

Arts & Culture engagement

Summarised results

Engagement activities & participation

- A series of engagement events and survey were hosted by Reigate & Banstead Borough Council (RBBC) in October 2024, focussed on the future of the Council's arts and culture offer
- The survey and events achieved a satisfactory response rate, with many invested stakeholder groups taking part:

Survey responses

- 608 responses
- 75% from Borough residents
- 9% from theatre/art professionals
- 6% from community art organisation members

Event responses

- 156 responses
- 27% from community art organisation members
- 17% from community organisation members

Methodology

- An exploratory approach was selected as most appropriate to the timeframe and resources available. This would provide an indication of resident and other audiences' needs.
- Five engagement events took place across the borough at various locations
- A survey was hosted online and paper copies made available (this survey was open from the 1st to 14th October)
- Both survey and events featured *Closed* and *Freetext* questions
- The survey and events were advertised on the RBBC website, social media channels, local press and posters and flyers at civic sites

Interpreting the research

- Whilst the engagement activities were popular with audiences who use the Harlequin or are engaged in the arts, the results may not represent the views of the general public
- Differences in data collection between survey and event responses means that some metrics are not comparable on a one-to-one basis (highlighted * within results)
- The results are best suited to providing an indicative understanding of what users of the Harlequin and/or those engaged in the local arts community:
 - Perceive regarding RBBC's performance
 - Value about the Harlequin
 - Want to retain from the Harlequin services
 - Consider regarding potential provisions and their location/type

Quantitative summary

Closed questions

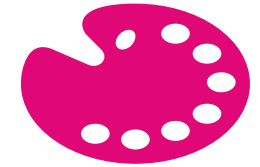
High level overview – values and retention

Why is the Harlequin valued?



26%* indicated that the Harlequin **location was among** its most **important features**

Variety of programme was also identified as one of the Harlequin's most **important features** with an average selection rate of **17.5%***



What do people want to keep from the Harlequin?

Responses indicated that above all else **live performances** should be retained. Community and live performances together had an average selection rate of **55.5%***



Pantomime performances were the next most sought-after feature to retain with **16.5%*** of responses selecting it

* Percentages have been calculated by averaging total survey and event selection rates together

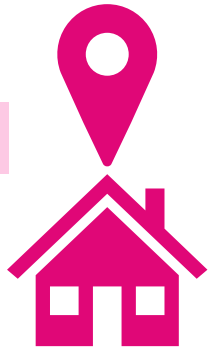
High level overview – provisions

How should provisions be handled by Reigate & Banstead Borough Council?



A large majority of responses – **92.5%***, believe that **funding for any provisions should be provided by RBBC**

Provision wise, the most popular responses were for a **single fixed location**, with **45.5%*** indicating that it was the preferred solution



However, it should be noted that **45%*** of survey responses highlighted that funding could be for a **limited time**



Of all locations **Redhill** was the most sought after, with a **75.5%*** selection rate



* Percentages have been calculated by averaging total survey and event selection rates together

Qualitative summary

Freetext responses

Points for consideration

- This qualitative analysis is based upon the responses given in the Survey, with representation made across many areas and summarised into 10 topics
- Due to recurring themes across all qualitative questions, we have opted to analyse the three freetext questions asked as a single collection, summarising all the results in one place
- Any counts provided within the analysis shows the frequency that topic is mentioned and not the number of respondents using the term

Survey responses

- 608 responses
- Over 1500 comments analysed

What topics appear in the discussion?

Ten topics were identified as making up the bulk of responses (the frequency noted in brackets)

Perceptions
of the
council
(307)



Engagement
with
residents
(212)



The
Harlequin
building (344)



Provisions
(146)



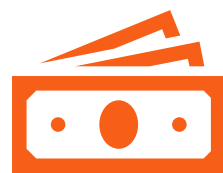
Events &
activities
(229)



Marketing
(66)



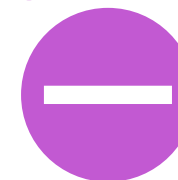
Funding
(86)



Value of the
arts
(120)



Impacts of
closure
(117)

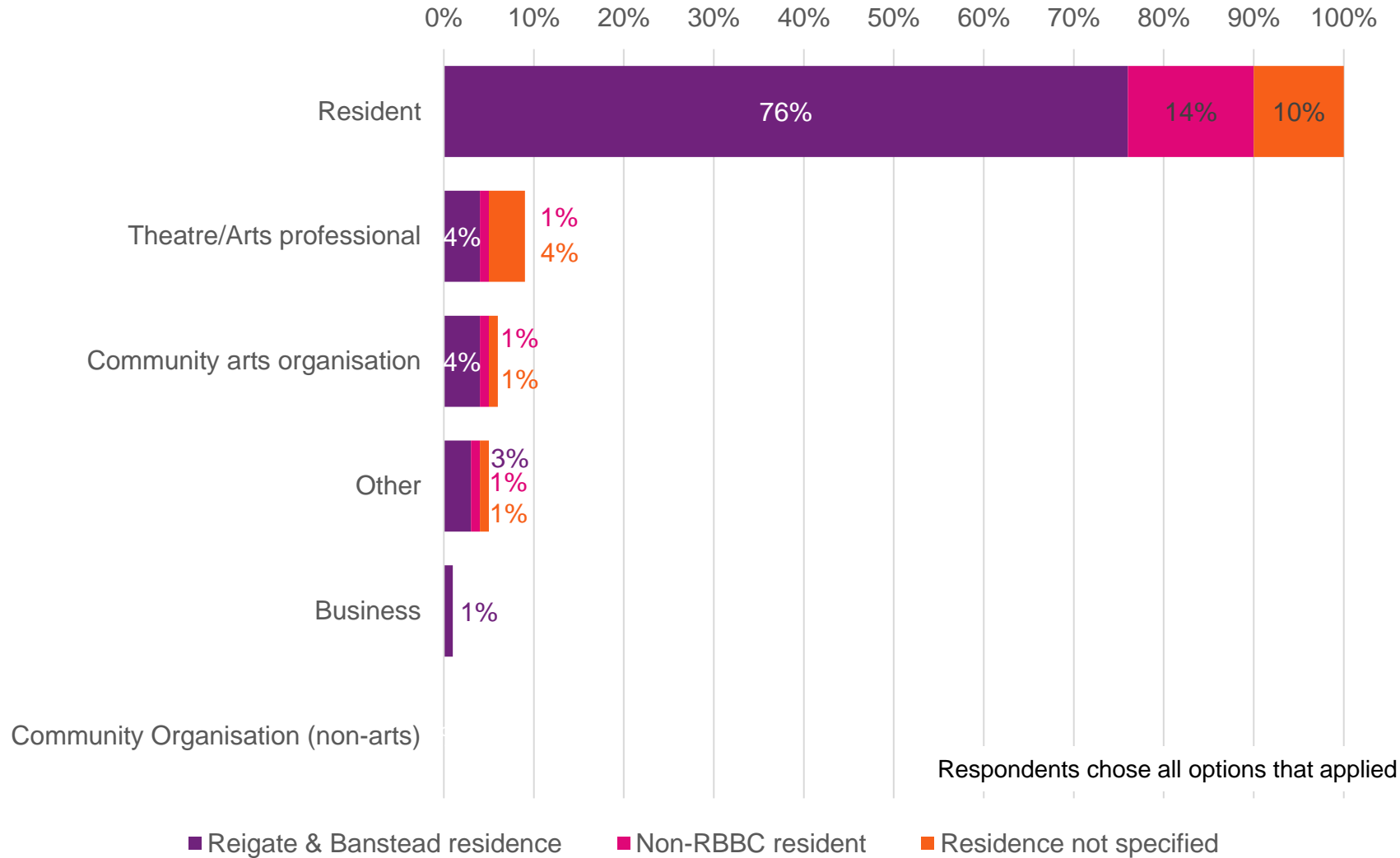


Affordability,
accessibility
& inclusion
(62)



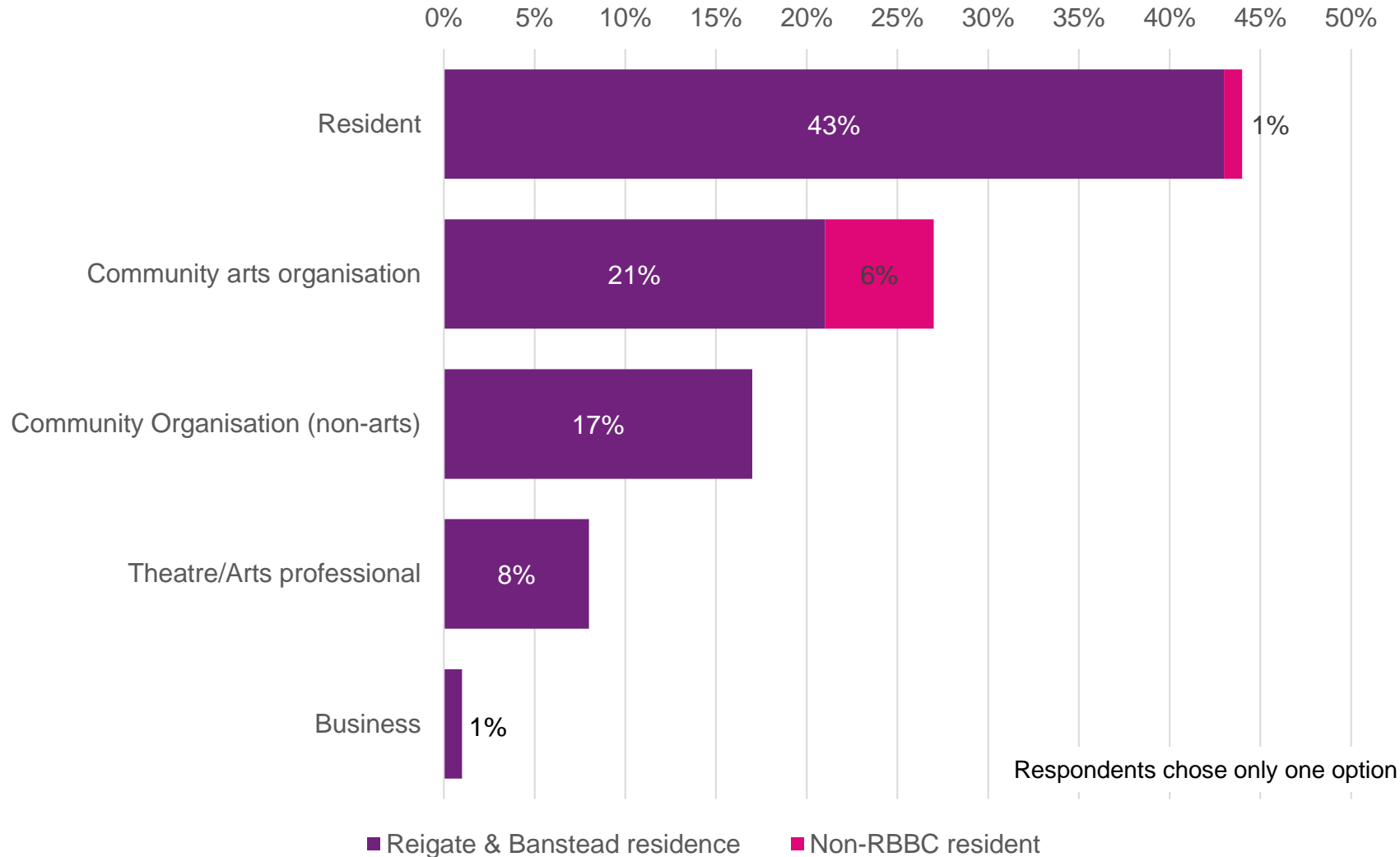
Detailed breakdown

In what capacity are you taking part? (Survey only)



- Survey respondents were mainly taking part from the perspective of a **resident**
- Less than **25%** of the sample indicated that they were responding in a capacity **other than a resident**

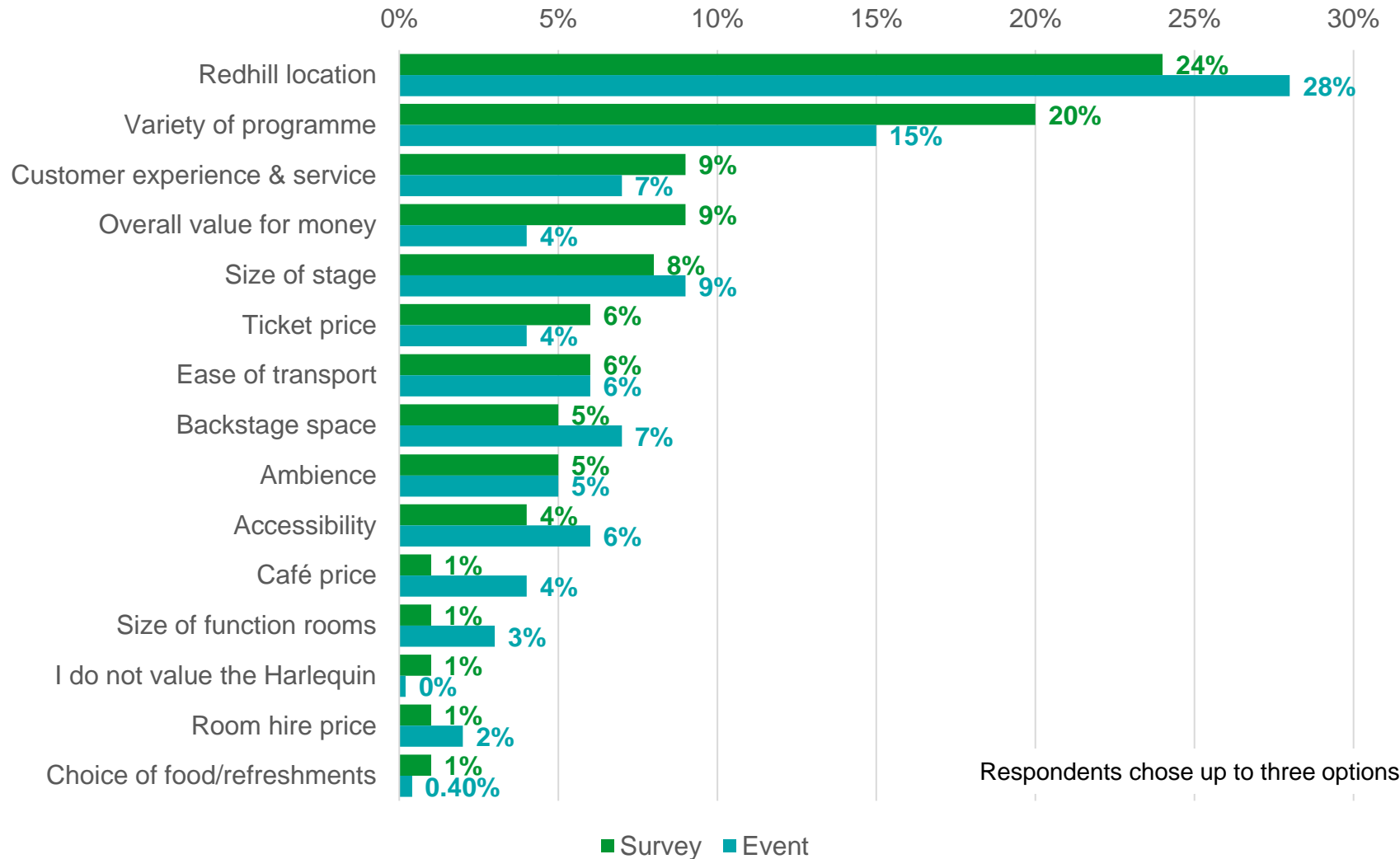
In what capacity are you taking part? (Event only)*



- A disproportionately **high amount of community organisation members** attended the event
- A sizeable **44%** of respondents identified as being a member of a **community organisation**

*Unlike the survey, event respondents were asked to answer this question with **only one answer**. In the survey respondents could choose up to three options, explaining the contrast in the pattern of answers

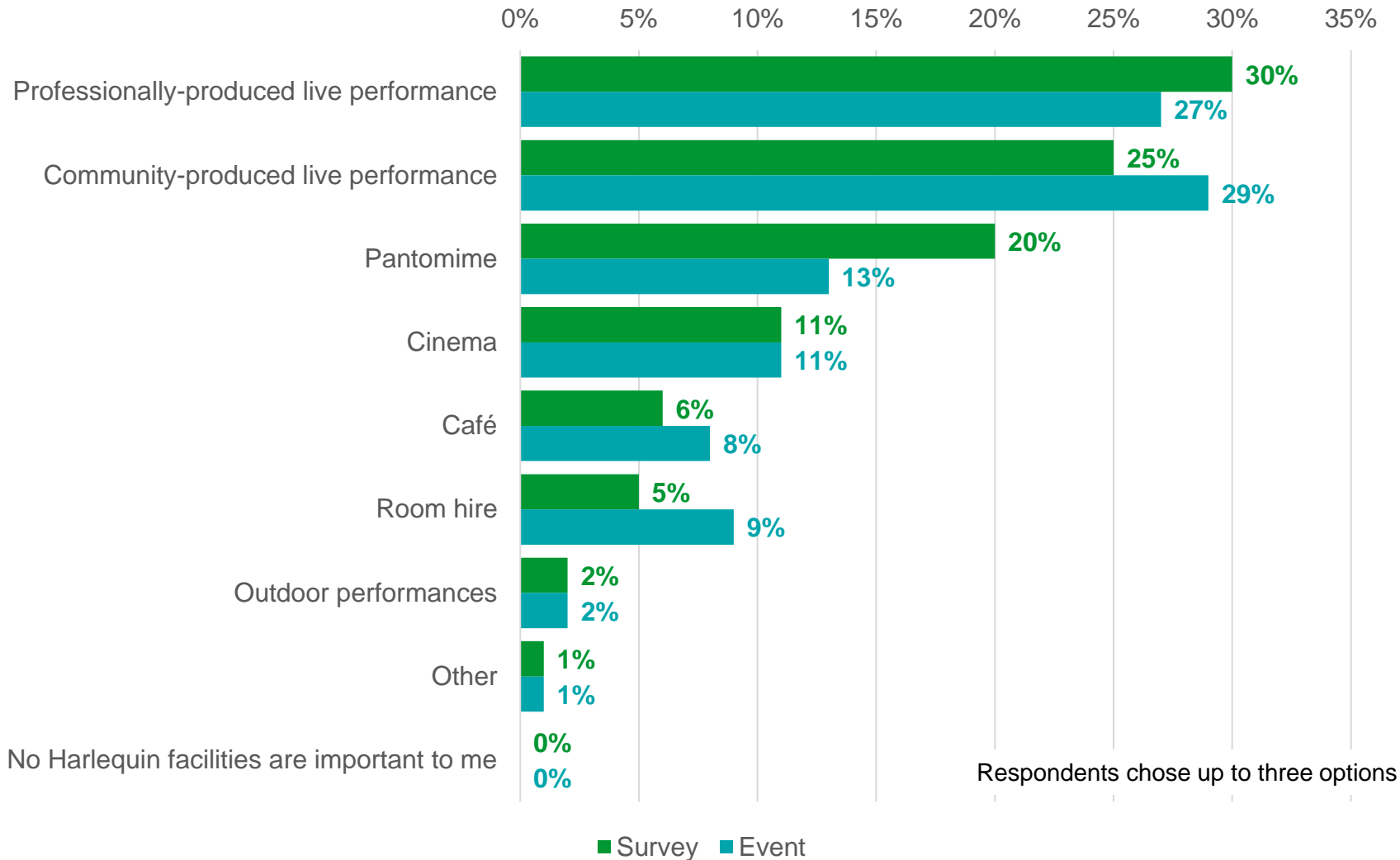
Why do you value the Harlequin?



Respondents chose up to three options

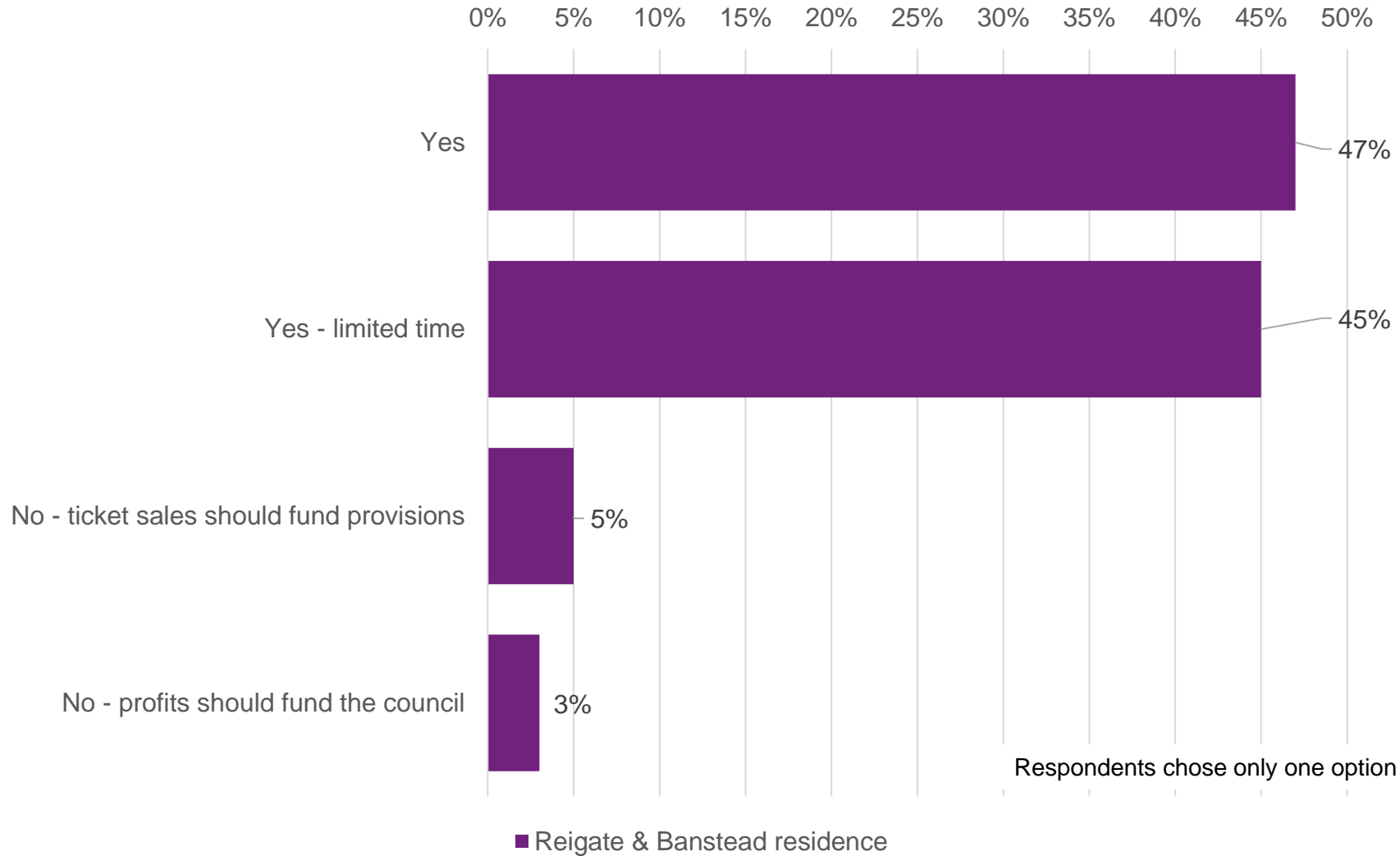
- For the most part **survey** and **event responses align**
- **Event respondents** were slightly more focused on features that were **impactful for performers** as well as users

What Harlequin services would you want retained?



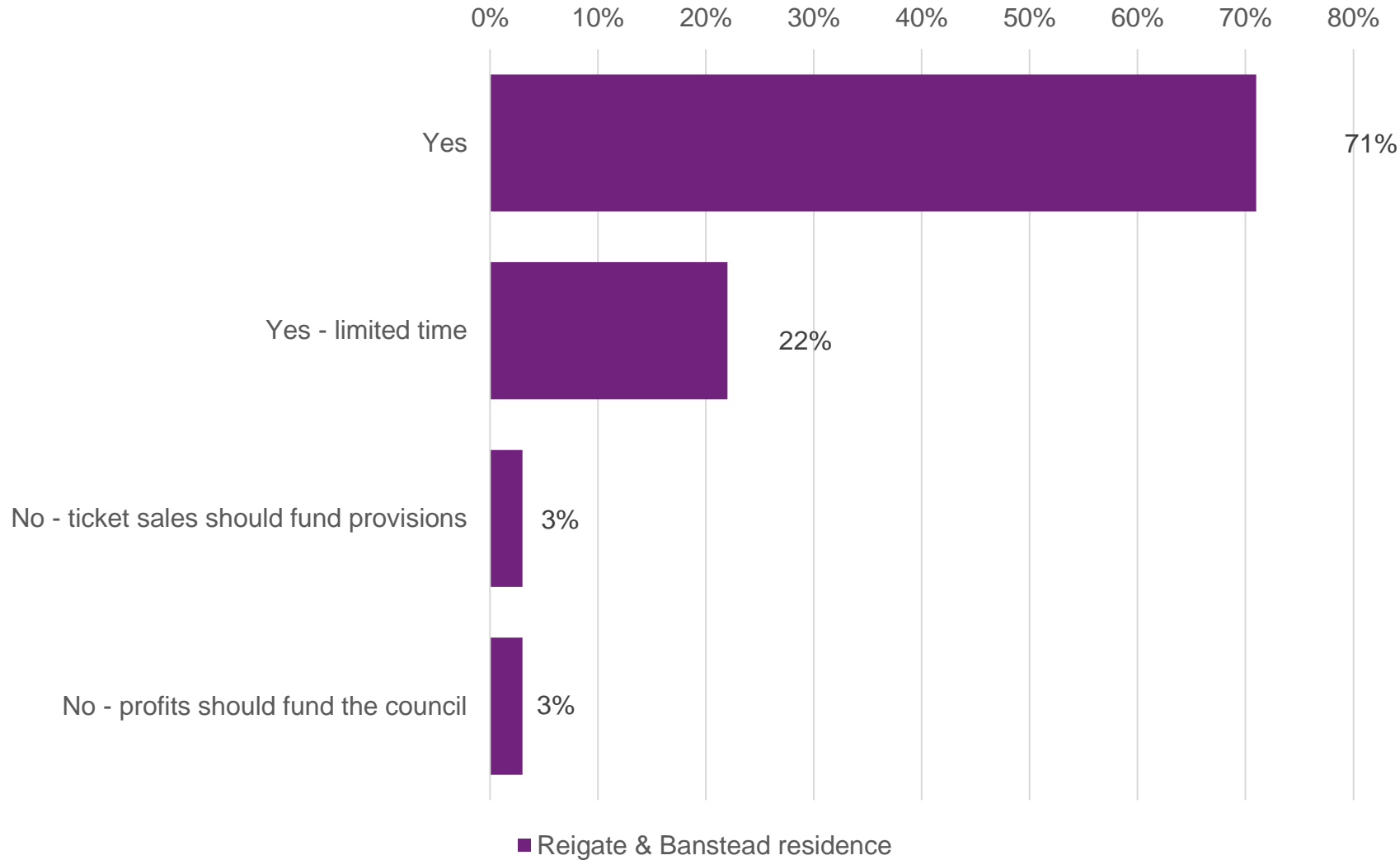
- Survey and event respondents both valued the **importance of live performances**
- High attendance of community organisation members at the event meant that **community-produced live performances were most highly ranked in importance for event respondents**

Should the Council subsidise provisions? (Survey only)



- **92%** of survey respondents thought that RBBC should be **funding Harlequin provisions** in some capacity
- There was a **split in opinion** between provisions being **funded full time or part time**

Should the council subsidise provisions? (Event only)*



- A similar proportion of event respondents (**93%**) thought that RBBC should be **funding any Harlequin provisions**. Unlike survey respondents, there is a much stronger consensus among event respondents. **71%** believe that RBBC should **fund provisions permanently**

*Both survey and event respondents were only allowed to answer this question with one option, however results showed that some event respondents answered **more than once** (202 answers from 156 event participants)

What types of art & culture provisions should be considered?

In a single building - including converting an existing space

Touring - using existing buildings in the community

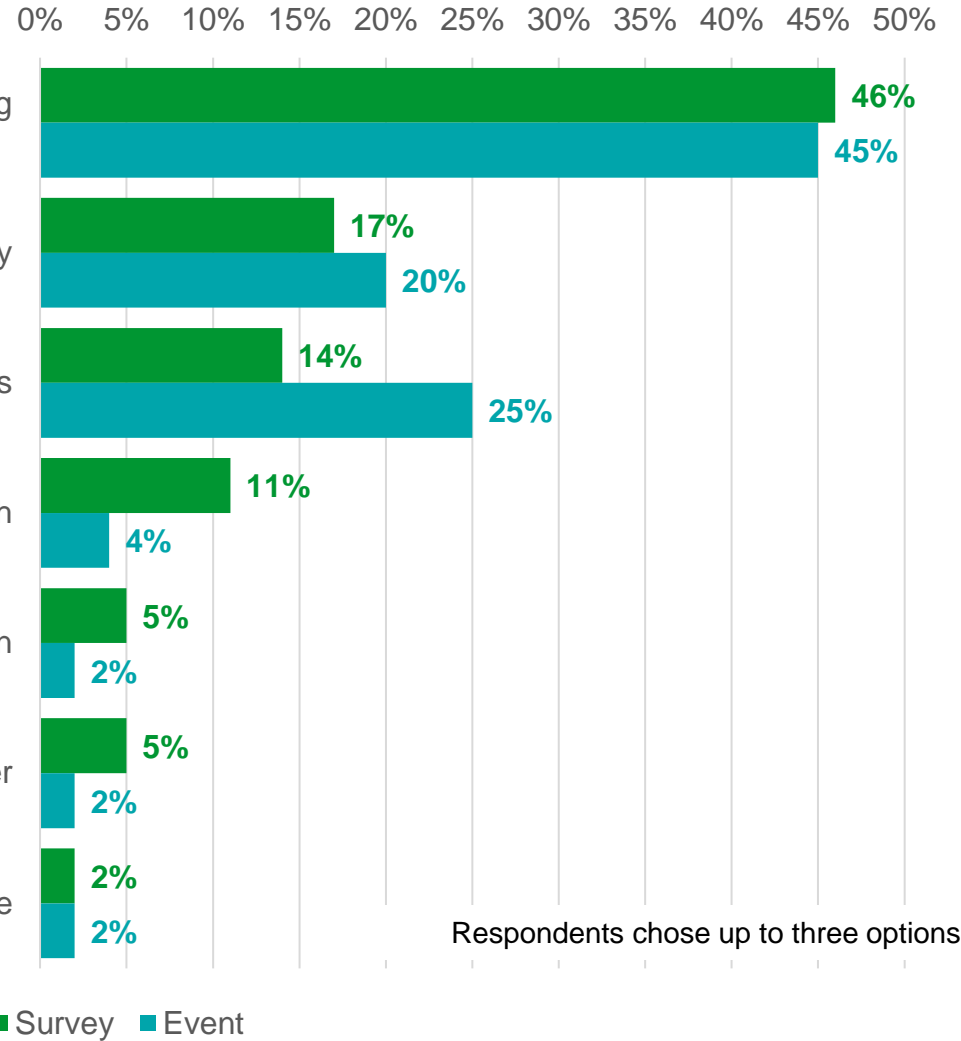
Pop up - temporary spaces active for short periods

Outdoor - using spaces across the borough

Outdoor - one location

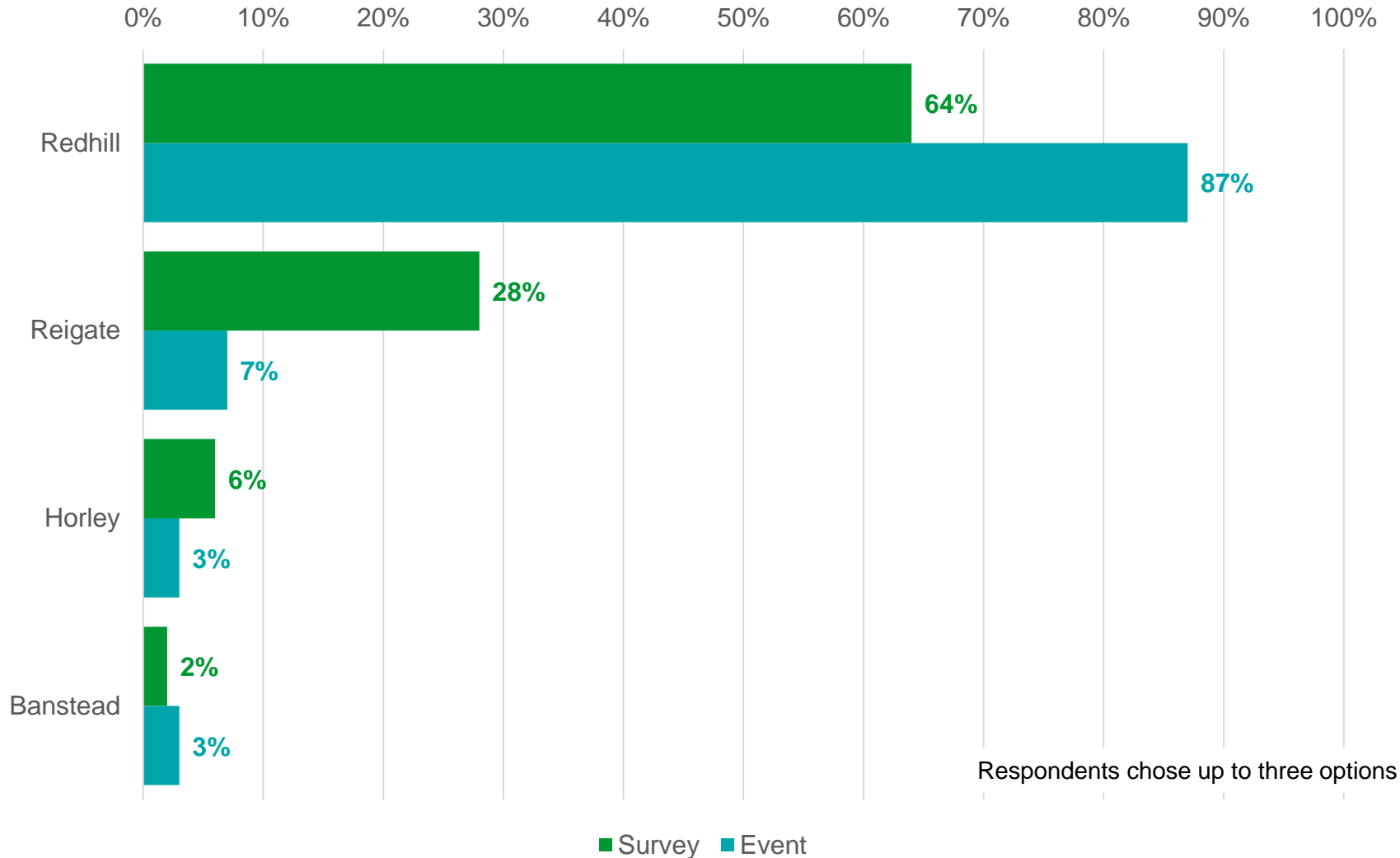
Other

None of these



- Having a **single base** for any provisions is **most preferred** by respondents
- There is also **a lot of interest** in the idea of a **touring or pop ups** which could be useful for immediate provisions

Where in the borough should provisions be located?



- Overwhelmingly, there is a strong sentiment that any **provisions should remain in Redhill**
- Survey respondents were **more open to the idea of a central/Reigate option as well**

1. Perceptions of the council



- There was a sentiment that **Council progress on the Harlequin** over the past year has **not been satisfactory (120)**.
- Many respondents indicated that they felt the Council had **already made the decision to close the Harlequin (62)**.
- Some comments indicated that the Council seems to **no longer place value on the arts (54)**.
- Some felt there has been **insufficient communication** from RBBC about the Harlequin situation **(48)**.
- A low number of comments suggested the Council should look to **other local authorities for advice** and **next steps (7)**.
- A handful of comments suggested that the executive **councillors lack the experience** to decide on the **future of arts and culture** in the borough **(7)**.

“Stop delaying surveys and get things moving on the renovation/rebuild”

“Actively communicate with the community with updates, understand this is an important place for people that means a lot to them, they want it back”

“Learn from the successes of other local authorities’ regional theatres and try and replicate that success...”

2. Engagement

- Many comments expressed an **appetite for more engagement opportunities (84)**.
- There was some discussion on the topic of RBBC's **engagement** with the community, **particularly focused on unsatisfactory communication with local arts organisations, and performance schools (76)**.
- Some comments noted that RBBC should do **more in schools** to **increase participation and exposure to the arts** for younger people **(52)**.



“Consult with local arts groups, performance groups, the local population and visitors to Redhill attracted by The Harlequin.”

“The Council should actually listen to those they're providing for, as performers that use the Harlequin have been left high and dry with no communication and no help. The Harlequin theatre is the best theatre for miles, and finding a replacement to perform in is an absolute nightmare...”

“Get into schools. Culture provision, particularly instrument lessons are vital in ensuring children are exposed to culture and can be directly included...”

“Listen to the people in the community. There needs to be somewhere that people can all be together to enjoy the arts”

3. The Harlequin building

- Many comments indicated that the Council should **repair and reopen the Harlequin (292)**.
- Several comments indicated that RBBC should act on **securing an alternative venue** whilst the Harlequin is closed **(35)**.
- Some comments mentioned that the closure is an opportunity to **future proof and improve the Harlequin (14)**.
- A small number of comments indicated that the Council should **not work to improve or restore the Harlequin (2)** or that there is **sufficient alternative provision** available elsewhere **(1)**.

“The Council needs to repair, and if necessary refurbish, and then reopen the Harlequin theatre as a matter of urgency before community groups (in the arts and for other sectors) lose membership, start to disband or fail and are lost to the community...”

“Make sure the current building at the hub of the town centre is either repaired or replaced...”

“Restore the Harlequin to its former glory with provision of all the exciting events it hosted.”

“... Live theatre is the beating heart of the performing arts scene in the borough, enjoyed by people of all ages. Part of Redhill died when the theatre was made to close in 2023 for safety concerns. The sooner it is repaired the better. It can't come soon enough. The Harlequin is the jewel in the crown of arts provision in the borough. People are desperate to see it reopen.”





4. Provisions

- Many respondents commented that **future provision** should **contain spaces for rehearsal and performance (85)**.
- There was a strong theme that the Harlequin was a **'community hub'** and a **central place for arts organisations (31)**.
- A roughly equal split of comments mentioned that the **Harlequin cinema should be kept (14)**, whilst others indicated that the **cinema is no longer needed (16)**.

“Promote and support community organisations which previously used the Harlequin to ensure their viability while situation is resolved.

Have a summer outdoor concert stage/festival venue for performance opportunities, outdoor cinema...”

“... Work with local arts organisations and the theatre to have a proper strategy for the provision of arts in the Borough...”

“The main concern at the moment is for the provision of facilities which enable the performing arts to thrive in our community. A properly provisioned theatre with a good sized stage, backstage and auditorium with raked seating is an essential part of this provision, which will enable choirs, orchestras, theatre and dance groups to perform to local audiences...”

“Provide one place for professional and community performances to take place, including backstage provisions, changing rooms somewhere that is easily accessible and parking available.”



5. Events & activities

- Another topic that was discussed indicated an appetite for **more professional theatre events**, including **more 'big ticket' acts (68)**.
- There was an expressed **interest** in **community arts**, such as **community festivals and multi school events (60)**.
- Some responses suggested that RBBC should **work with organisations** to create exhibitions **to give artists opportunities to showcase their art (33)**.
- Many respondents mentioned that **future events offered should be varied (21)**.

“Host art shows and taster events by local groups...painting, woodworking, ceramics sculpture etc stained glass”

“... more short season theatre productions and a wider variety of pop up events for art, comedy, literature and poetry.”

“Provide a theatre/performance space that is accessible to all. One that puts on a variety of events including touring theatre productions , variety of music performances etc. A space that can be used for art exhibitions, music and dance classes, host craft fairs etc”

“... Get some decent acts in to encourage attendance - lots of what's offered will not appeal to many in Redhill, never mind Reigate and surrounding area. Dorking Halls seems to get lots of famous people in, would be great if Harlequin could do the same.”

6. Marketing



- There are many who believe the **Harlequin and general arts offer** has **not been promoted well** in the past. Some comments suggested **more advertising** in **local stores** and on **social media** pages (52).
- Some suggested the Council could play an active role in **helping local arts groups promote** their own **work and productions** (14).

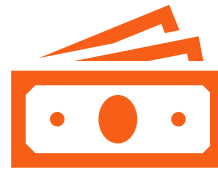
“... Encourage engagement with primary age children to get family & community involvement. Advertise more widely - would definitely support but not always aware of what's on...”

“The Council has continually failed to publicise the Theatre. No street level presence, little borough wide advertising either. If you want it to work you have to market and advertise properly”

“...Continue with a mix of music/talks/comedy/local groups using the theatre.
Make more use of the Facebook Harlequin page to advertise acts, hire of rooms, big up the cafe - many people didn't know it existed...”

“Significantly improved marketing so I know what is going on in advance. Apart from the pantomime, I find the marketing & advertising poor.”

7. Funding



- **Many** comments indicated that the **Council should fund the arts (55)**.
- A **fewer** number of comments mentioned that the **Council should not fund arts provision (18)**.
- There were suggestions that RBBC should **either apply for funding grants or work with local groups to crowdfund** for arts provision **(13)**.

“Allow groups to apply for trusts and grants”

“To be honest if council can support contribute or fund repair then many would be happy with slight increase in Ticket fare or council tax. The arts are essential. ”

“Provide small one-off investments to support development of community arts organisations and initiatives, but only where these can demonstrate the potential to become self-supporting... ”

“Council should support the provision getting up and running and help it to run self-sufficiently...”

"Stop hosting your own non statutory services"

“Arts and culture is so important for the whole community and should be valued and funded equally as sports facilities”

8. Value of the arts

- The **Harlequin** was highly regarded as an **important part of the community itself (66)**.
- Some felt that **arts promotes benefits for society**, such as **economic**, **reducing crime** and helping young people's career prospects **(19)**.
- Some expressed a view that **arts has health and wellbeing benefits (15)**.



“There needs to be a clearer understanding of the value of arts and cultural provision in tackling other health wellbeing and social inclusion issues. Viewing it as a drag on finances fails to recognise other goals that can be realised...”

“The Harlequin is the best and only complex in the district to provide a professional theatre experience for the community...”

“Arts and culture is so important for the whole community and should be valued and funded equally as sports facilities”

“... Do not underestimate the vital role the Harlequin has had in the community. It's so important to rectify this situation...”

“Recognise the value to the community of having arts & culture provision ...it impacts social, emotional wellbeing, inspires young creatives (many have gone into the performing arts from experience at The Harlequin), and has huge economic value for local businesses. All contributing to a thriving community with all the social benefits that brings including impact on crime.”

9. Impacts of closure

- Respondents talked about how **the closure has led to less income for local Redhill businesses**, alongside **an increase in anti-social behaviour and crime in Redhill (90)**.
- A **frustration** was expressed at needing to **travel to Leatherhead or Dorking for community theatre (16)**.
- Some comments mentioned that the closure of the Harlequin has led to the **reduction of arts organisation offering (11)**.

“Delay in solving issue at Redhill is impacting on local provision”

“A local theatre is absolutely essential for the local children and arts generally. The delay in obtaining the RAAC survey on the building is a scandal and it is local families who have suffered without this provision. It is having a significant impact on the progress of Redhill as a town.”

“... In this affluent area where lots of new housing is being built we surely need to provide more leisure facilities rather than take them away. I resent having to travel to East Grinstead to support Yespa.”

“... Surely restoring a venue that was hosting events almost nightly helps drive revenue to other businesses in the town as well as offering a base for the arts.”



10. Affordability, accessibility & inclusion

- There were concerns about **ticket prices for future provision** and that they **should be affordable (21)**.
- Some comments suggested that **room hire prices** should be **low cost**, particularly for arts groups and schools **(15)**.
- Some comments noted that **provision** should be **inclusive for all (13)**.
- Several comments of respondents with a **long-term health condition or disability** mentioned that provision **should be accessible** to them **(11)**.
- A small number of comments indicated that the **closure of the Harlequin** has had a **substantial impact on older populations (2)**.

“Consider the needs of disabled residents in the borough”

“...Not only that, The Harlequin theatre being closed is a huge hinderance to disabled, elderly and parents with children who can no longer easily access a theatre to go and watch shows. Live theatre is so incredibly important to communities and taking it away when the train station is a 5 minute walk from it is stopping those who need easy access from attending.”

“...provide arts and culture which are inclusive and available to the whole of the community at affordable prices.”

“Whilst the Harlequin is closed help local community arts groups to find alternative performance spaces to showcase their repertoire. Need some kind of affordable Christmas show for families.”

Appendix

- There was no feasible solution to restricting only one response channel per participant, hence duplication may be present across event and survey data
- Results revealed that a number of participants offered more than one response to questions hosted during the engagement events
- Free text responses from events were considered by Council officers when validating the analysis of the survey data only and were not transcribed. These may be used to inform any further research.