

Renfrewshire Event Strategy

Report on Event Strategy Research
October 2024



Renfrewshire
Council

Executive Summary

Introduction

- Renfrewshire Council currently deliver a successful programme of visitor and local events, however, with costs of running events rising sharply, the Council’s event programme is being reviewed.
- A programme of research was carried out to gain public and stakeholder input into the Council’s new events strategy. A total of 778 individuals responded to an online consultation survey. This was augmented by 4 focus groups to gain greater insight from key groups.
- 93% of respondents agreed the strategic priorities were correct
- Popular events include Paisley Halloween Festival (81%), Christmas Lights (80%), and Paisley Food & Drink Festival (79%). Discussion suggested that the Council should focus on “big ticket” events, with community-led gala days being run by those communities.
- Respondents recognise the importance of local economic benefits, with a preference for local vendors over external suppliers. Suggestions to spread events beyond central Paisley to engage communities and support more local businesses.

Key findings

- 90% of respondents have attended multiple local events; 27% have been directly involved.
- Key barriers include time constraints, costs, overcrowding, lack of inclusivity, sensory overload, and limited information on events.
- Suggestions for improvement include lowering costs, better layouts, quiet zones, more cultural representation, and clearer communication.
- Engagement of businesses, community and cultural groups is welcomed and recommendations for improvement include improved communication, early notification, small grants, discounted participation fees, and streamlined application processes.

Executive Summary: Key Strategy Considerations

- **Willingness to pay:** There were mixed views on ticketing. There is willingness from some to pay for premium experiences but preference for free tickets for family-oriented events. Suggestions included affordable pricing, tiered access, and phased payments to ensure inclusivity. Equity of experience and sharing free tickets with grass roots organisations was highlighted as important.
- **Inclusion & Accessibility:** Focus on affordability, transport solutions, quieter events or areas for those with sensory issues, and disability access.
- **Economic Impact:** Emphasis on supporting local businesses, fair distribution of economic benefits, sustainable funding, and improved communication.
- **Event Focus:** Focus on the key events which are the biggest economic drivers for Renfrewshire should be priority where resources are limited. If there is scope to extend the event programme there is a desire for a year-round cultural calendar, heritage-focused events, family-friendly activities, and opportunities for local talent. Popular event suggestions include a focus on music events, fireworks and a return to events which are no longer on the events calendar such as Spree and the Beer Festival.

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Background and methodology

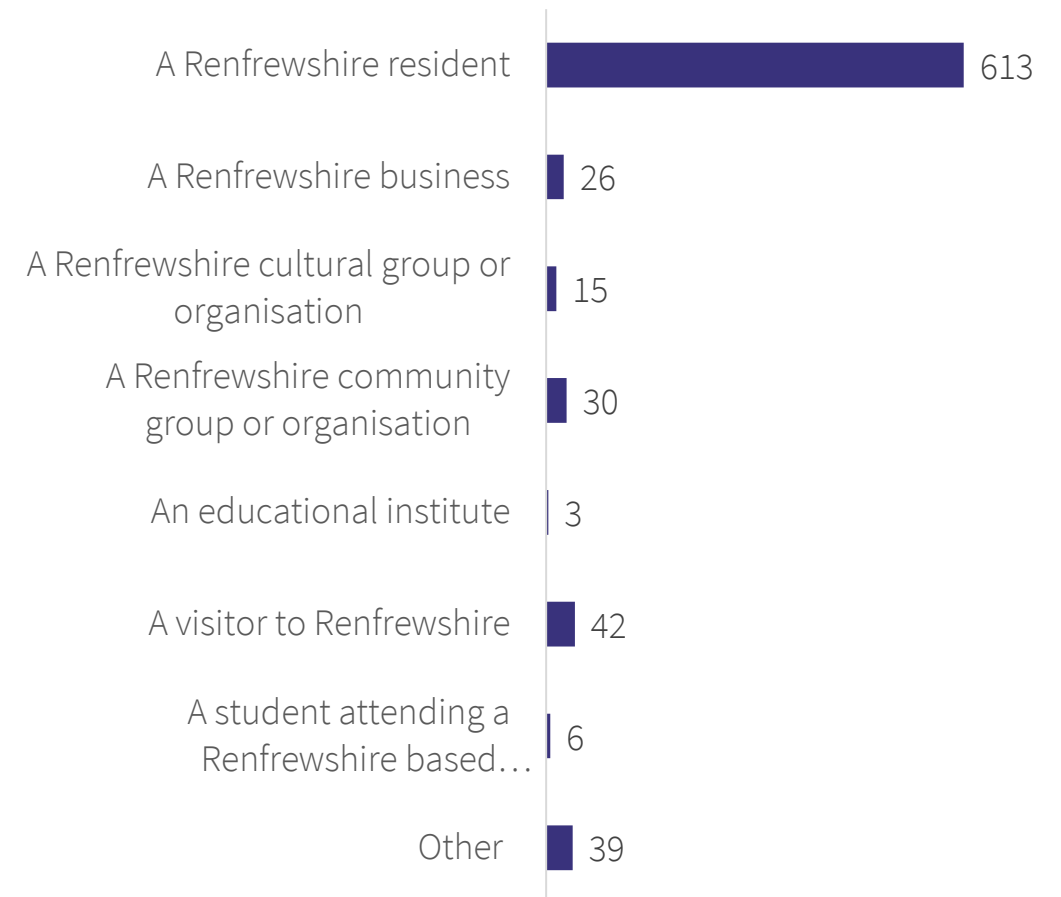
Background

- Renfrewshire Council currently deliver a successful programme of events comprising:
 - Local events
 - Renfrew Gala day
 - Barshaw Gala day
 - Doors Open Days
 - Renfrew Christmas Lights switch-on
 - Johnstone Christmas Lights switch-on
 - Visitor events
 - Paisley Food & Drink Festival
 - Sma' Shot day
 - Paisley Halloween Festival
 - Paisley Christmas Lights switch-on
 - Renfrew Pipe Band Competition
- Like household costs, the costs of running events are increasing sharply.
- To balance the council's event budget, the Council is reviewing our events programme and strategy to ensure it continues to deliver benefits for local communities and businesses.
- This research sought to hear stakeholder views and to understand what events are most important to them.
- Feedback will be used to help the Council design a new three-to-five-year strategy and help shape the programme of events.

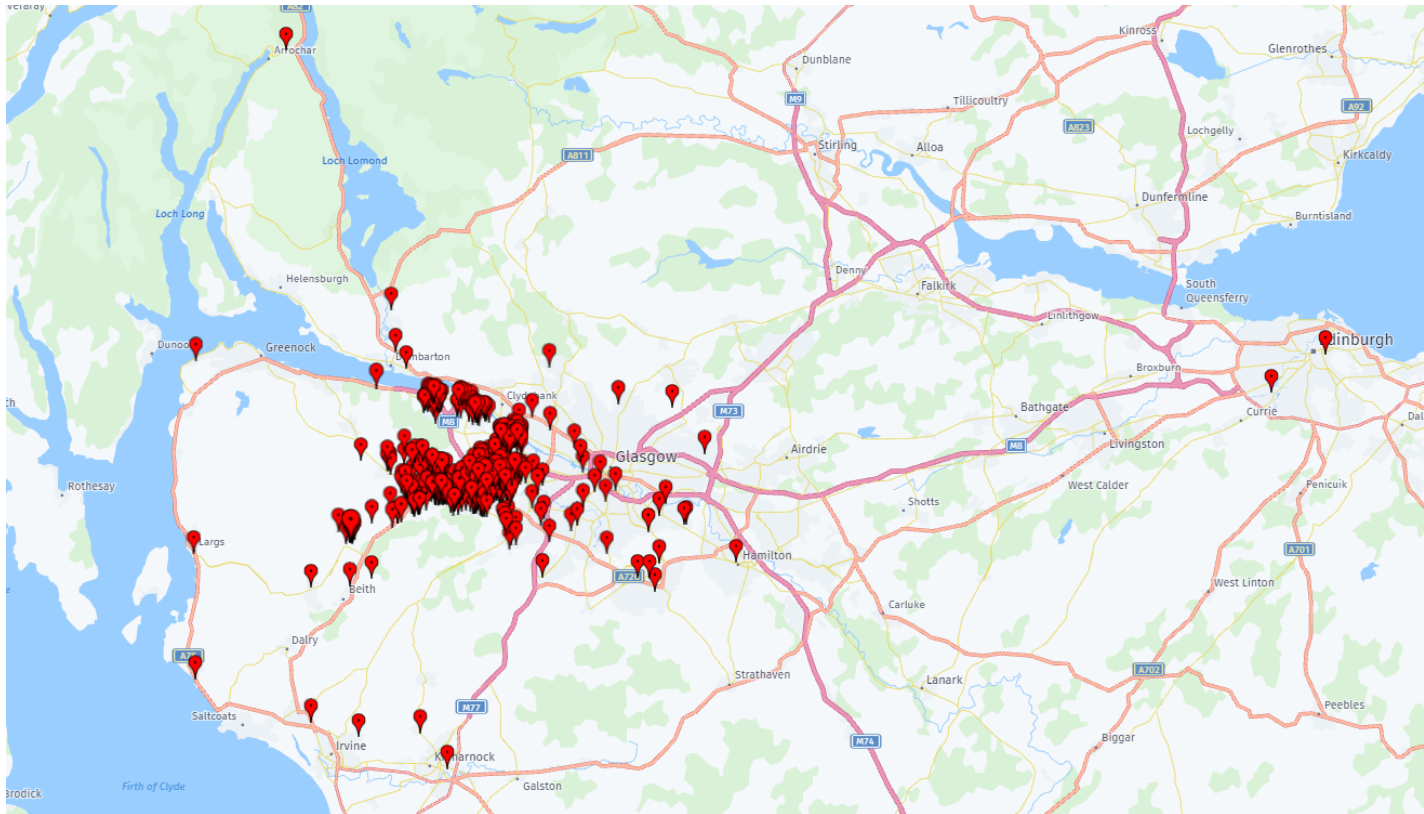
Survey Methodology and response

- An online survey was developed to capture stakeholder views, including those of
 - Renfrewshire residents
 - Businesses
 - Cultural groups
 - Community groups
 - Educational institutions
 - Other interested parties
- The survey was published and promoted by Renfrewshire Council between 2nd and 23rd September 2024.
- A total of 778 responses were received.
- 4 focus groups were also carried out to gain greater insight into the views of key groups on the event strategy.

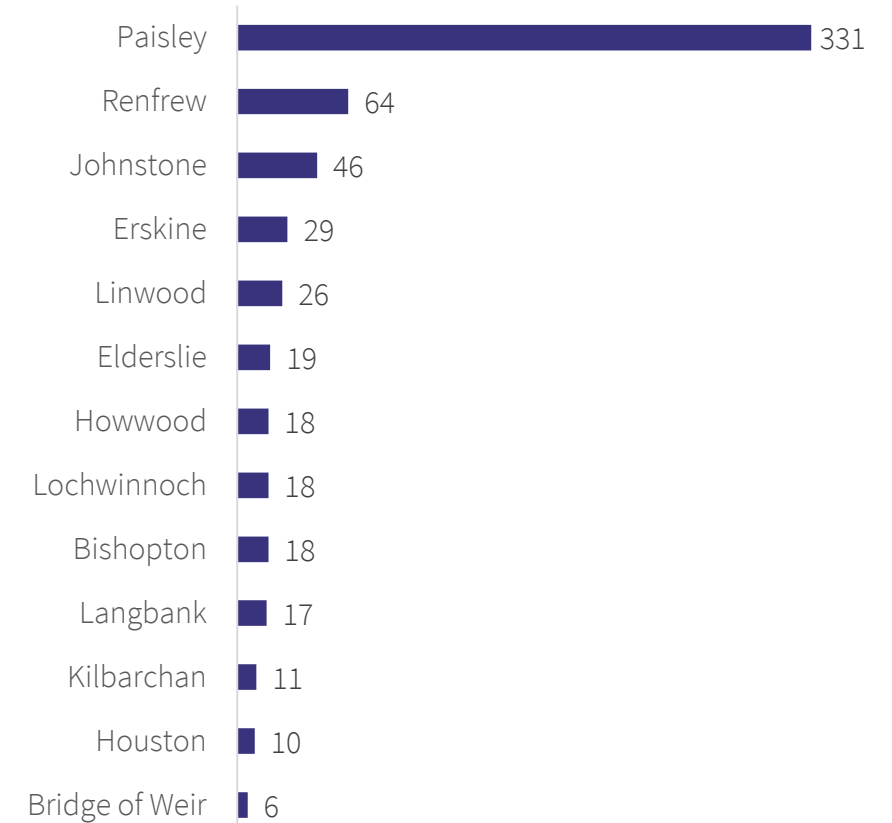
Stakeholder Groups responding



The majority of respondents came from Renfrewshire (631 out of 692 who gave a postcode were from Renfrewshire)



No of respondents within
Renfrewshire



Key questions for focus groups

Businesses

- Getting involved in events in Renfrewshire:

How would you like to get involved with events?

How can we best support businesses to get involved with events in Renfrewshire?

- Benefits of events

What are the benefits for your business of Renfrewshire events?

- Event Strategy

What are the key thing or things you'd like the Council to take into account when developing their events programme?

Cultural and Community Groups

- Barriers to delivery:

As a cultural or community group, are there events you would like to deliver in your local area but can't, and if so, what are the barriers?

- Getting involved in events in Renfrewshire:

How can we best support cultural or community groups to get involved with events in Renfrewshire?
What are the barriers to getting involved?

- Event Strategy

What are the key thing or things you'd like the Council to take into account when developing their events programme?

Residents and Lived Experience Group

- Motivation to, and barriers against, attending events

If you've attended, or not attended, a particular event /events, why?

- Attitudes towards paying for visitor events

In future, we may need to consider ticketing some of the visitor events, to help us manage the number of attendees and generate some income towards covering the costs of delivering the event. Are you in favour of paying to attend visitor events?

- Event Strategy

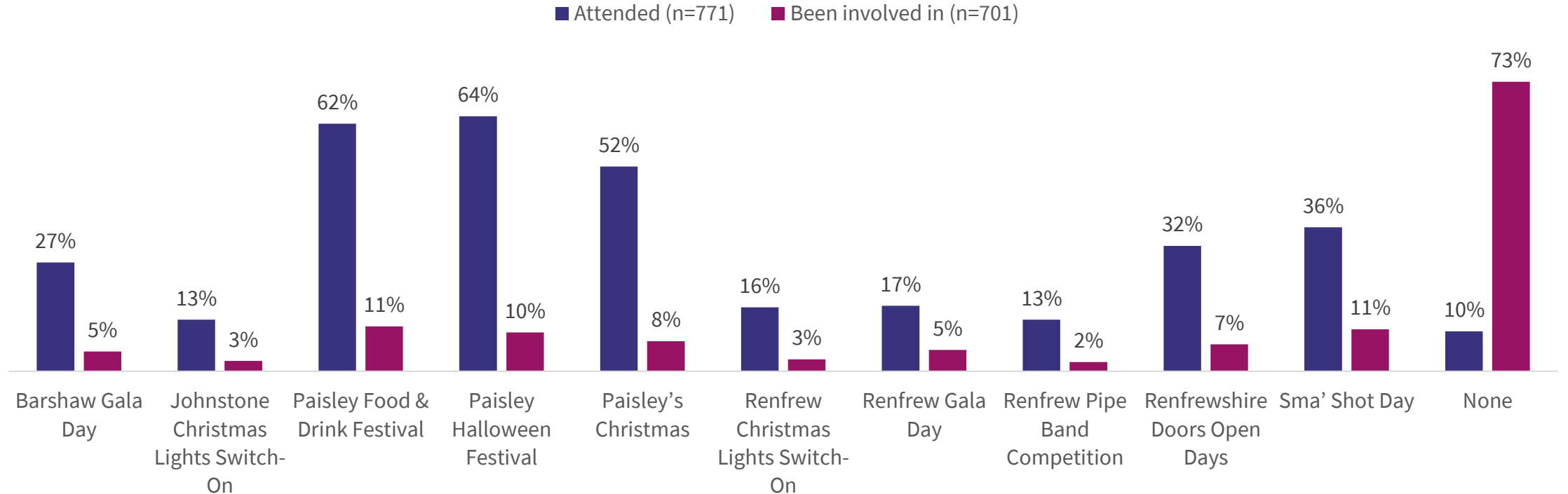
What are the key thing or things you'd like the Council to take into account when developing their events programme?

The background features a complex arrangement of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes. A large purple circle is on the left, partially overlapping a larger pink circle on the right. Below these, there are various triangular and polygonal shapes in shades of blue, teal, and orange. The overall effect is a vibrant, layered composition.

Key findings of the research

90% of respondents have attended multiple events in Renfrewshire 27% have been involved in events

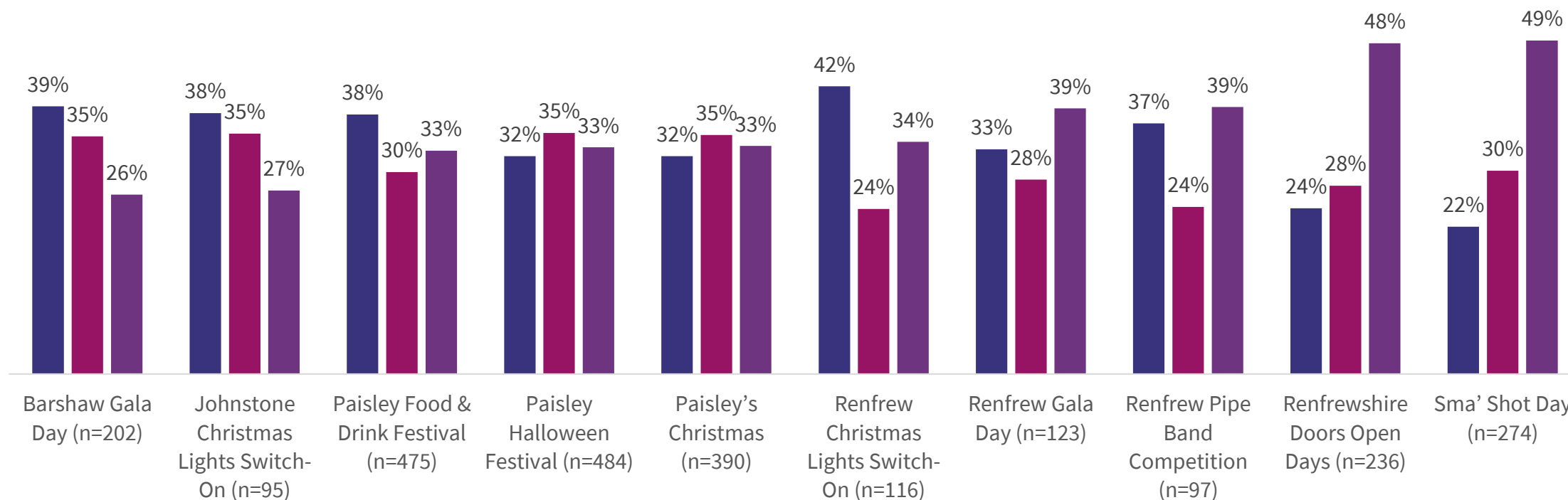
Have you attended any of the following Renfrewshire events over the last 3 years?
Have you been involved in any of the following Renfrewshire events over the last 3 years?



Renfrewshire Doors Open Days (48%) and Sma' Shot Day (49%) were most likely to have been attended multiple times

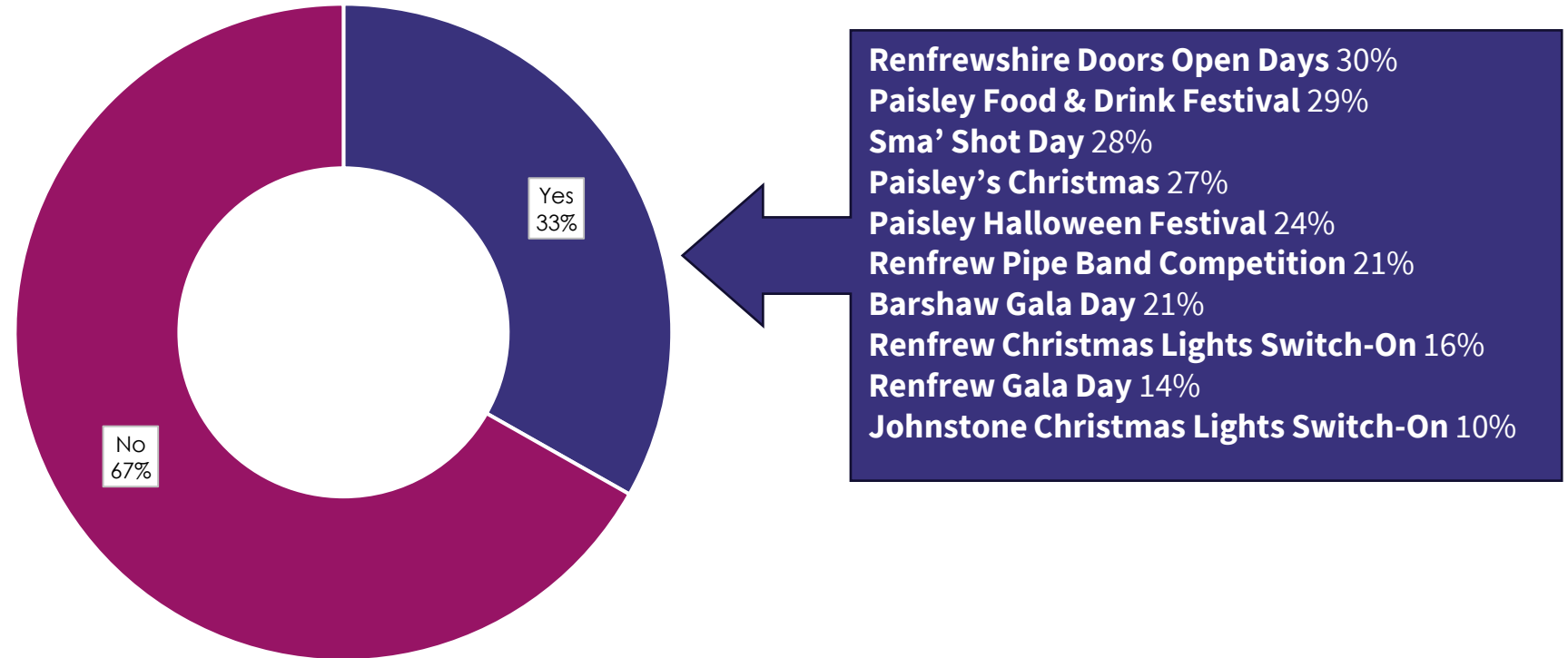
How many times have you attended/ been involved over the last three years?

■ One ■ Twice ■ Three times



One third of respondents said there was an event or events that they would like to attend but do not

Is there an event or events you would like to attend, but do not?



Time pressure - I do not have time to attend due to work, family, or other commitments - was the key barrier to attending (48%)

Barshaw Gala Day (n=45)

- Time pressure (49%)
- Lack of information (38%)
- Accessibility (20%)

Johnstone Christmas Lights Switch-On (n=22)

- Time pressure (36%)
- Lack of information (36%)
- Accessibility (36%)

Paisley Food & Drink Festival (n=61)

- Time pressure (46%)
- Lack of information (33%)
- Accessibility (18%) / Affordability (18%)

Paisley Halloween Festival (n=51)

- Time pressure (35%)
- Event environment is too busy/noisy (33%)
- Lack of information (28%) / Accessibility (28%)

Paisley's Christmas (n=57)

- Time pressure (37%)
- Lack of information (33%)
- Event environment is too busy/noisy (30%)

Renfrew Christmas Lights Switch-On (n=35)

- Time pressure (43%)
- Lack of information (40%)
- Event environment is too busy/noisy (29%)

Renfrew Gala Day (n=30)

- Time pressure (46%)
- Event environment is too busy/noisy (33%)
- Accessibility (23%)

Renfrew Pipe Band Competition (n=45)

- Time pressure (53%)
- Lack of information (44%)
- Accessibility (20%)

Renfrewshire Doors Open Days (n=64)

- Time pressure (53%)
- Lack of information (50%)
- Affordability (16%)


Sma' Shot Day (n=60)

- Time pressure (48%)
- Lack of information (33%)
- Accessibility (25%)

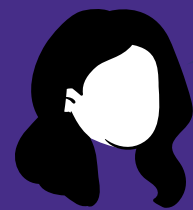
Further insight into barriers to attending events

- 1. Cost:** Several participants mentioned that high costs prevent them from attending events, particularly families with children. The pricing of food, drinks, and activities can be prohibitive, making it difficult for large families to participate fully (Lived Experience Focus Group and Resident Focus Group).
- 2. Overcrowding and Space:** Events are often overcrowded, making it uncomfortable for attendees. There were concerns about the safety of children in crowded spaces, with some parents mentioning their kids being knocked over (Lived Experience Focus Group). Busy environments, especially during popular events like the Halloween festival, can be off-putting. This is a concern particularly for people who prefer quieter settings (Lived Experience Focus Group and Resident focus group).
- 3. Lack of Inclusivity:** There is a feeling of exclusion for some, particularly those from minority communities or with disabilities. Some mentioned that events do not cater to their cultural background or accessibility needs (Lived Experience Focus Group).
- 4. Physical and Sensory Overload:** Some individuals, particularly those with autism or other sensory sensitivities, mentioned that the events were overwhelming due to noise and crowding. A lack of quiet spaces or designated areas for sensory breaks was a concern (Lived Experience Focus Group).
- 5. Lack of Information:** A lack of clear communication or information about what events entail and what activities will be available beforehand discouraged people from attending. This was particularly important for parents or carers of children with special needs (Lived Experience Focus Group and Resident Focus Group).


Barriers to attending events




I have a daughter with Autism. We do a lot of social stories to get out of the house because she will not leave if she doesn't know exactly what is happening. We talked about Halloween because we're in the parade and she's like 'There's too many variables. I won't go.' Because I can't talk her through exactly what will happen and when.



It's the money. That's why I don't go. I've got three young girls and then also my grandkids are over as well. You know, I'm the one who's going to pay for it. I want to enjoy it and not think of how much I'm going to spend.



There's too much noise and there's too much stimulation. It's a lot and I get overwhelmed. When I feel like that I just leave. For me it's a lot.



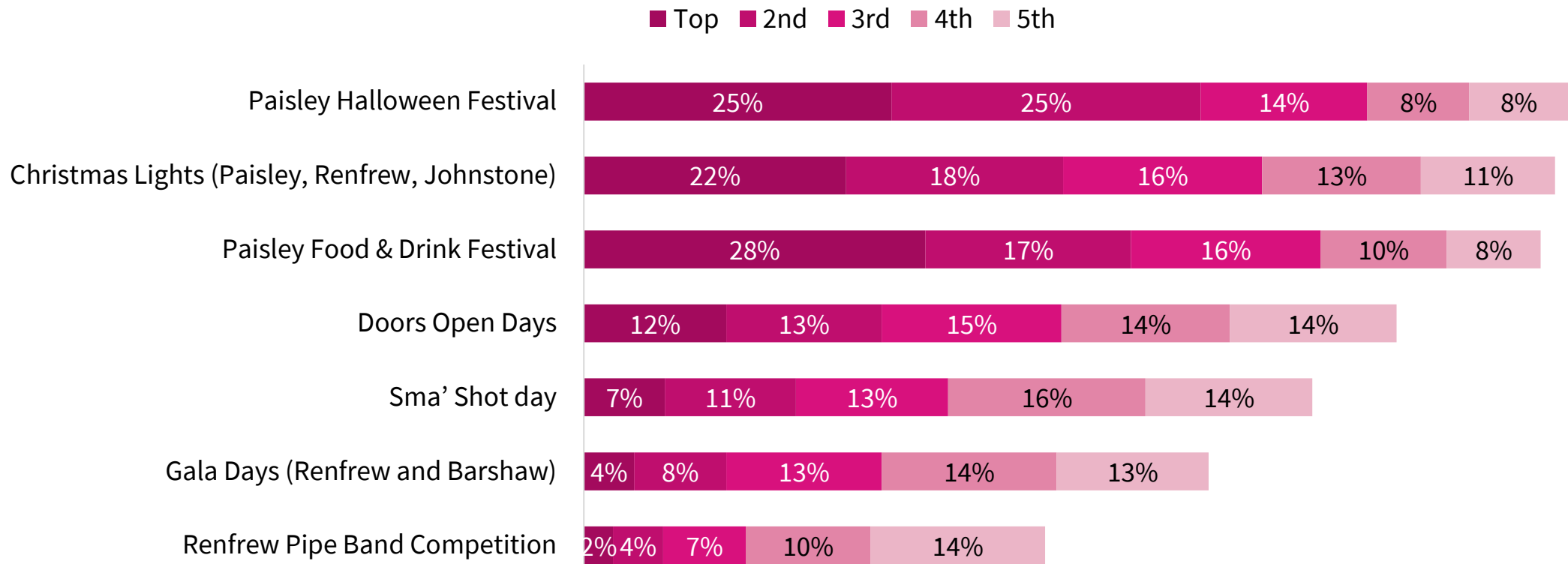
Its just me now. My kids are older and I think a lot of these things are aimed at families with young kids. I like Doors Open and Food and Drink but I wouldn't go to the others.

Suggestions for improving events for attendees

- 1. Lowering Costs:** Suggestions were made to standardise prices across vendors and have more affordable food and drink options. There were also calls for discounted or free tickets, particularly for larger families or low-income attendees.
- 2. Better Event Layouts and Crowd Management:** Some suggested creating larger spaces for events to avoid overcrowding, along with introducing one-way systems or designated areas for different types of activities to manage the flow of people.
- 3. Quiet Zones and Safe Spaces:** Attendees proposed adding quiet zones or safe spaces where people could retreat from the noise and crowding, especially for those with sensory sensitivities or anxiety.
- 4. Cultural Representation and Inclusivity:** Some participants mentioned the need for events to be more inclusive of different cultural groups, for example Black History Month celebrations, and other events that reflect the diversity of the community.
- 5. Clearer Communication:** More detailed information about the events, such as schedules, maps, and available activities, should be provided ahead of time, particularly for families with children who need to prepare for sensory or other special needs. This was also noted for those from minority ethnic backgrounds for whom events are not familiar.

Respondents favoured events were Paisley Halloween Festival (81%), Christmas Lights (80%) and Paisley Food & Drink Festival (79%)

Please rank the events in order of preference, with number 1 being your most preferred event that you would want to attend / or be involved in?



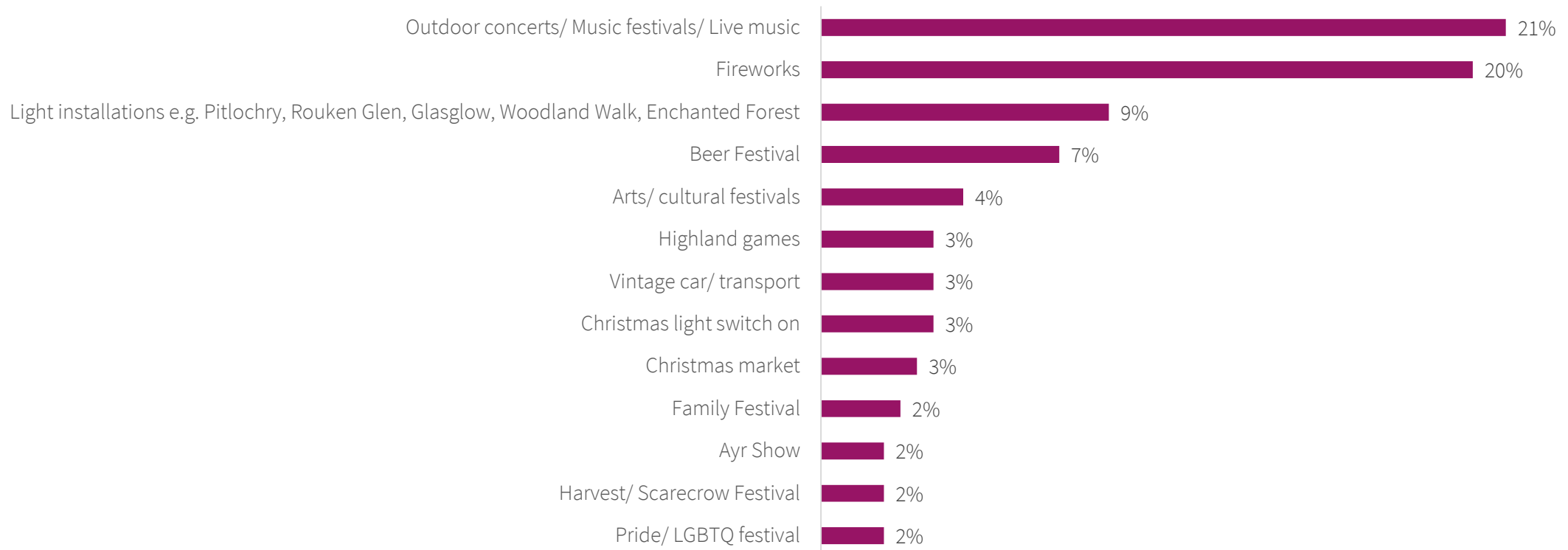
Base: all respondents, n=750

Resident and Lived Experience Panel Event Priorities

1. **Multi-generational Events:** Festivals like Halloween are praised for their wide appeal to both young families and older generations. The atmosphere, costumes, and performances are enjoyed by all. Residents value events that foster a sense of community and family-centered activities.
2. **Food and Drink Festival:** This festival is popular for bringing people together and offering a range of activities and dining options. However, they can be expensive .
3. **Gala Days should not be priority:** Whilst gala days are enjoyable and well attended, with limited resources it was felt that gala days should be run by the community for the community as opposed to by the Council. Both groups agreed the focus should be on the ‘big ticket’ events. It was noted that some other communities such as Bishopton and Houston organise their own gala days and it was further questioned why the Council should support some and not others.
4. **Local Economic Benefits:** A significant priority is ensuring that events benefit the local economy. Residents want to see local businesses, especially in hospitality, involved in events and benefiting from the influx of visitors and attendees to events. Local businesses and vendors should have priority over those from out with Renfrewshire when seeking vendors or suppliers at events.
5. **Attracting Visitors:** Events that bring people into the town, such as larger festivals, are important to raise the profile of Renfrewshire and what the area has to offer. Residents believe the Council should focus on attracting visitors from outside the area in order to ensure that the economic benefits of the events programme can be harnessed by Renfrewshire.

30% of respondents said they had attended other events outside of Renfrewshire that they would like to see happening in Renfrewshire instead of one of the current events. The most common suggestions are noted below:

Q15 If yes, please tell us what events you would like to see happening in Renfrewshire?



Supporting and involving businesses

1. Improved Communication and Outreach

- **Early Notification:** Establish a system to inform businesses about upcoming events well in advance. This could involve creating a calendar of events that is accessible to local businesses.
- **Targeted Communication:** Use social media, newsletters, and email campaigns to promote events and provide application forms specifically to local businesses. Promote the successes of local businesses that have participated in previous events to encourage others to get involved.

2. Financial Support and Incentives

- **Small Grants:** Promote the availability of small grants (£500 - £1,000) specifically for local businesses and artists to encourage participation in events.
- **Discounted Rates:** Offer discounted fees for local businesses for participation in major events (e.g., Food and Drink Festival), which can encourage more involvement. Provide affordable rental options for local organisers, ensuring that costs are reasonable and accessible for smaller businesses and groups. Consider offering free or low-cost stall space for local traders at events.

3. Simplified Application Processes with support available

- **Ease of Application:** Streamline the application process for businesses wishing to participate in events. This might include creating a user-friendly online portal for applications. Offer clear, detailed information about deadlines, requirements, and expectations for participating businesses.
- **Networking and Mentoring Opportunities:** Create opportunities for local businesses to connect with one another, building relationships that can lead to partnerships in future events. Pair experienced businesses that have successfully participated in events with those that are new or seeking to get involved.

4. Regulation and Fairness

- **Control Outside Traders:** Implement measures to limit the number of outside traders at events to protect local businesses, ensuring they have fair access to opportunities.
- **Diverse Events:** Organise a wider range of events that cater to different business types and interests, ensuring all local businesses can benefit.
- **Location Consideration:** Ensure events are held across a range of areas to maximise visibility and sales for local businesses.

Supporting community and cultural groups

1. Desire for Diverse Offerings:

- There is demand for more theatre performances, particularly from visiting professional companies, as well as contemporary dance.
- There is also interest in expanding adult-focused cultural programming, as current offerings are primarily youth-oriented (e.g., PACE).
- There are requests for specific events such as monthly ceilidhs, music festivals, cultural festivals, heritage events, and outdoor events like a Gala Day or themed festivals (e.g., 'Witch-Fest' or 'Geek-Fest').
- Groups expressed interest in running initiatives to address climate change and promote local solutions, tying these into existing council plans.

2. Funding Challenges:

- A consistent theme across all responses is the struggle with securing adequate funding. Many groups expressed that funding limitations are a primary barrier to organising a wider range of events.
- Groups would like to run various awareness sessions and events but feel constrained by financial resources.

3. Venue Limitations:

- The lack of suitable and affordable venues is a recurring issue, with many organisations finding current venues either too costly or unavailable.
- Specific venues, such as Renfrew Town Hall and Johnstone Bandstand, were mentioned as potential sites for community events if funding could be secured.

4. Volunteer Engagement:

- There is a strong reliance on volunteers to execute events, with several groups reporting challenges in recruiting and maintaining volunteer support.
- Communities like Lochwinnoch are noted for their proactive approach to volunteering, yet they still face difficulties due to funding constraints.

5. Promotional and Advertising Support:

- Many organisations highlighted the need for assistance with advertising and promotion to better reach their communities and encourage participation in events.

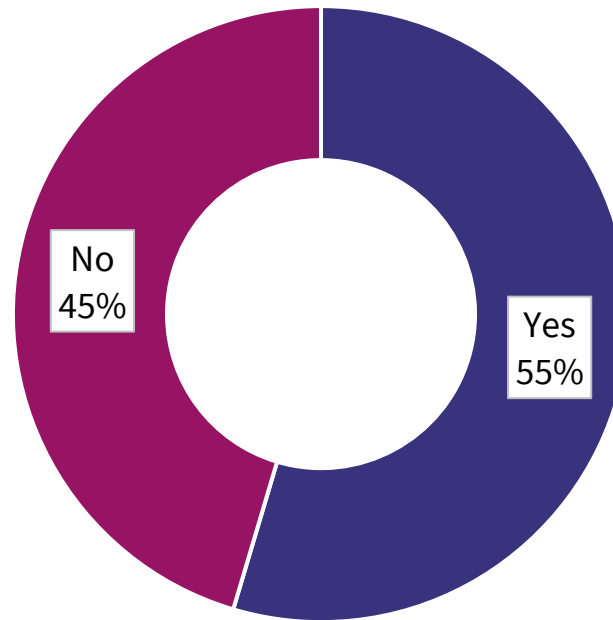
Council engagement with businesses, community groups and cultural organisations

Similar themes were noted across all groups in terms of suggesting how the Council can better engage with these organisations and groups.

- 1. Strengthen Regular Communication:** Establishing more consistent, face-to-face interactions with local organisations would help build long-term relationships and trust. It was suggested that the Council provide regular updates on event planning and seek feedback from businesses and organisations that have participated in past events or have expressed an interest. A designated point of contact for organisations during event planning was recommended.
- 2. Use Local Resources:** Prioritising local talent, suppliers, and cultural organisations can foster a sense of ownership and pride within the community. Local talent and suppliers often feel overlooked when external services are brought in. There's a need for increased involvement and acknowledgement of local groups, businesses and artists.
- 3. Improved Communication Channels:** There were requests for better and more consistent communication, particularly around market opportunities, and workshops. Some businesses and organisations felt there had been a lapse in engagement since certain key council contacts left. Confusion on the role of One Ren and Renfrewshire Council was also evident and greater collaboration between the two, and greater clarity of roles, would be helpful.
- 4. More Inclusive Decision-Making:** Involving local organisations from the earliest stages of planning to allow for meaningful participation and input on event types and themes. Organisations want to be involved in decision-making processes, especially when selecting vendors and planning event layouts. They suggested more collaboration between the Council and local businesses and organisations in shaping events from the outset as opposed to further down the line.

Over half of respondents (55%) would be willing to pay to attend events in the future

In future, we may need to consider ticketing some of the visitor events, to help us manage the number of attendees and generate some income towards covering the costs of delivering the event. Please indicate if you would be willing to pay to attend?



Further insight into willingness to pay

- **Balance between Paid and Free Events:** Differences were noted between the Lived Experience Panel and the Resident group regarding paying. While some residents are willing to pay for larger events or to access premium experiences (e.g., grandstands at parades), there is a desire to keep some events free, especially those with a family focus, like Halloween and Christmas festivals (Resident focus group).
- **Affordable Pricing:** If ticketing is introduced, residents suggested that pricing should be kept reasonable (e.g., £5 per person or £20 for a family ticket). Additionally, offering tiered experiences where basic access remains free, but premium options (like reserved seating) come at a cost, was viewed positively (Resident focus group).
- **Balance Between Free and Paid Events:** Businesses suggested a balance between free and ticketed events, with some willing to pay for premium spots at larger events. However, there were concerns that charging too much for events could deter local participation (Business focus group)
- **Ensure inclusion for all if ticketing is introduced:** It was felt that if tickets were introduced they should also be distributed via grass roots organisations to ensure that all groups can be included. It was felt that it was important that any free tickets weren't differentiated and those that couldn't afford the tickets could still attend in an equitable way. It was also suggested that phased payment or discounted tickets for people who were less likely to be able to afford full price tickets should be considered (Lived Experience Panel).

93% of respondents consider these to be the right priorities that the Council should seek to achieve through its events programme

Participation and co-design

allowing communities to get involved in events and have an influence in designing them.

Performance opportunities

to increase opportunities to showcase and develop local talent, cultural organisations, and groups.

Volunteering

allowing people to have regular access to volunteering opportunities.

Economic impact

increasing income to the area on event days for local retailers and businesses.

Local spend

to encourage people to spend money locally, in Renfrewshire.

Civic pride

to help communities feel proud of the area they live in.

Inclusion and accessibility

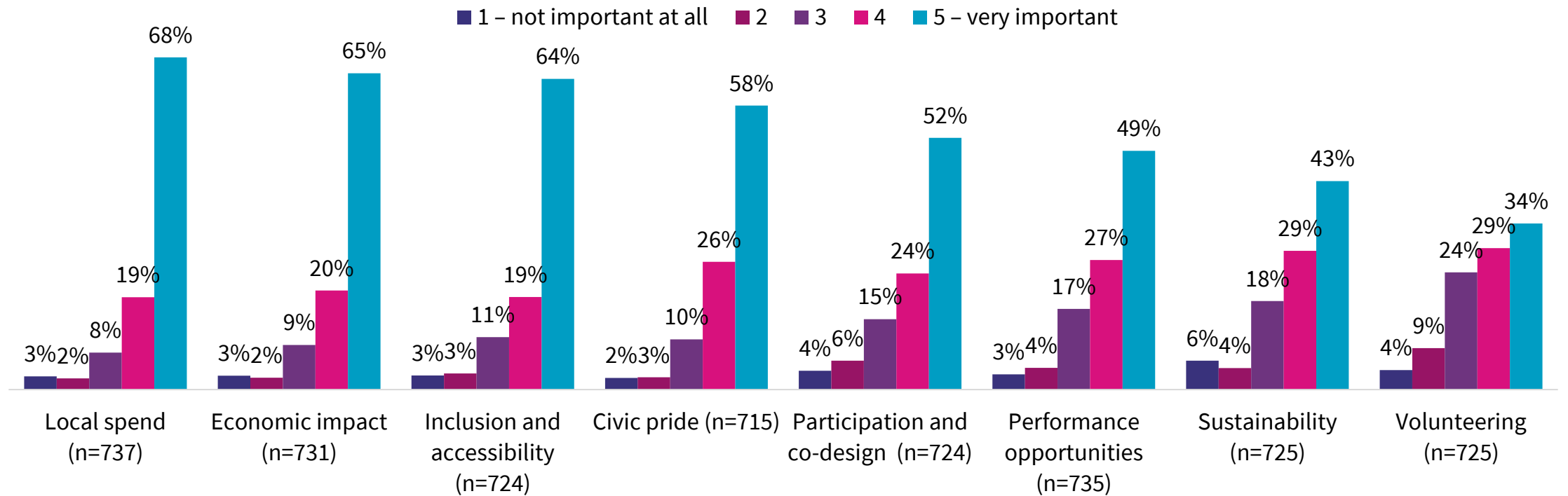
to help event attendees to feel included, welcome and that their accessibility needs are met.

Sustainability

to ensure resources are managed efficiently and responsibly in relation to the environment and climate change.

Local spend (68%), Economic impact (65%) and Inclusion and accessibility (64%) are most important to respondents (% very important)

How important do you think each of these strategic priorities are for events in Renfrewshire for 2025 and beyond? Please give a score of 1 to 5 for each, where 1 is not important at all and 5 is very important, or do not know.



Base: all respondents, n=750