Food businesses including Digbeth Dining Club
- Planning and Transport
- Children & Young People's Services

**We also asked if we had missed any key priorities.**

- Reference to Net Zero action plan
- Aligning to grass roots approaches already happening
- Consult PAN-UK re. other cities moving towards organic food growing
- Transparent key performance indicators
- Strong links with government departments, including lobbying for change
- Keep scientific literature under constant review
- Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority owned businesses
- Eating disorders

## Food Action Decision-Making and Prioritisation (FADMaP) tool

Food Action Decision-Making and Prioritisation (FADMaP) tool in order to aid decision-making and prioritising actions. This will ensure actions are:

- Citizen-first
- Celebrating diversity
- Addressing poverty and inequalities
- Healthy and safe
- Environmentally sustainable
- Economically sustainable
- Empowering
- Evidence-based
- Cost-effective
- Scaled and paced
- Learning and improving
- Risk-aware and resilient.

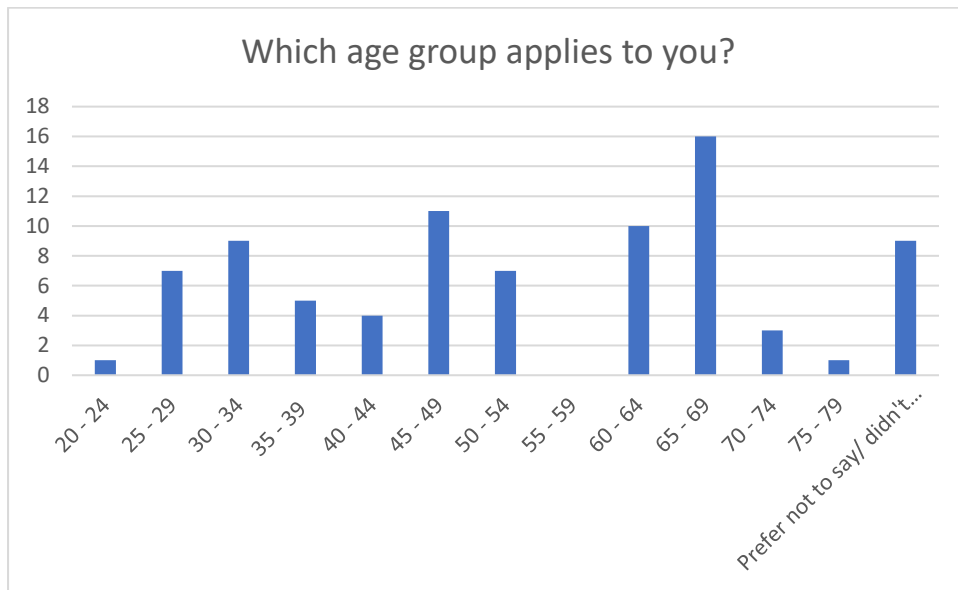
**91% of BeHeard respondents who answered the question agreed with this statement**

Key feedback included:

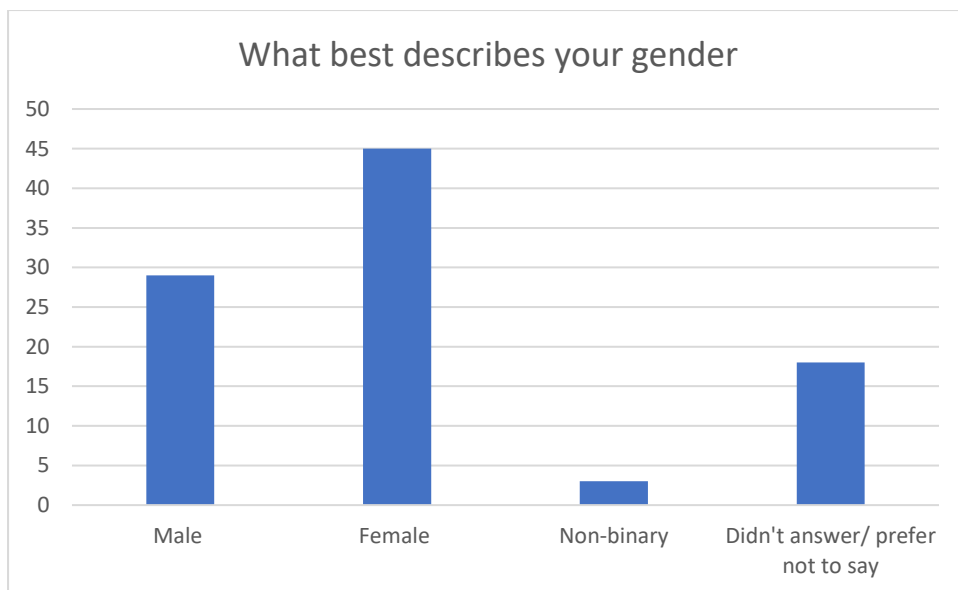
- Need to be more precise about who FADMAP is for and what it is – some people struggled to understand what the tool is, who it's for, what it's for etc.
- Very wordy & lots of considerations – may not help prioritise!
- Need to be clearer about order – is there a hierarchy? Are they equally weighted? People disagree with order. Eg. top 3: 1. Cost effective; 2. Environmentally sustainable; 3. Evidence based
- This initiative is built around a top-down approach that claims looking at benefitting individuals with centralised decision-making. Change to a bottom-up approach.
- Need to focus on long term achievable initiatives.
- Quantitative and qualitative assessment of success – how will you know which aspects have been effective?
- Prioritise effectiveness over minimising spending

## Appendix A: Demographic Profile of BeHeard Respondents

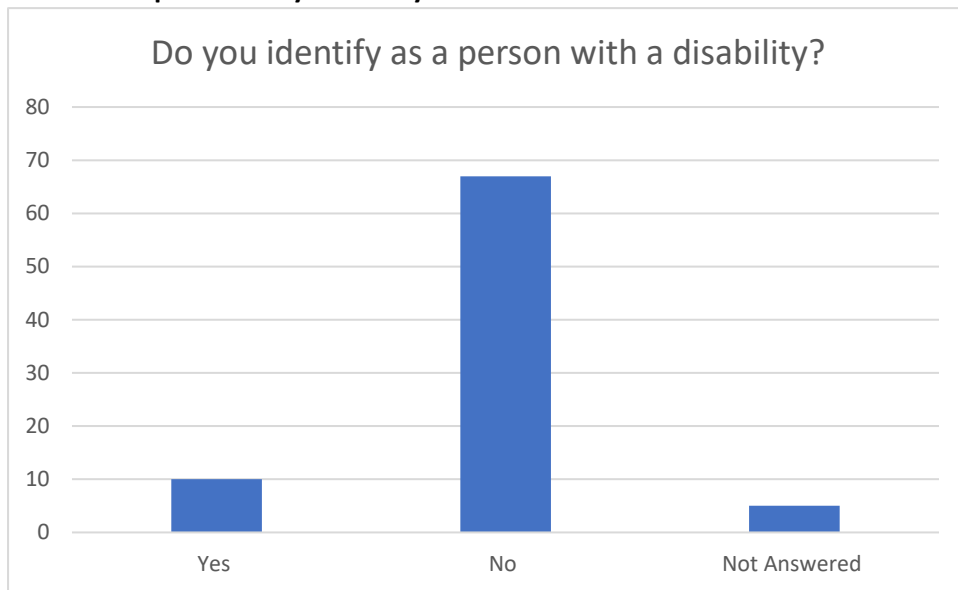
**Chart 1: Respondents by Age**



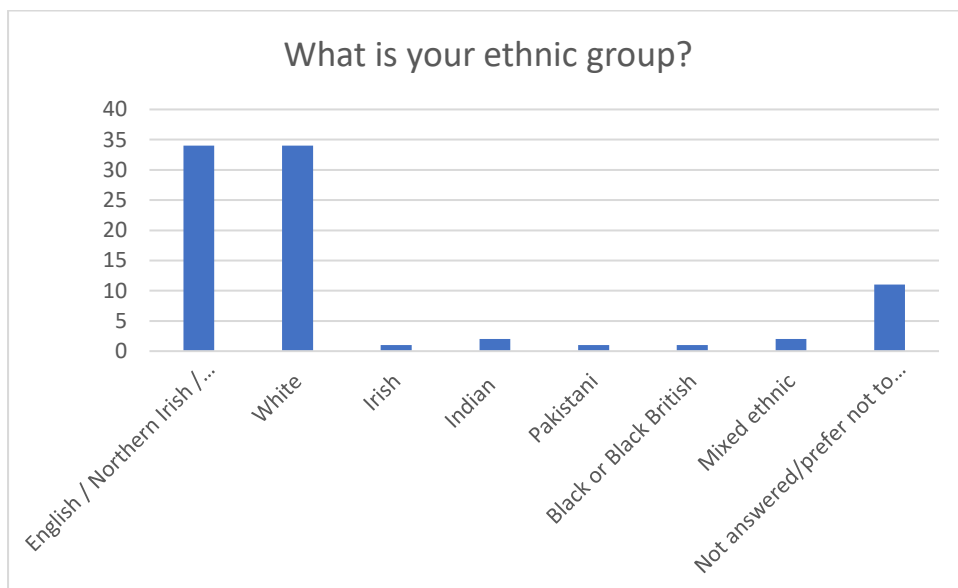
**Chart 2: Respondents by Gender**



**Chart 3: Respondents by Disability**



**Chart 4: Respondents by Ethnicity**



**Chart 5: Respondents by Religion**

