



# Council Tax Leaflet Online Panel Survey Findings

June 2014

## Background

Each year the Council spends more than £20,000 producing a leaflet to send out to residents with their annual council tax bill. The council wants to understand whether the leaflet is useful to residents or not. To find out, the Council asked the Sutton Online Residents Panel using an online questionnaire. This report details the survey findings.

## Methodology

In April 2014 an online questionnaire was sent out to more than 800 members on the Sutton Online Residents Panel. The timing of this questionnaire was important in that residents would receive the questionnaire within weeks of receiving their annual council tax bill, to ensure they would be familiar with the topic. A £50 incentive was offered to encourage respondents to take part in the survey. A total of 93 residents took part (which is lower than the normal response rate for an online survey). With such a small sample size, the findings of this survey cannot be used with absolute confidence, although provides an indication as to how useful the council tax booklet is to local people.

## Respondent Demographic Profile

Slightly more males than females took part in this survey. 76% of respondents were White British, which is higher than the percentage of White British residents who live in the borough of Sutton (71%). Just over half of all respondents were aged 35 to 54 years old, only 8 respondents were aged 34 years and under. The largest proportion of respondents (42%) were buying their home on a mortgage. The survey findings have not been analysed by demographic group, as with such a small sample size analysis by demographic group would not be representative. Tables with the full demographic breakdown are at Appendix A.

## Summary of Findings & Recommendations

While three quarters remembered receiving the Council Tax Booklet, fewer (59%) had actually read it. However nine out of ten respondents said that they would like to continue to receive an information booklet with their council tax bill in the future. Half of these people had a preference to receive the information online, which is substantially higher than the 13% that said they currently receive the information online.

More than half of respondents discarded their Council Tax Booklet, yet a third kept it for future reference.

The information within the Council Tax Booklet that people found most useful was in relation to how council tax is calculated and how much they pay. Respondents were also interested to find out how the council spends council tax and other funding. Information about contacting the council was also found to be useful. Respondents were least interested in information from the Mayor of London or finding out what support is available to them. Financial information and how to access local information were the two main themes that came to light when respondents were asked about any information that the council should provide with the council tax bill.

The two main reasons why people didn't read their Council Tax Booklet was that they didn't have time to read the booklet or that they thought that the booklet was not interesting. Perhaps a shorter booklet would enable more people to read it.

Respondents were also asked about the Local Committee leaflet and the Energy Saving Sutton leaflet that were circulated with the Council Tax Bill. While 26% said that both leaflets were useful, an equal amount said that the Local Committee leaflet was not useful and 28% said that the Energy Saving Sutton leaflet was not useful.

From the findings of this report it is recommended that a more concise booklet focused on information about how council tax is calculated and spent would be more useful to residents. The option to receive the information

electronically should be developed and promoted. As only a few respondents found the additional leaflets useful, it is suggested separate leaflets are not circulated with the Council Tax bill in the future, as it does not seem to be an effective way of communicating information. The leaflet could also let people know where they can access local information if they need it.

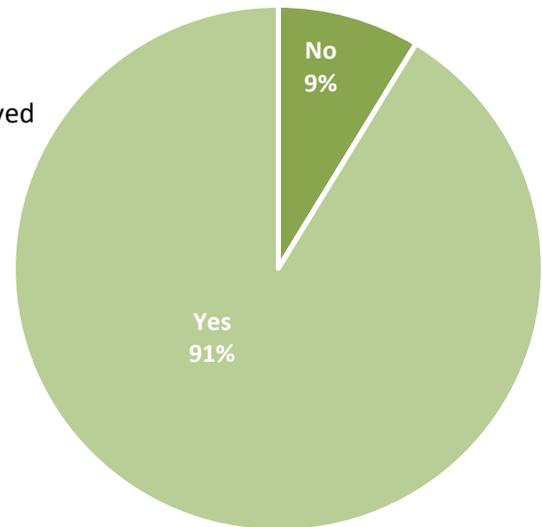
The findings in this report should be used with caution and it should be noted that the small sample size cannot be considered to be representative of all Sutton residents.

**How did you receive your Council Tax Bill this year?**

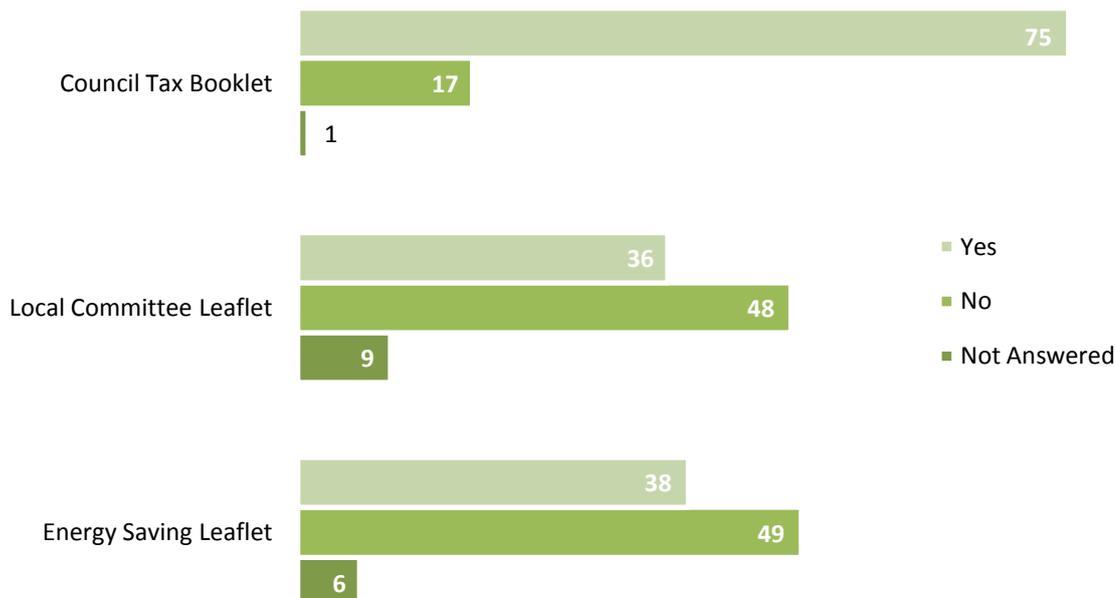
81% said that they received their council tax bill by post. 13% received their bill online and 5% either they were not the main bill receiver, didn't know or didn't answer.

91% said that they had read their council tax bill.

The most popular method for paying the Council Tax Bill among panel members who took part in this survey was by Direct Debit (89.2%).



Residents were asked if they recalled receiving the council tax leaflet, the local committees leaflet or the Energy Saving Leaflet with their council tax bill. The largest proportion of respondents recalled receiving the Council Tax Booklet, less than half recalled receiving the Local Committee Leaflet or the Energy Saving Leaflet.

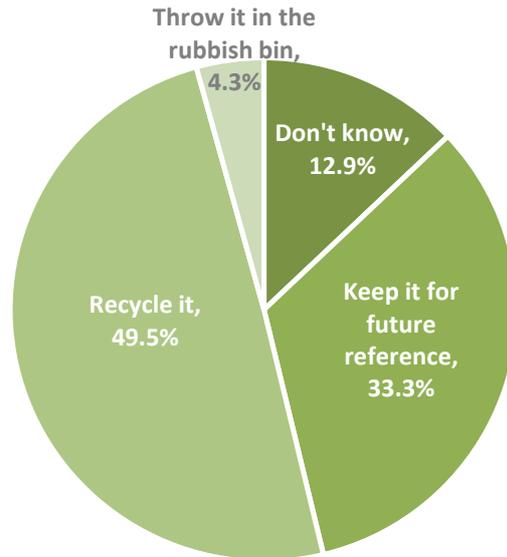


### The Council Tax Leaflet

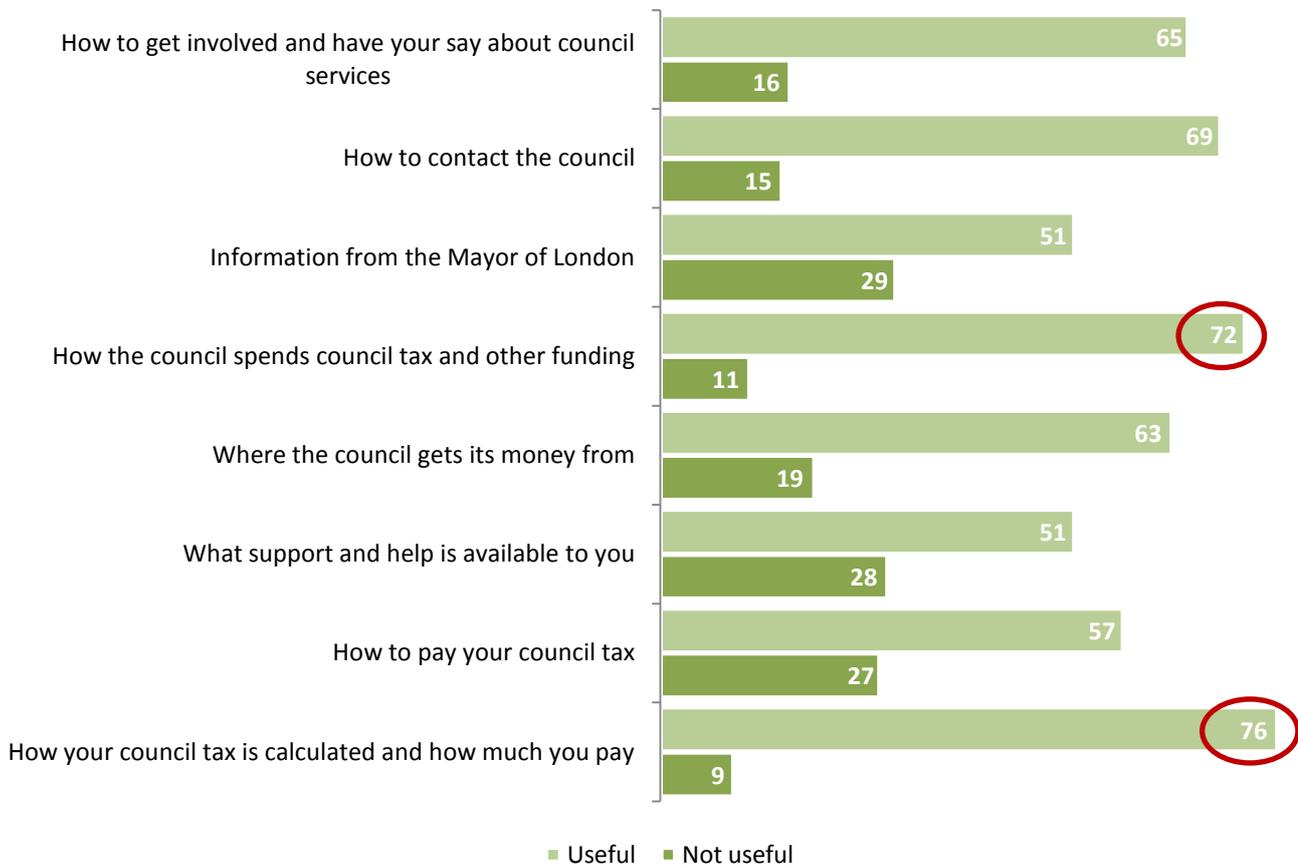
When asked about the Council Tax Leaflet, 59.1% said that they had read it.

When asked what they did with their Council Tax leaflet; a third kept it for future reference while half said they recycled it.

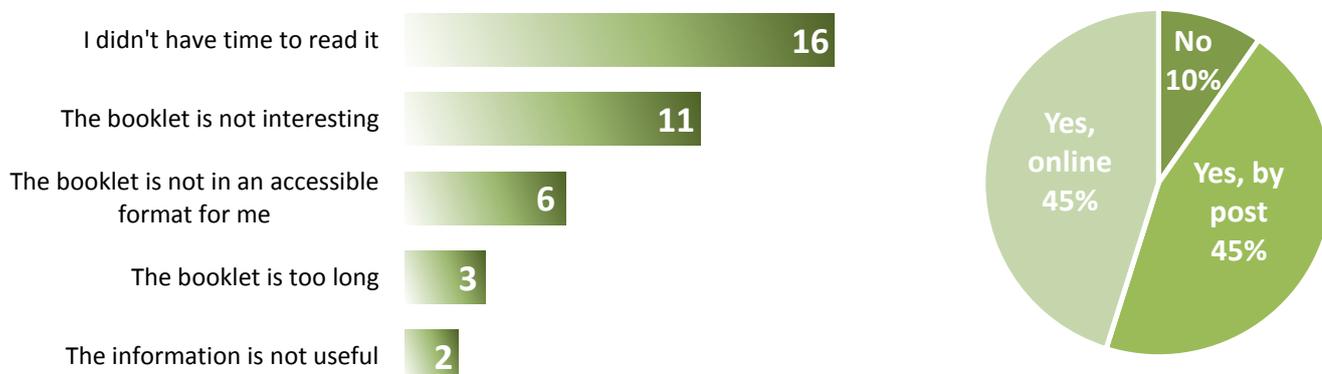
The panel were asked about the different types of information that was included in the Council Tax Leaflet and whether they thought it was useful or not. The chart below shows the number of panel members who thought the different types of information were either useful or not useful. For the purpose of the chart below, the 'Useful' and the 'Very Useful' responses have been added together, as have the 'Not Useful' and the 'Not at all Useful' responses. Not answered or not sure responses have been removed.



The chart shows that the largest number of respondents found information about 'how your council tax is calculated and how much you pay' to be the most useful information. This is closely followed by 'how the council spends council tax and other funding'. Respondents were least interested about 'information from the Mayor of London'.



Respondents who did not read their Council Tax Leaflet told us why. The largest proportion (16 people) said that they did not have time to read it, while 11 respondents said that the booklet was not interesting.



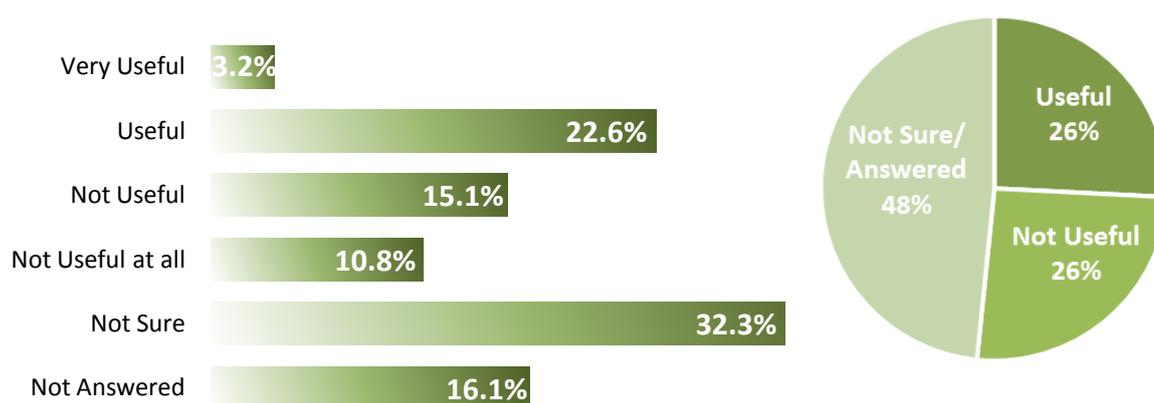
When asked: 'Would you like to continue to receive an information booklet with your Council tax bills in the future?' 9 out of 10 said yes. As the chart shows half of those who said that they would like to continue to receive an information booklet said they would like to receive it by post and half said that they would like to receive it online.

### Local Committee Leaflet

38.7% recall receiving the Local Committees leaflet and 24.7% (23 people) read it. The survey asked 'how useful or not did you find the leaflet?' The graph below shows the responses from all respondents.

While 22.6% said it was useful and 3.2% said it was very useful, the pie chart shows that an equal proportion said that it was not useful or not useful at all.

From the 23 people who read it, 3 said it was very useful, 19 said it was useful and one said it was not useful.

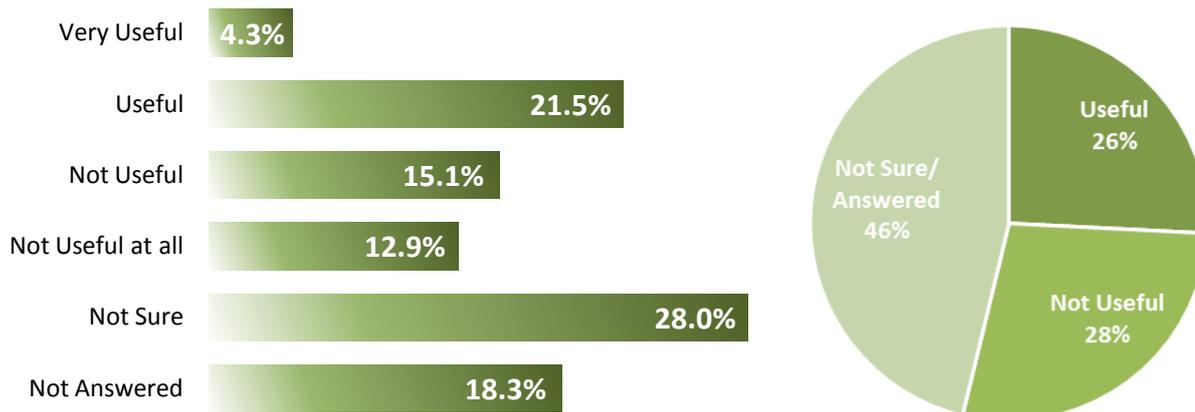


**Energy Saving Sutton Leaflet**

40.9% recall receiving the Energy Saving Sutton leaflet and 24.7% (23 people) read it. The survey asked ‘how useful or not did you find the leaflet?’ The graph below shows the responses from all respondents.

While 21.5% said it was useful and 4.3% said it was very useful, the pie chart shows that slightly more respondents said that it was not useful or not useful at all.

From the 23 people who read it, 3 said it was very useful, 16 said it was useful, 3 said it was not useful and one person was not sure.



Respondents were asked: Is there any other information that you think the council should provide with the council tax bill? Responses to this question were varied, but fell into the following two themes.

- a) Access to information
- b) Financial information

**a) Access to information**

Yes a leaflet
I strongly feel that Sutton council needs to improve the customer service. It takes too long to get through the right person for a simple query. On average I wait for approximately 15 - 20 minutes per call.
Information about ongoing projects to make Sutton green. Information about school ofsted reports so we can monitor success of spending.
More information about the Freedom Pass, how much it costs the council and its future.
Useful contact numbers for council services and that of partners
What % of accommodation in Sutton is band A and so on to band G
Just on sheet of paper stating where people can get information if they do not have access to the internet
- Who the 3 ward Councillors are and their contact information.
- A list of events throughout the year.

**b) Financial information**

Waste of money. Whatever feedback we give is not acted upon anyway. We have no say in how the money is spent. If we did, then money would not be wasted on stupid initiatives but would be spent instead on saving st helier hospital AAE and maternity unit. Also, the money would be better spent on green and recycling centres such as promoting recycling waste instead of burning in in giant incinerators for all the boroughs in the neighbouring areas. Also sort out the traffic in hackbridge. It's appalling since the new layout has been introduced. There isn't even any road markings or crossings. This is an accident waiting to happen. When a little kid gets run over or someone gets killed in a road traffic accident -sutton council will abdicate all responsibility. Even I could plan it better!

Comparison with other similar areas, might be helpful but otherwise it is a useful and necessary info, on how our money is spent.

Yes how have they made the savings to keep the tax the same, The payroll was clearly bloated to be able to make such savings

- 1) A list of individual salaries for those earning over £100k p/a along with their names and responsibilities.
- 2) More evidence that the council is providing good value for money (rather than just cutting services).

An indication of what Council officers heads of department are paid.  
In a banding say 2 at £100,000 year  
20 at £50,000 year etc,as an example.

How the rateable value is assessed.

How much councillors salaries are in this time of austerity and cut backs

I believe there is a complete listing of what our money is spent on.

Information on the council's strategy to REDUCE council tax even further.

**Any other comments**

Residents were asked: 'Do you have any other comments?' There was a variety of responses

I did not get the leaflet at all in any form.....

Nearly every bill has some additional leaflet with it and you just glaze over when you get another one. If the major points could be put on the bill they may get a wider audience.

We didn't receive the energy saving leaflet.

Recently I have contacted the council for the Manor road cross junction road condition. The condition of the road is very bad since early February, and I have been told that this road is red route and under TFL and council cannot do any maintenance. However, its not just the red route but the surrounding area which is not red route is also badly affected. I am not sure why it is taking council and TFL to repair it.

I am not sure why the council charge for collecting garden waste and have failed to collect it twice this month. Should we be able to opt out of paying for a service that does not happen? When it is collected I am having to replace the sacks. Since it is not permitted to leave bins or full sacks on the pavement and I need to be able to drive in and out of the gateway, the sacks are not seen when placed on the driveway.  
The council website is difficult to navigate especially when I want to look up a specific area or topic. Could directions be included in the booklet?

I think the Council does a good job of providing information.

Yes. Stop planting trees everywhere and invest the money in making sure that the roads are free of potholes. My road is abysmal. Cul de sacs do not have any attention given to them but the pot holes are dangerous to cyclists and anyone who has to walk/cycle on these roads. Just because they are not main roads, it doesn't mean that they are not important if dangerous. Just take a walk down Wandle Road and Birchwood Avenue SM6 7EN to see just how poor the roads are. Also we could do with some grit bins for the snow/ice conditions in winter"

Happy to complete this survey, however, a lot of the final questions are useless as I didn't actually receive any of the booklets mentioned, either by post or online. The survey should have responses that reflect that.

I have not yet received my bill!

The energy leaflet- I will be phoning the number given for ideas and help to improve our energy usage.

too much self praise keep it short

The booklet appears to me to be propaganda for Liberal Democrats and is frankly a waste of money. If people want this information it should be on the Sutton website and for those without access to the internet information given as outlined above. The money spent on this booklet would be better directed to some of the services that have been cut

The Sutton Council website is truly dreadful - I find it hard to understand why a local authority that spends so much money on IT services has such a poor website.

Also things such as  
How much profit the life centre makes to help reduce Council Tax.  
And other similar projects.

Very good to keep the tax at the same level as last year.

The council tax booklet is not in a design that encourages me to read it. However I know I have it and I know what information is in it to refer to should I wish to.

I guessing all this information is available on line and would rather the council saved our money and stop sending out these documents/booklets.

I did not receive the booklets which would have been very helpful!

It would be useful if you put skips maybe once a quarter to allow people to large rubbish in them, it would also help older people who cannot get down to the dump.  
Sutton use to do this it would also reduce the number of cars visiting the dump

Council should be encouraging recycling and not accepting the appalling incinerator, which all the other local boroughs have rejected. Sutton - the place where other boroughs send their rubbish.

I find opening postal mail a chore as there is so much unwanted junk mail, so the things like the enclosures with the council tax bill just get added to the junk pile.  
Email separates junk (spam) from genuine mail, so the council's leaflets would stand more chance of being read if they were received via email.

The first leaflet appeared to be a political statement and therefore not interested

I think that the council wastes a lot of money on stupid things, like painting a wall, and growing things on walls. If my street was swept I would be VERY impressed. Barlow Close is NEVER, EVER swept.  
I have complained about this many times with no result.

To be produced on recycled paper (cannot remember if it was) and a bigger push for digital versions // online content.

It should be available in accessible formats for the visually impaired

Not in relation to the bill format.

If I have implemented energy saving measures there's no point in sending me a booklet.

Appendix A: Demographics of Respondents

Gender	Number	%
Female	41	44.1%
Male	44	47.3%
Not known	8	8.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Age Group	Number	%
16 – 24	3	3.2%
25 – 34	5	5.4%
35 – 44	24	25.8%
45 – 54	23	24.7%
55 – 59	15	16.1%
60 – 64	4	4.3%
65 – 74	10	10.8%
75+	1	1.1%
Not known	8	8.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Disability	Number	%
No	61	65.6%
Yes	11	11.8%
Not known	21	22.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Ethnicity	Number	%
White British	71	76.3%
White or White British - Other	6	6.5%
Asian or Asian British	6	6.5%
Chinese / other	1	1.1%
Mixed - Any other mixed background	1	1.1%
Not known	8	8.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Employment Status	Number	%
Working - Full time (30+ hours)	45	48.4%
Retired	13	14.0%
Working - Part-time (9-29 hours)	10	10.8%
Not working - retired	7	7.5%
Housewife/ husband	4	4.3%
Self-employed	2	2.2%
Unemployed	2	2.2%
Registered unemployed	1	1.1%
Unemployed but not registered	1	1.1%
Not known	8	8.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Tenure	Number	%
Buying on a mortgage	39	41.9%
Owned outright (including leasehold)	27	29.0%
Rented from private landlord	13	14.0%
Rented from Council/ Sutton Housing Partnership	4	4.3%
Other	1	1.1%
Not known	9	9.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100.0%</b>