

# What Matters To Us

An analysis of surveys from FaithAction members and partners leading up to the UK General Election. July 2024

Compiled in Autumn 2024

# 1. Introduction

“What Matters To Us” was a short six survey campaign by FaithAction designed to find out the most important issues to its multi-faith audience. It was timed to coincide with the 2024 UK General Election, which was called somewhat unexpectedly by the then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on 22<sup>nd</sup> May.

The “What Matters” campaign formally began on 30<sup>th</sup> May, and continued through the General Election (July 4) to the end of July, in order to maximise submissions. The primary audience for the campaign were the 1,238 FaithAction members who receive the weekly eNews, as well as partners, stakeholders, and affiliated organisations. The campaign was promoted through social media and the regular and special eNews bulletins.

QR codes were assigned to each form, and these were appended to staff members’ emails, as well as used extensively in X and Facebook.

A simple survey form was created using JotForm - the concept being that busy people appreciate forms which are quick to complete, yet allow plenty of space for expanded comment.

Some of these comments feature prominently throughout this report, and are analysed and commented on, along with the quantitative data charts. The comments are also summarised through word clouds.

The six surveys were released weekly as follows:

Survey One (30<sup>th</sup> May 2024) - Asking people to name their most pressing issues facing the UK today.

Survey Two (6<sup>th</sup> June 2024) - Faith and Civil Society.

Survey Three (13<sup>th</sup> June 2024) - Health and Social Care.

Survey Four (20<sup>th</sup> June 2024) - The Cost of Living.

Survey Five (27<sup>th</sup> June 2024) - Education.

Survey Six (4<sup>th</sup> July 2024) - Crime and Justice.

The final survey was timed to coincide with the Election, and all six surveys were left open for participants to contribute to any or all of them. Each survey started with respondents being invited to list the three areas they would like the next government to focus on (in no priority order) and then to offer an optional open question to gather qualitative data. Throughout the survey it was felt to be important to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Each survey linked to the next (once it was announced) and the previous, so that people could answer any or all surveys in any order.

The final question was related to the respondent’s faith, and offered a drop-down list of faiths that they could belong to. The faith options were Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Other, No faith, Prefer not to say.

## 2. Overall Themes

The FaithAction team decided early on to start with a general category for respondents. The idea of the campaign was cumulative, so that people could respond to any or all of the surveys.

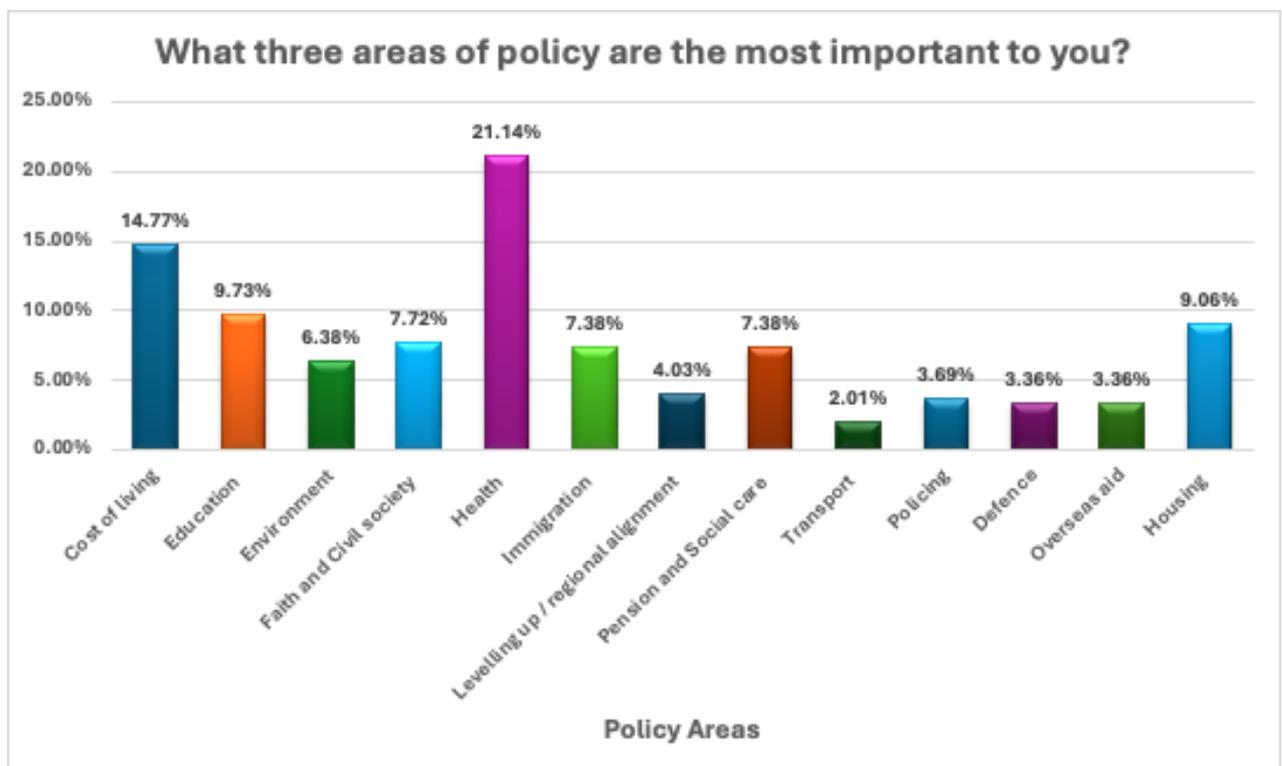
The initial survey allowed participants to select three areas of government policy which were the most important to them.

Participants were invited to select three of the following themes:

- Transport
- Education
- Immigration
- Cost of living
- Levelling up / regional alignment
- Overseas aid
- Environment
- Defence
- Pensions and Social care
- Policing
- Faith and Civil society
- Health
- Housing

The optional open question was: What would you most like to see the next government spend money on?

The figures below indicate that health is a huge concern among respondents; perhaps not surprising given the fragmented nature of the NHS.





The word cloud for the overall themes is interesting, in that the most prominent word is “people.” This reflects the community focus of many of the organisations who participated. “NHS”, “health”, “social” and “housing” are also high within the cloud.

## Verbal responses

In the verbal responses, there was a general sense of tiredness around the NHS, the cost of living, the lack of progress, the sense that the country was impoverished in many ways:

*stop the UK being the most nature deprived countries in the World.*

The Conservative concept of “Levelling Up” was popular in theory, but there was a sense that it was not happening in practice:

*We should be enacting policies which help those with the least and trying to ease the cost of living.*

One participant highlighted the need to address what they perceived as inaccuracies in immigration reporting which might result in unrest:

*(We need) fact-based policies that welcome and integrate refugees...*

For one participant it was about Brexit, to which the respondent attributed the loss of UK international status:

*BUT for me the principal overriding priority is to break down the Brexit debacle and return the UK to its proper place as a leader in Europe.*

For many people, this was an opportunity to list all the things that they felt was wrong about the state of the UK in 2024.

### 3. Faith and Civil Society

Faith and Civil Society was next in the order of surveys, since the participants would primarily be answering from a faith perspective.

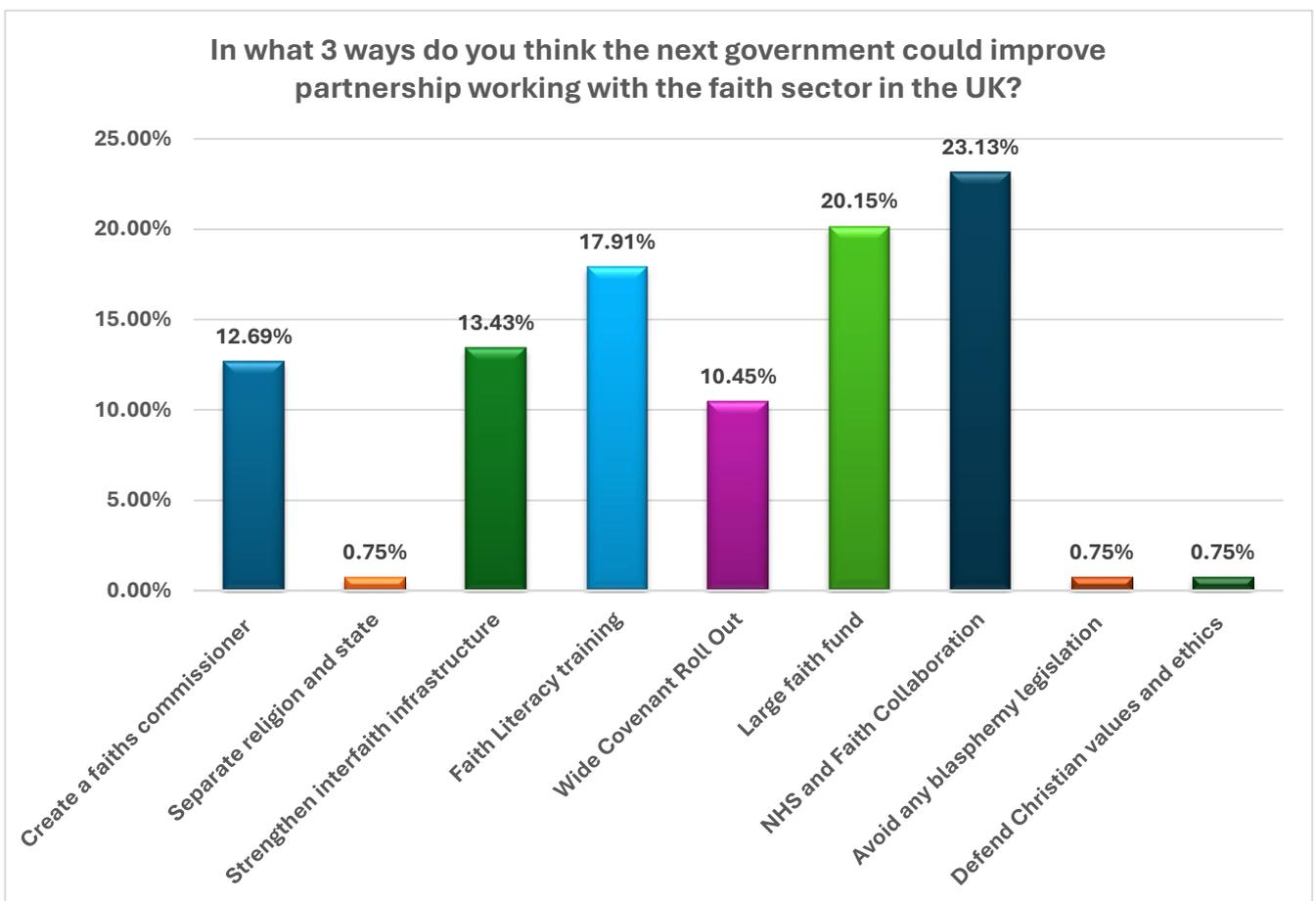
The areas of concern we asked people to select three priority areas were:

- Create an office of a faiths commissioner.
- Promote a greater understanding of faith among public sector workers through faith literacy training.
- Encourage a wider roll-out of the faith covenant.
- Create a large national fund directed towards faith-based social action.
- Encourage more active collaboration between local NHS systems / Public Health and faith groups.
- Strengthen and fund national inter-faith infrastructure.

The optional open question was:

Is there anything else a future government should consider?

Responses to this theme were very passionate, which is not surprising given the nature of the voluntary sector faith groups. Reflecting the health issue once again, many responded with a desire to collaborate with the NHS, and many advocated for a “large faith fund” to run community projects. Faith literacy training is seen as a critical element; perhaps reflecting natural concerns reflected in the Crime theme’s responses about community cohesion.





## Verbal Responses

In the faith and society sphere, there were a number of expressive responses, which is not surprising given the audience:

*Faith groups are propping up the country.*

*Allow people to live according to their faith.*

Some were keen to bridge any gaps between faith and government:

*Establish dialogue between faith/belief communities & government.*

Others had innovative ideas:

*The government should consider having faith coordinators or 'faith teams' made of interfaith leaders to act as a body or representative of such marginalised voices.*

*Invest in strategic relationships between government departments and faith groups (like the Health & Wellbeing Alliance).*

Education played a role in responses, although they did not always agree:

*Faith organisations run a third of our schools! (as a positive).*

*Phase out faith schools from the state education sector (not as a positive).*

A final well-considered response summed up the thinking of many with regard to faith and society:

*The government needs to understand that faith communities are the key to unlocking many of the hardest to reach in our neighbourhoods.*

## 4. Health and Social Care

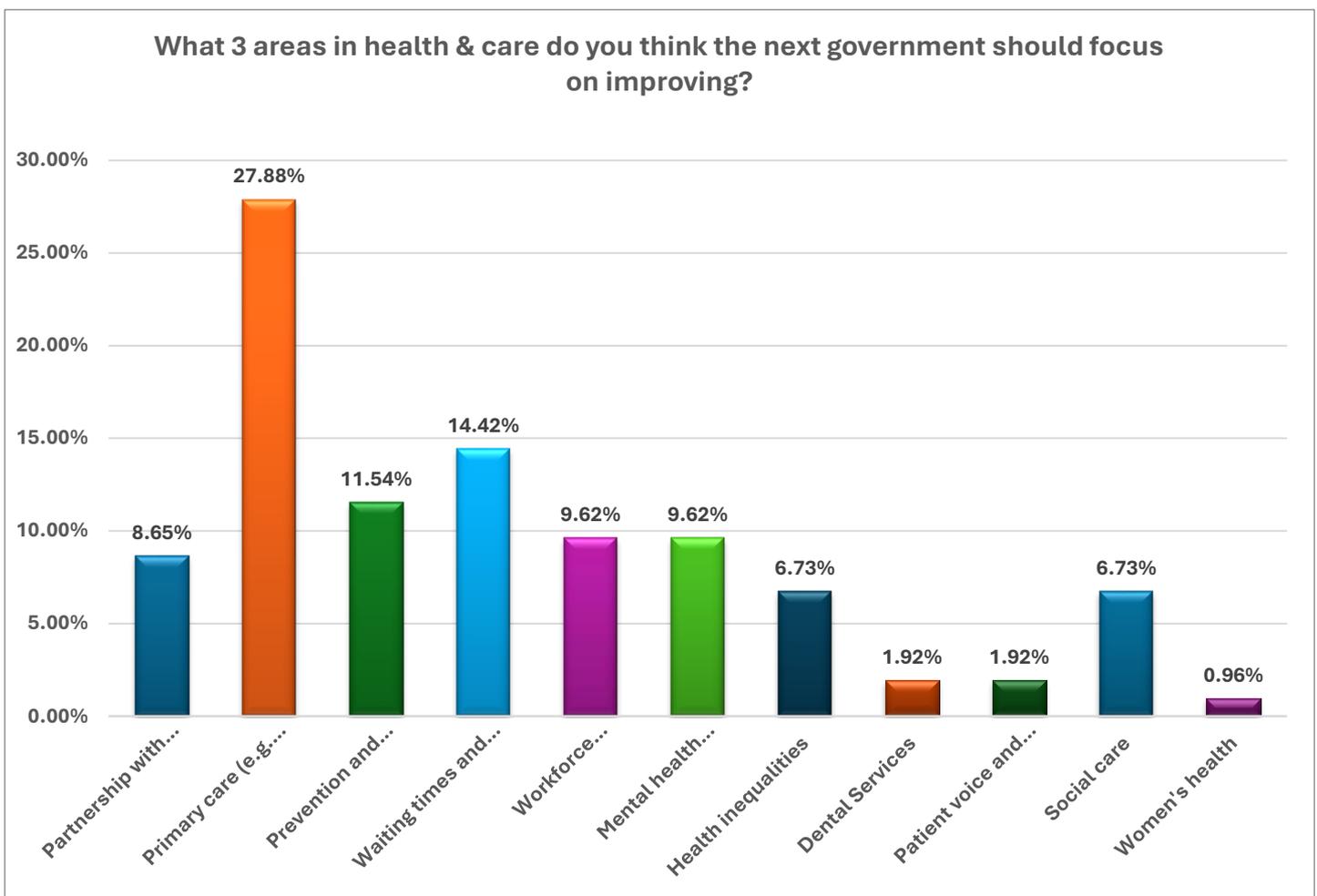
As evidenced by responses from the initial theme survey, health and social care was the most popular theme from the viewpoint of the respondents.

As before, we asked participants to select three from the following categories around health and social care:

- Primary care (e.g. GP Services).
- Workforce recruitment & retention.
- Waiting times and backlog.
- Partnership with VCS & faith groups.
- Prevention & public health comms.
- Patient voice and participation.
- Appropriate data collection.
- Mental health services.
- Health inequalities.
- Dental Services.
- Research.
- Social care.

The open question was:

How can faith groups best support the health & care system?



The graphics show an immediate concern; that of primary care services. In this post-Covid world, where GP services are moving predominantly to online, this is understandable, given the ageing population, and how often the technological revolution has left them behind. Waiting times comes second, but again, this is aligned with GP services. Many of the issues which arise here are ones which respondents face every day.



## Verbal responses

For health, people felt it was important for faith groups to work in partnership with local providers:

*To recruit and train community health champions.*

*Have a Chaplain based in each GP surgery perhaps, or at least the contact details of the various faith group representatives which can be handed to patients who would appreciate additional support.*

Mental health was a huge topic:

*More funding and access to mental health support for young people before they reach crisis point.*

*There are still a lot of taboos around getting support for mental health in my community which must be addressed. People talking about their experiences openly is a good first step.*

There were responses about working toward suicide prevention, chaplaincies to help people come to terms with crises. Another person called upon people of faith to have a voice in the campaign to address assisted dying laws.

One respondent felt that faith groups should open up their premises:

*(faith groups should be) offering their buildings - especially in villages, - for 'Well clinics' for preventative & 'early signs' care.*

And a final heart-felt response came from a Creative English hub:

*Creative English has been a very successful way of helping people in my community look after their health.*

## 5. The Cost of Living

The Cost of Living survey was launched next. This dealt with the whole economy, but it was felt that the perspective should be a more personal one, rather than a UK wide macro viewpoint of the economy.

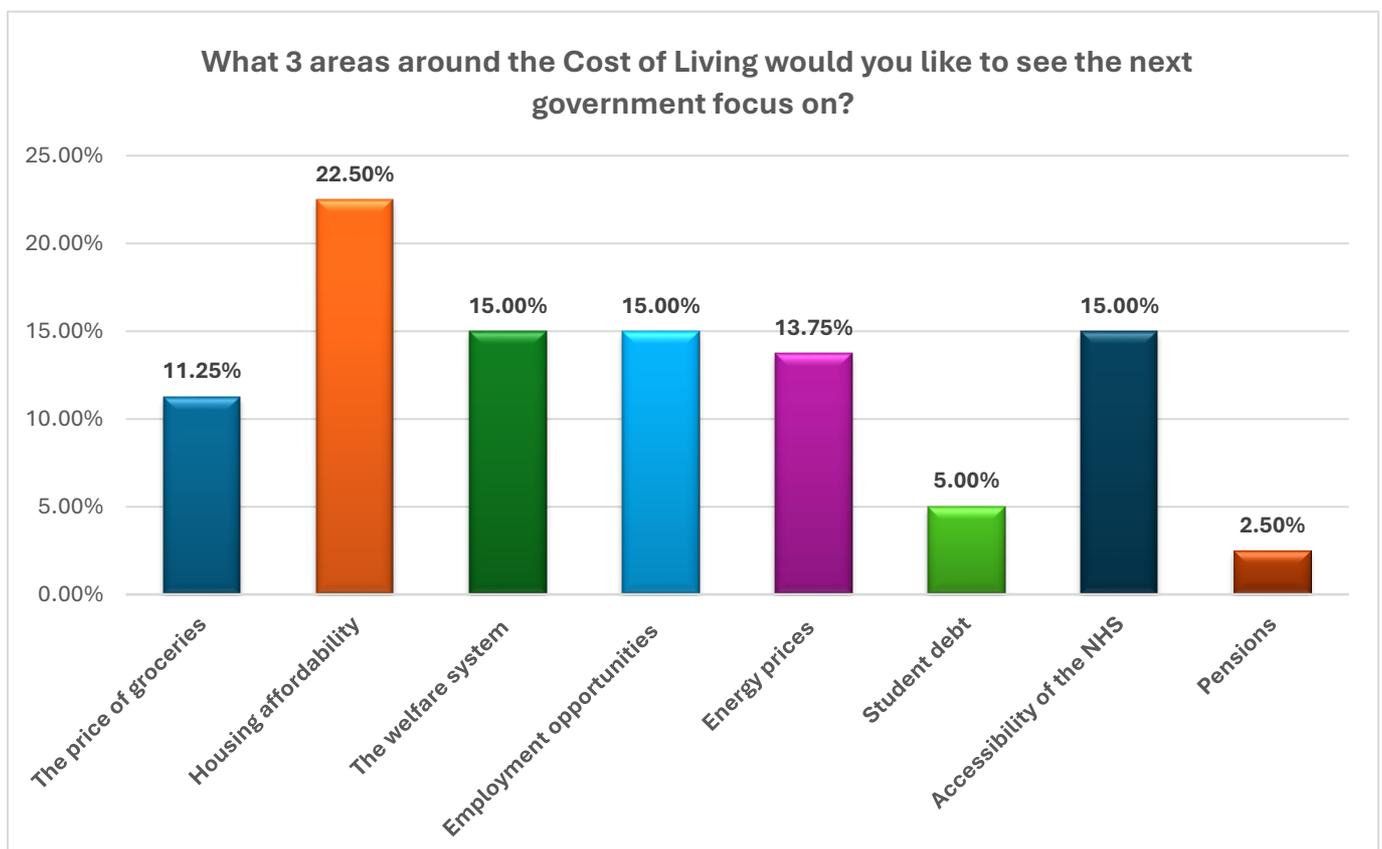
That said, many of the areas of government focus were at a macro level. The audience were asked to select three of the following:

- The welfare system.
- Housing affordability.
- Employment opportunities.
- The price of groceries.
- Energy prices.
- Accessibility of the NHS.
- Student debt.
- Pensions.

The open question was:

How can faith groups best support people in the current economic climate?

Housing affordability was prominent: and housing itself was a major theme in the first survey. Welfare system and employment both have equal importance, along with accessibility of the NHS (echoing the health theme). Energy prices reflect the difficulty with energy caps as a result of the Ukraine war, along with the price of groceries.





## Verbal Responses

The Cost of Living crisis, precipitated by successive economic downturns, and the aftermath of Covid19 and the Ukraine war, became a vehicle to discuss the response of faith groups to economic challenges as a whole:

*Faith groups are already providing a massive amount of support, through food banks, running debt counselling services and providing emotional support services.*

Many of the responses reflected what is already taking place:

*By offering hope, pastoral care, a sense of community, and where possible practical help, e.g. with advice, form-filling, clothing and food banks. Faith groups can also provide support for specialist charities such as in housing or skills training.*

Others were keen to reach those who were the most marginalised:

*By being there for the most vulnerable and "hidden".*

A final response recognised what is already being done, but stresses the need for more access to such services:

*The next government should publicise these organisations (particularly CAP) and encourage people to get help. Instant credit companies need to be more strictly regulated, to prevent them from charging ridiculously high interest rates. The regulation of the banking sector once again needs significant overhaul.*

## 6. Education

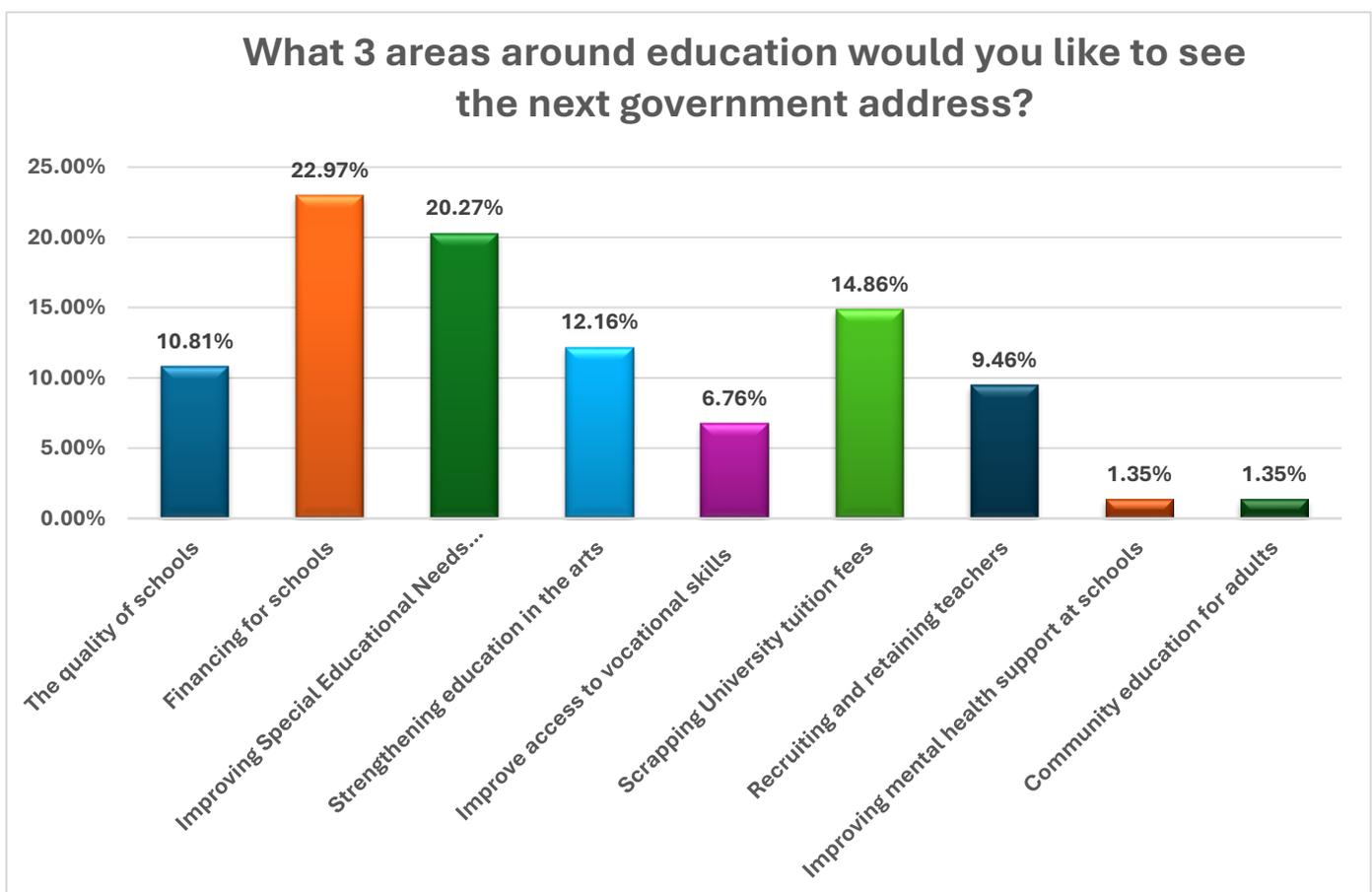
Education has always been a major focus of government attention, and a critical pressure point for many people, particularly in the aftermath of Covid19.

The participants were invited to ask the next government focus on three of the following areas:

- The number of schools.
- Financing for schools.
- The quality of schools.
- Improve access to vocational skills.
- Strengthening STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)
- Strengthening education in the arts.
- Improving Special Educational Needs provision.
- Recruiting and retaining teachers.
- Scrapping University tuition fees.

The open question was:

How can faith groups best work with public services in the Education sector?



It is perhaps surprising that finance for schools comes out as the highest, but many of the issues which arise (better SEN provision, recruitment, school quality) arguably have some of their deepest roots in financial issues.



## Verbal Responses

Education proved to be a source of strong opinion. Some advocated better family support:

*Support for families - schools are a key connecting place for vulnerable families who may not engage elsewhere. Supporting parents results in better outcomes for children.*

Others pointed to the need for schools to help pupils address issues of integration:

*Raising awareness of culture and beliefs to improve tolerance and understanding.*

There were responses around governance and leadership:

*More faith groups should have a voice as school governors, take part in school events and create more school inter-faith groups.*

There were also responses examining our national philosophy of education:

*So much of our education seems to be a focus on passing the exam - rather than learning. It seems very technical, with regard to exam technique ... our children are not well set up to be the workers and citizens of tomorrow.*

*We need to focus on transferrable skills and adaptability as well as developing vocational routes.*

Faith schools were once again the source of some controversy, for good and ill. There were responses around school auditing:

*Ofsted needs a complete overhaul. The single-sentence [school scores] are too simplistic.*

There were also some concerns around SEN provision, and the inadequacy of strategies to cope:

*There is a serious issue with regard to SEN provision - too many teachers are expected to cope with undiagnosed neurodivergent children, and often local authorities can't afford TAs, putting unnecessary pressure on teachers. There appear to be more neurodivergent children in mainstream education than ever before.*

*There is not enough information or understanding of autism.*

## 7. Crime and Justice

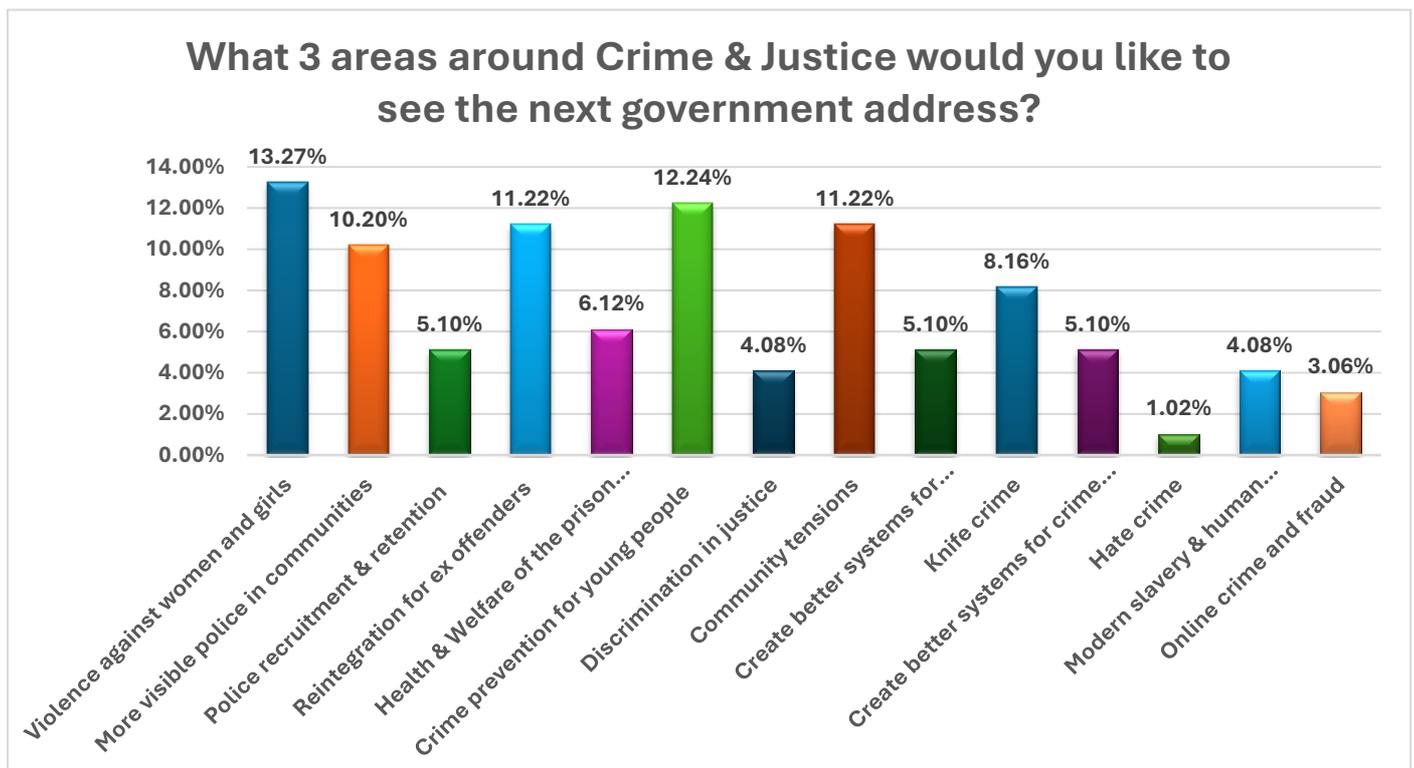
The final survey, crime and justice, appeared on July 4th, 2024, which was Polling Day.

The respondents were asked to prioritise three of the following areas:

- More visible police in communities.
- Police recruitment & retention.
- Health & Welfare of the prison population.
- Violence against women and girls.
- Discrimination within the justice system.
- Reintegration and life opportunities for ex-offenders.
- Strengthen crime prevention among young people.
- Knife crime.
- Hate crime.
- Community tensions and cohesion.
- Create better systems for dealing with crime.
- Create better systems for crime prevention.
- Online crime and fraud.
- Modern slavery & human trafficking.

This was an extensive list of options. The open question was:

How can faith groups best work with public services in the Justice sector?



The responses are balanced between crime (violence against women, dealing with crime) and prevention (community tensions, police visibility and retention, crime prevention, and restorative justice).



## Verbal Responses

Many of the responses around crime and justice centred on rehabilitation and restorative justice:

*Support and engagement with offenders to offer a different alternative to a life of crime.*

*Support work for reintegration for ex-offenders - maybe invest in housing projects and employment projects.*

*Coaching, mentoring and support into employment opportunities for ex-offenders through programmes like Clean Sheet, and young people like Lifeline's Switch Communities.*

*Support for those leaving prison.*

*We have a retributive justice system. We need a restorative justice system. Our prisons are overcrowded with short-term offenders, who reoffend when they return to the community, because there is so little integration or proper rehabilitation.*

As with health, and education, and other categories, there was a call for more chaplains, volunteers, community engagement.

One respondent took issue with the nature the police:

*... seek out and deal with corruption within the police force itself.*

One person advocated volunteer policing, which is something that is being reconsidered, with the use of "special constables."

## 8. Reflections

Reviewing the responses in retrospect, there is clearly a sense of frustration in many areas when it comes to the state of the nation in early July, 2024. There are a number of responses which begin with phrases like “we should be”, “there should be” and “we need”.

With the quantitative data, Health and the Cost of Living tower above all others, with education and housing coming soon after. There is also a strong preventative element to the responses, which is not surprising, since many charities acknowledge the importance of “upstreaming” - finding ways to deal with serious issues long before they become critical. This is certainly true when it comes to crime: better systems for crime prevention and prevention for young people being particularly prominent. The response about violence against women and girls is the highest response in that section, and the concerns for community tensions reflect a national anxiety which prefigures the riots of August 2024. Prevention and effective public health communications is also dominant in the health and social care survey.

In almost every word cloud, the word “people” appears to be prominent, perhaps reflecting the focus of the respondent organisations on the people within society, within their communities, within the framework of services represented by government.

Overall, it is health which comes out as the most prominent theme. Not only does it tower above the other themes in the first survey, but it is also reflected in the faith and civil society responses, and the cost of living responses (access to the NHS). This might be attributed to the fact that many of FaithAction’s partners and stakeholders have both a faith and health leaning.

Faith organisations are keen to partner with statutory health services, whether through governance and strategy, or social prescribing, or supporting people who “fall through the cracks” as one respondent put it. It is in the health sphere that many of the strengths of faith can best be found, where prevention is at a premium (healthy living courses, Creative English for Health); where volunteers frequently work around the clock as visitors, advocates, chaplains; where the “isolated and uninformed” can be helped not only to access services, but also to improve their own quality of life.