

Consultation results report

Circle Room sexual health clinic

About this consultation

This consultation was about the proposed closure of the Circle Room sexual health clinic for young people in Lewes and the surrounding areas. The consultation started on 21 July 2025 and closed on 28 September 2025.

The focus was on hearing from people who currently attend the clinic or who have attended in the past. Based on the comments, we know we also had responses from people who haven't used the clinic themselves but know others who value it.

The consultation survey was available to complete online, and a print version was available from the provider or from the Council on request. Flyers about the consultation were given out to clinic attendees and the provider promoted it directly to people and on its website.

Who took part in the consultation

We received 120 survey responses to the consultation. The comments given suggest that the majority of respondents were current users of the service (90 people or 75% of the total). Of the remaining respondents, 10% were previous users of the service and 15% had not used the service.

Everyone was asked for their postcode, although people could answer 'prefer not to say'. 78% told us their postcode (94 respondents), with most people living in the Lewes and the surrounding towns and villages (85 respondents). The remaining postcodes were for elsewhere in East Sussex (6) or outside the county (3).

People were also given the option of answering an 'about you' equality section at the end of the survey, with 78 people (65%) choosing to answer one or more of these questions. A summary of the main findings is below, while the full results can be found in the 'Equality survey questions' section later in this report.

- Nearly two thirds of respondents told us their age (59%). The age range of respondents ran from 15 to 64 years old (some won't have used the service themselves as it's for people aged up to 25 years old). The average age was 23, although among current service users it was lower at 20 years old.
- The majority of respondents were female (53%). Only 9% were male, although we don't know the sex of the 35% of respondents who skipped this section.
- The majority were a registered patient with Foundry Healthcare (78%). The rest were registered with a different GP practice in East Sussex (19%) or with a GP practice outside the county (6%). One person wasn't registered with a GP practice.

Key messages

These key messages reflect the feedback received in the survey. For detailed charts, tables and comment themes please see the later sections.

- Almost everyone who responded to the consultation strongly disagreed with the proposed closure. This was true of current service users, former service users, and those who had not personally used the clinic.
- They described the service as vital for young people in the local area.
- Many knew the Circle Room as a well-established and well-respected local resource, offering a range of specialist advice, all located in one place.
- The clinic was praised for its supportive and safe environment. Users felt comfortable visiting it and discussing their concerns.
- Young people valued the Circle Room for the confidential nature of the support and advice it offered.
- Staff were appreciated for the non-judgmental support they provided, and the trustworthy advice and sexual health education they offered.
- The clinic was seen as accessible, due both to its location and the relative speed with which users could see staff. For these reasons, the walk-in service at the clinic compared favourably with waiting lists for GP appointments.
- The closure of the clinic was believed likely to reduce young people's access to sexual and reproductive health services. It was believed that this would lead to possible consequences such as riskier sexual health practices, a rise in teenage pregnancies, and greater anxiety and stigma around testing for young people.
- Fears were expressed about longer-term consequences of closure. These included: rises in teenage abortion rates, less early treatment of sexually transmitted infections, and youth disillusionment with public healthcare.
- Many regarded travelling further afield to similar services as either unappealing or impossible. This reflected both a lack of similar, confidential options, and practical or financial difficulties of travelling.
- Asked where else they might go for sexual health services, respondents were most likely to say they did not know.
- For those who suggested another service, the most popular options were a sexual health clinic outside East Sussex, or the Foundry Healthcare GP practice for contraception.
- Few were willing to use online services as an alternative. Seeing a professional in person was seen as more reassuring.
- Any financial savings were seen by some as likely to be negated by costs and pressure being transferred to other parts of the healthcare system, which themselves are already at capacity.
- Some were concerned that closure would send a message that younger people's health and welfare was not a priority.

Sample quotes

These comments are a small selection of the responses we received in the consultation. They reflect the key themes or offer a specific suggestion.

- “I strongly disagree that this irreplaceable service be closed. I have been using this service since I was 15/16 and am now 23 and STILL [emphasis in original] use it. It saves on nurse appointments that can be given to patients that aren’t in need of Circle Room services. This service encourages young people to access sexual health advice and treatment when some home situations don’t allow them to and keeps them safe...”
- “There is nowhere else in Lewes that does this, and having to travel outside Lewes would mean I couldn’t access this sort of help.”
- “Confidential spaces for young people to discuss and seek help surrounding sexual issues are so very important. I don’t know what I would have done otherwise because the next service like this is relatively far away.”
- “I would have to wait weeks for an appointment, maybe even have to pay privately to be seen in a good amount of time.”
- “Going to Eastbourne or Brighton as two of the other ‘nearest’ clinics is difficult for us as school kids. It’s a long, costly journey. Dropping in to local clinics is much easier and much more accessible for all Lewes under 25s.”
- “I wouldn’t want to travel a long way on my own to access services like this and [would] be embarrassed to go to the GP and have to raise the problem myself. At the clinic they know more why you’ve come.”
- “[Closure] would make Eastbourne and Hastings clinics jam packed. They’re already full and [it’s] hard to get appointments/help. We are just told to do it online. I’m a young person and like talking to nurses/doctors in real life.”
- “[C]linics are better equipped than GPs for sexual health queries because they specialize in this area, offering comprehensive testing, treatment, and expert advice. This focused expertise ensures more accurate diagnoses and effective management of sexual health issues.”
- “The Circle Room is of fundamental importance to the local community. The doctors create such a warm, non-judgmental and welcoming environment. Without it, I’d never have been brave enough to seek the help I needed with contraception. Many friends have had the same experience. It’s vital young people have access to safe, private sexual health advice. The Circle Room is undoubtedly the best for this. It’d be an immense detriment to the community and frankly foolish to shut it down.”
- “Without [these services], there’s higher risk of untreated infections, unplanned pregnancies, and increased pressure on already overstretched NHS services.”
- “It’s an essential service for young people, especially given that heterosexual HIV infections are rising. Sexual health clinics need to be as easily accessible as possible and the Circle Room is exactly that.”

Results summary across all methods

Views on the proposal

98% of respondents disagreed with the proposal to close the Circle Room sexual health clinic. The vast majority chose 'strongly disagree' over 'disagree' (92% and 6% respectively). The only person who ticked that they agreed with the proposal went on to explain why they disagreed with it.

110 people added a comment, and the top themes for why people agreed or disagreed with the proposal are:

- The service is vital for young people (41 comments)
- There would be poorer access to support (31)
- The service provides a safe environment (30)
- The service is vital in a general sense (24)
- Comments about the respondent's personal circumstances, such as healthcare history and current living arrangements (21)
- The service is beneficial (21)
- The service is confidential (19)

Some people also made suggestions in response to the proposal:

- Review number of managers/staff in other roles (1 comment)
- Encourage more people to use service (1)
- Listen to the consultation feedback (1)

Potential impacts of the proposal

How they would be affected if the clinic closed

88 people answered this question, and the top five themes were:

- There would be poorer access to support (34 comments)
- Comment about the respondent's personal circumstances, and how closure would affect these (21)
- More inconvenience for those using the service (17)
- There would be reduced access to advice (17)
- Journey costs to another service would be more expensive/harder to justify (13)

What services they would access instead

This was a multiple-choice question, with everyone giving at least one answer. The most common answer people selected was that they did not know what they would access instead (30%).

The next most common responses were:

- A sexual health clinic outside East Sussex (18%)
- The Foundry Healthcare GP practice for contraception (14%)
- I wouldn't use another service - although a quarter of these people hadn't used the Circle Room service (12%)

Other comments and suggestions

59 people added a comment or view, and the top 5 themes were:

- Comment that the service is vital in general terms (9 comments)
- Comment that the clinic offers a safe or confidential service (8)
- View that there would be reduced access to advice or sexual health education (8)
- Comment that the service is vital to young people (8)
- View that the proposal is detrimental to young people (7)

Some people also made suggestions in response to the proposal:

- Not to cut the service (31 suggestions)
- Consider wider impact of decisions on health system (3)
- Increase service rather than cut it (3)
- Consider wider message this conveys about young people (2)
- East Sussex County Council should manage resources better (1)
- Cut non-emergency services (other Council spend) (1)
- Cut non-essential parts of the service (1)
- Keep parts of the service running (1)
- Manage resources better using AI for appointments (1)

Charts and tables

This section presents respondents' answers to quantitative questions using charts and tables, and to free text comments using tables.

The free text comments from the survey have been thematically analysed. This involves developing a coding framework to capture the themes raised by the comments and converting the comments into quantitative data by producing counts for the number of times a theme was raised.

Survey responses

Q1) What is your postcode?

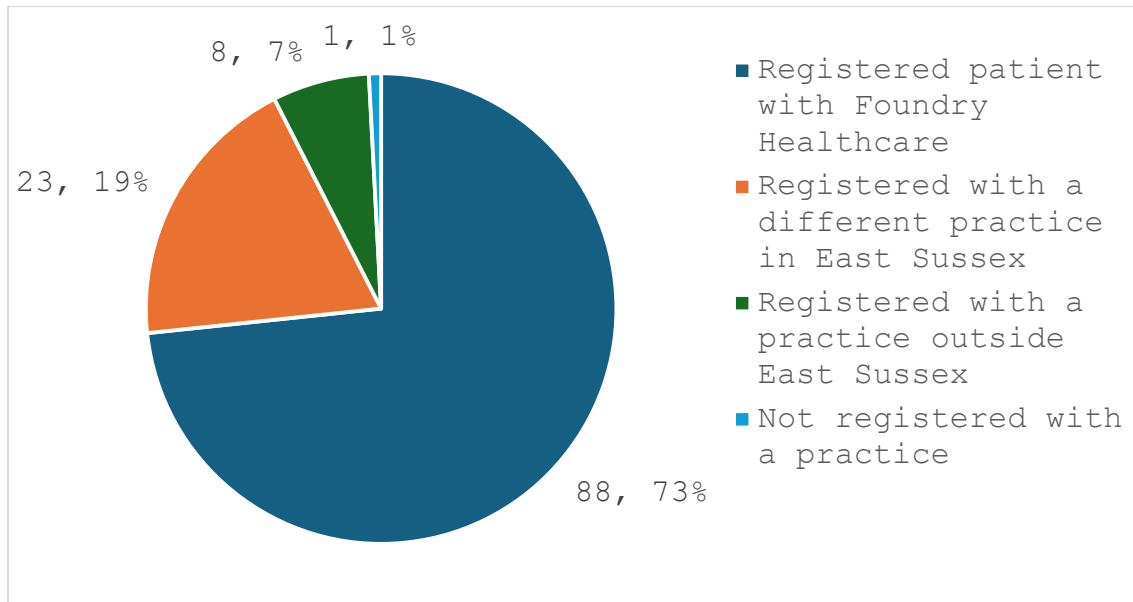
There were 94 responses to this question. In all, 26 people didn't answer. Three postcodes belonged to respondents from outside East Sussex.

Postcode area	Total	Percent
Eastbourne	1	1%
Wealden	5	4%
Lewes	85	71%
Rother	0	0%
Hastings	0	0%
No postcode provided	26	22%

Q2) Are you a registered patient with Foundry Healthcare?

Nearly three quarters of respondents (88 people) were a registered patient with Foundry Healthcare. The proportion was slightly lower for previous users of the service (7 out of 12, or 58%).

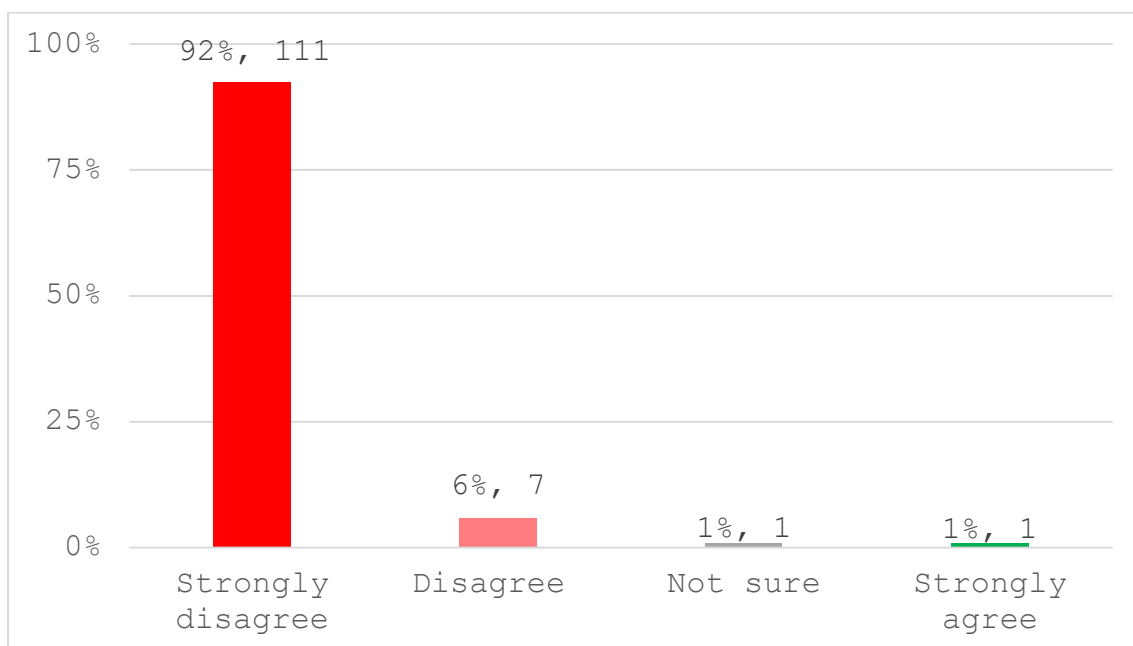
Chart 1: Registration with a GP practice



3) How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to stop funding the Circle Room sexual health clinic?

All 120 people responded to this question. Of these 118 (98%) disagreed with the proposal. Nearly all of these (111) strongly disagreed.

Chart 2: Views on the proposal



Note: The person who ticked "Strongly agree" went on to explain why they disagreed.

Please use the box below to tell us why you agree or disagree:

In all, 110 people responded to this question, with 10 people not answering. Reasons why respondents felt as they did are themed and listed below.

A number of comments focused on other issues besides why the respondent viewed the proposal as they did. These are also listed, in a separate table.

Reasons for views about the proposal

Comment themes	Total
The service is vital for young people	41
There would be poorer access to support	31
The service offers a safe environment	30
The service is vital in general terms	24
The service is beneficial	21
The service is confidential	19
There would be reduced access to advice	18
The proposal is detrimental to young people	15
Closure would be more inconvenient for those using the service	14
Those using the service would adopt more risky sexual behaviour	11
Service users would have poorer physical health	10
There would be a loss to the community	10
This is the only service of its sort	10
Concern for where service users would go instead	10
Costlier for service users to go elsewhere	9
Service users would feel less comfortable going to a GP	7
The journey to other services would be complex	6
Increased stigma associated with using other services	5
Alternative services are not adequate	5
The service is well used	4
The service is cost effective	4
The service is immensely valued	4
There would be increased pressure on other services	3
The service is of high quality	3
Alternative services are not suitable	3
Proposal is short sighted	3
Service users would have poorer mental health	3
The proposal would add more costs in the long term	3
The service is well run	2
The need for this service is increasing	2

The service is efficient	2
The service offers other key support	2
The proposal is detrimental to women	2
Relationships built between staff and service users may end	2
Closure would cause upset to service users	2
Respondent understands the importance of making savings	1
Young people deserve this service	1
People's needs won't be met	1
Routine change would be disruptive for service users	1
Foundry Healthcare is already stretched - longer wait to be seen	1
Closure would reduce service users' wellbeing	1
Service users' confidence would reduce	1
Service offers a stable environment	1
Respondent is concerned about the impact on them	1
Alternative services are too far away	1
Cuts are unfair/unequal	1
The service provides peace of mind	1
These services are already limited	1
Would feel less reassured if using other service or GP	1

Other themes

Comment themes	Total
Comment about personal circumstances (e.g., healthcare history)	21
Praise for staff	13
Praise of service	12
Disagree with proposal	11
Don't close service	9
Proposal is shocking/saddening/upsetting	5
Respondent said the closure would not affect them personally	1
Criticism of council	1
Suggestion: Review number of managers/staff in other roles	1
Suggestion: Encourage more people to use service	1
Suggestion: Listen to the consultation feedback	1

Q4) How would you be affected if the sexual health clinic closed?

In all, 88 people responded to this question, with 32 people not answering. Ways in which people said they were affected are themed and listed below.

A number of comments focused on other issues besides how the respondent would be affected by the proposal. These are also listed, in a separate table.

Reasons for being affected

Comment themes	Total
There would be poorer access to support	34
There would be more inconvenience for service users	17
Closure would reduce access to advice	17
The journey cost to another service would be more expensive	13
Service users' journey to services would be more complex	10
The service provides a safe environment not available elsewhere	10
Concerned where people would go instead	7
Would not want to use a different service	6
There would be a loss to the community	6
Those using the service would adopt more risky sexual behaviour	5
Service users would have poorer physical health	5
Service users would feel less reassured if using other service or GP	4
Closure would cause upset to service users	3
Relationships built between staff and service users may end	3
Foundry Healthcare is already stretched - longer wait to be seen	3
People's needs won't be met	2
Respondent said the closure would not affect them personally	2
Respondent is concerned about the impact on them	2
There would be increased pressure on other services (e.g., NHS)	1
Service users would have poorer mental health	1
The routine change would be disruptive for service users	1
Service users' confidence would reduce	1
Would feel less comfortable going to a GP	1

Other themes

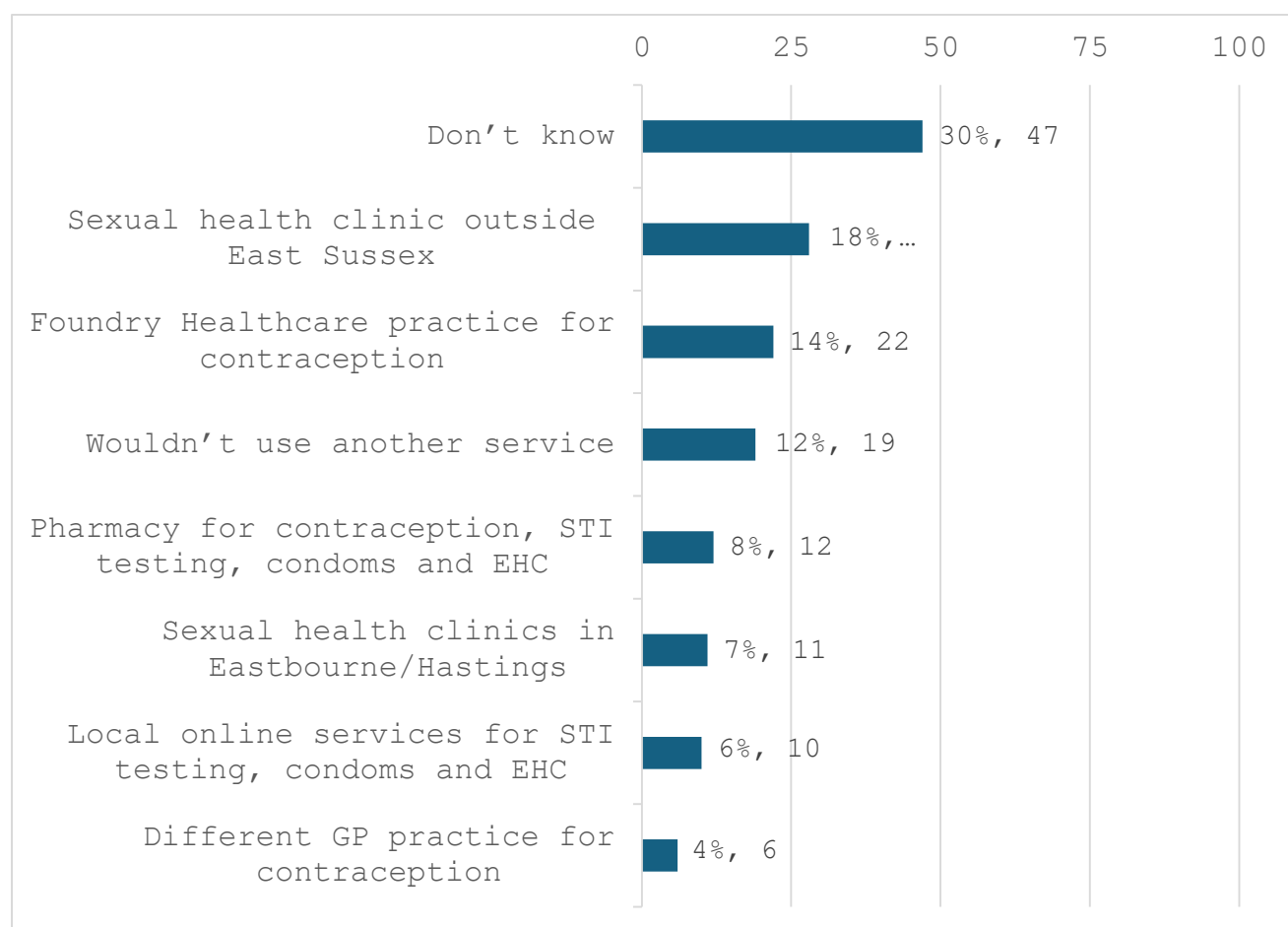
Comment themes	Total
Comment about personal circumstances (e.g., healthcare history)	21
The service is vital for young people	12
The service is confidential	10
This is the only service of its sort	7
The service is efficient	5
Praise for staff	4
The service is very accessible	3
Proposal is shocking/saddening/upsetting	3
The proposal is detrimental to women	3
Negative impact (unspecified)	2
The service is vital in general terms	2
The proposal is detrimental to young people	2
Praise of service	1
The service is immensely valued	1
The service is well used	1
The service is key to users' wellbeing	1
Alternative services are not adequate	1
Alternative services are not suitable	1
The system of service provision is already complex	1
The proposal is detrimental to disabled people	1
Respondent disagrees with the proposal	1
The service is beneficial	1
The service provides peace of mind	1
Services of this sort are already limited	1

Q5) If the clinic closed, where would you get sexual health services instead?

Everyone gave at least one answer to this question. The most common, mentioned by 47 respondents, was that they did not know where they would get sexual health services if the Circle Room closed.

A greater proportion of those who were a registered patient with Foundry Healthcare said that they did not know where else they would get services (36 of 88 or 41%), compared with those not registered there (11 of 32 or 34%).

Chart 3: Services they would access instead



Note (1): STI - Sexually Transmitted Infections. EHC - Emergency Hormonal Contraception. Pharmacy services: for contraception, STI testing, condoms and EHC. East Sussex online services: for STI testing, condoms and EHC.

Note (2): People could tick multiple answers to this question. Between them, the 120 respondents gave 155 responses. The percentages in the chart for each option are calculated using these 155 responses, not the 120 respondents.

Note (3): 5 of the 19 respondents who said they would not use another service were among those who had never used the Circle Room.

Other responses

There were 11 further free text responses to this part of the question. Some responses mentioned alternative options, not all of which were within East Sussex. Most of those who mentioned these did so with little enthusiasm, as they were some distance away, with longer waiting times than the Circle Room, and less valuable support. Others reiterated that they, or those they knew, would likely feel less comfortable and more embarrassed accessing unfamiliar GP surgeries, pharmacies, or other facilities - leading to riskier sexual behaviour.

Q6) Do you have any other comments or suggestions ... to make?

59 people responded to this question, while 61 people did not answer. The themes from the responses are shown below, divided according to whether the comments reflected views about the proposal, opinions about the potential impact of closure, suggestions for actions, and other themes.

Views about the proposal

Comment themes	Total
The service is vital in general terms	9
The service is safe and confidential	8
The service is vital for young people	8
The proposal is detrimental to young people	7
The proposal is short sighted	4
Financial savings will be small compared to negative effects on clinic users	3
The service is well used	3
Services in the Lewes area are already limited	3
Young people deserve this service	3
The proposal is detrimental to women	2
Online support for sexual health is insufficient	2
Access to support elsewhere is hard	1
Users would not want to go to a different service	1
The service is beneficial	1
Alternative services are not adequate	1
Alternative services are not suitable	1
Cuts target the most vulnerable	1
There is no other similar confidential service	1
Recognise need to make savings	1
Services are already under pressure with capacity	1
This service cannot be replaced	1
These services are already limited	1

The service provides peace of mind	1
Respondent is shocked/saddened/upset by proposal	1
Service is valued by the local community	1

Opinions about the potential impact of closure

Comment themes	Total
There would be reduced access to advice or sexual health education	8
Service users would be more likely to adopt risky sexual behaviours	6
Poorer access to support	4
Closure would cause upset to service users	2
Fewer safe spaces would exist to access this support	2
Loss to the community	2
Service users would feel less reassured using other service or GP	2
Costlier for service users to get support	1
Increased pressure on other healthcare services	1
Increased stigma for people accessing less specialist services	1
More inconvenience for service users	1
People's needs won't be met	1
Service users would have poorer physical health	1
People's view of public healthcare will worsen	1
Service users' journey to services would be more complex	1

Suggestions for actions

Comment themes	Total
Don't cut this service	31
Consider wider impact of decisions on health system	3
Increase service rather than cut it	3
Consider wider message this conveys about young people	2
East Sussex County Council should manage resources better	1
Cut non-emergency services (other Council spend)	1
Cut non-essential parts of the service	1
Keep parts of the service running	1
Manage resources better using AI for appointments	1

Other themes

Comment themes	Total
Comment about personal circumstances (e.g., healthcare history)	1
General criticism of East Sussex County Council	1
Reiterates disagreement with proposal	1

Equality survey questions

People were given the option of answering the ‘about you’ equality questions, with 78 (65%) choosing to take part and 42 (35%) choosing not to. The percentages are based on all 120 respondents, including those who skipped the entire section and those who chose not to answer certain questions.

Based on their comments, 15% of people who took part in the consultation haven’t used the service themselves (18 people). Of these, 12 answered the about you questions and 6 skipped this section.

What age are you?

There were 71 responses to this question. 49 people didn’t answer.

Option	Total	Percent
Under 18	18	15%
18-24	38	32%
25-34	6	5%
35-44	1	1%
45-54	4	3%
55-59	3	2%
60-64	1	1%
65+	0	0%
Did not answer	49	41%

What is your gender?

There were 78 responses to this question. 42 people didn't answer.

Option	Total	Percent
Female	63	53%
Male	11	9%
Non-binary	1	1%
Prefer to self describe	1	1%
Prefer not to say	2	2%
Did not answer	42	35%

Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

There were 77 responses to this question. 43 people didn't answer.

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	72	60%
No	3	3%
Prefer not to say	2	2%
Did not answer	43	36%

What is your ethnic group?

There were 78 responses to this question. 42 people didn't answer.

Option	Total	Percent
White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	61	51%
Any other White background	8	7%
Any Asian background	2	2%
Any Black background	1	1%
Any Mixed or Multiple background	5	4%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Did not answer	42	35%

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

There were 78 to this question. 42 people didn't answer.

Option	Total	Percent
Straight/Heterosexual	47	39%
Gay or Lesbian	5	4%
Bisexual	22	19%
Prefer to self-describe (pansexual)	2	2%
Prefer not to say	2	2%
Did not answer	42	35%

What is your religion or belief?

There were 78 responses to this question. 42 people didn't answer.

Option	Total	Percent
No religion	61	51%
Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)	9	8%
Muslim	2	2%
Prefer not to say	6	5%
Did not answer	42	35%

Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

There were 77 responses to this question. 43 people didn't answer.

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	14	12%
No	56	47%
Prefer not to say	7	6%
Did not answer	43	36%

Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

There were 62 responses to this question. 58 people didn't answer.

Option	Total	Percent
Yes, a lot	5	4%
Yes, a little	10	8%
Not at all	38	32%
Prefer not to say	9	8%
Did not answer	58	48%