

Public Document Pack

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**



**Belfast
City Council**

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
- REPORT TO FOLLOW

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet both online and in-person, in the Lavery Room - City Hall on Friday, 22nd May, 2026 at 9.30 am, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

6. **Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

- (c) Sunday Openings 2026 Public Consultation (Pages 1 - 74)



Subject:	Sunday Openings 2026 Public Consultation
Date:	22 May 2025
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer:	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control

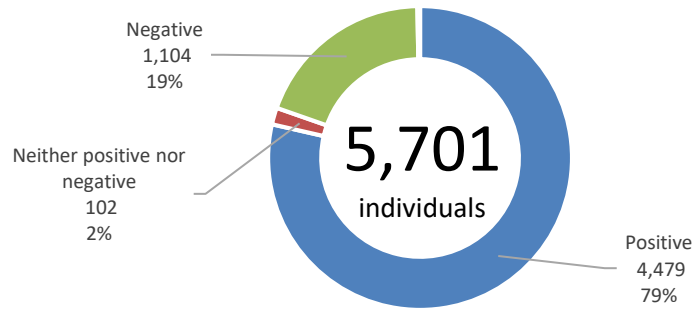
Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision After Council Decision Sometime in the future Never	<input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The report sets out the results of the recent public consultation on the proposed designation of the Belfast City Council area as a holiday designation to enable extended Sunday Trading hours for larger retailers.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the results of the public consultation and additional direct responses received from stakeholders attached as appendices 3-7; • Note the issues and viewpoints expressed in the course of the public consultation process, as set out in section 3.5; and • Agree the implementation of the in-principle, council decision from July 2025 and designate the entire Belfast City Council area as a Holiday Resort designation under Article 6, paragraph (9) of the Shops Sunday (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. Any resolution passed by the council on 01 June would take effect from 01 July (i.e. one month after the date on which the resolution may be passed by council).
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>At its meeting on 01 July 2025, the Council agreed, in-principle , to progress the Holiday Resort designation citywide under paragraph (9) of the Shops Sunday (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (“the legislation”), to be introduced on an ongoing basis commencing March, 2026, following further consultation and engagement with relevant stakeholders, including trade unions.</p> <p><u>Designation as a Holiday Resort</u></p> <p>Under paragraph (9) of the legislation, a Council may designate “any area in its district as a holiday resort”. This means that for 18 Sundays between 1 March and 30 September in any calendar year (apart from Easter Sunday) a large shop which has a relevant floor area exceeding 280 square metres) may open on Sundays in accordance with notice given to Council. Before making any designation, the Order is clear that a Council should consult those likely to be affected by the proposed designation.</p> <p>The council has consulted on the designation of the <i>city centre</i> as a holiday destination under the legislation on several previous occasions, most recently in 2019-20 but also in 2018 and 2017. On the previous occasions, there was engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including retailers (small and large); trades unions; statutory bodies; cultural sector; families; young people; tourism and hospitality representatives and transport providers.</p> <p>The issues behind the proposals to designate the city centre as a holiday resort were similar to the current position: ongoing challenges to city centre viability; a desire to accommodate a growing tourism audience and a recognition that there was limited retail and hospitality provision in the city centre on a Sunday morning, compared to other days of the week.</p> <p>The 1997 Order sets out in paragraph 10 that any resolution to designate a Holiday Resort can only take effect from a specified date, which must be at least one month after the date on which the resolution is passed. Should a decision be taken at this Committee, following due process the specified date on which the decision could take effect would be Sunday 5 July 2026. The extension of Sunday trading hours would therefore run for 13 weeks until Sunday</p>

	<p>27 September 2026. The Council will also have to publish a notice of the designation in such a manner as it considers appropriate.</p> <p>The most recent engagement commenced in April 2025 linked to a Notice of Motion from September 2024 to deliver a pilot Sunday City Animation Project. Council officers held a number of discussions with key stakeholders including management at Victoria Square, Castle Court and the Kennedy Centre, Belfast One, Cathedral Quarter and Linen Quarter BIDs, Belfast Chamber, Retail NI, NI Hotel Federation, Visit Belfast, Translink, USDAW and the Department for Communities. At that time, Shopping Centre management teams were generally supportive of any proposal to extend hours of opening on Sundays, suggesting that retailer buy-in to the proposal shouldn't be an issue. Views were expressed that flexibility was key for retailers and their workers and that most would probably want to open from 11am onwards rather than anything earlier. The recent engagement and public consultation exercise has confirmed that the positions taken, and views expressed in previous consultations remain relevant.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Sunday Opening Public Consultation 2026</u></p> <p>Following the council decision in July 2025, officers developed an engagement programme to further consult with relevant stakeholders, including trade unions. Crucially this engagement would seek views on the holiday designation being extended across the entire Belfast council area. Officers utilised Your Say Belfast, the council's engagement platform with created two survey instruments targeting both individuals (residents, visitors and workers) and business responses (all sectors including retailers, business representatives, unions and community organisations). The consultation was launched on Monday 23 March and ran for 7 ½ weeks, closing on Wednesday 13 May. In addition, key stakeholders including trade unions who had previously been engaged in April 2025 were contacted directly to discuss their previously expressed opinions.</p> <p>The council issued a press release, and the consultation received considerable press coverage over this period. There were over 11,100 visits to the Sunday Openings 2026 webpage on Your Say Belfast. Almost half of these visits were directed via social media, over 80% of which, came from Facebook, with the remainder coming from other platforms including Instagram, LinkedIn and Reddit. In addition, visitors to the page were also directed from the Belfast City Council website, search engine results pages and other media outlets including Belfast Live, the Irish News and the Newsletter.</p> <p>In total, there were 5,701 responses to the individual survey and a further 101 responses to the business survey. Additional replies were also received from 5 stakeholder organisations (USDAW, Belfast Chamber, Translink, NI Hotel Federation and Association of Convenience Shops). These are summarised in section 3.6 below and attached as individual appendices.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Key Findings (Individual Survey)</u></p> <p>Overall, the majority of (79%) individuals expressed that the extension of Sunday opening hours would be positive, with 19% reporting it as a negative.</p>

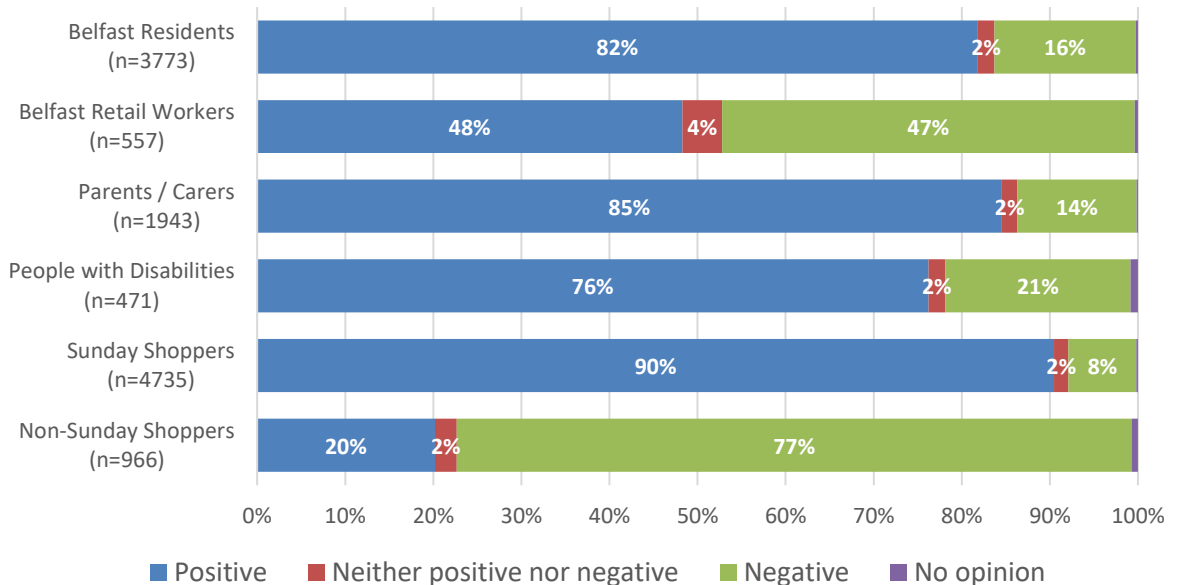
Overall, would you see the extension of opening hours on Sunday as positive or negative?

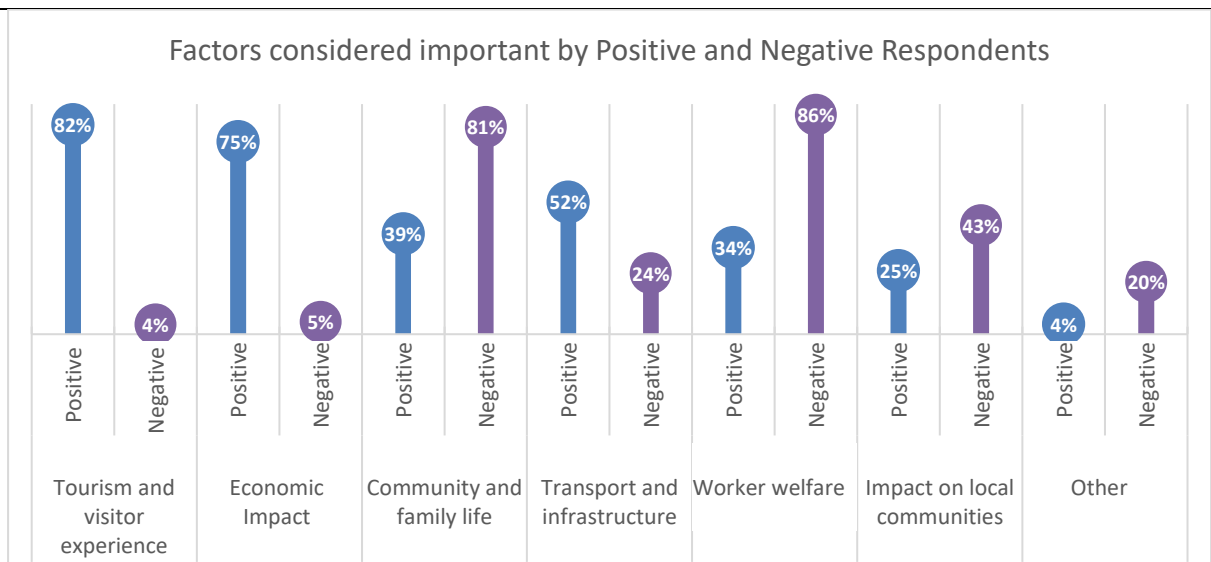


Disaggregation by specific cohorts of interest shows a range of perspectives:

- Belfast residents (82% positive) are in favour of extending Sunday trading hours, by a slightly larger proportion than respondents overall.
- Belfast Retail Workers are divided on the issue, with almost identical numbers of respondents expressing a positive or negative view.
- Those who stated they care for children (parents/carers) and people with disabilities are both heavily in favour of the proposal.
- There is a clear divide in views on the proposal based on whether the respondent currently shops on a Sunday. Those who currently shop on Sundays are 90% positive; whereas those who don't shop on Sundays are 77% negative.
- Views on the proposal varied by age-group. Those aged 25-40 (86% positive) were most in favour about extending opening hours on Sunday.
- Members of the Roman Catholic community background (91% positive) were most in favour of extending Sunday trading; compared with those from the Protestant community background (64% positive). Those from neither background were also strongly in favour (85% positive).

Overall, would you see the extension of opening hours on Sunday as positive or negative?

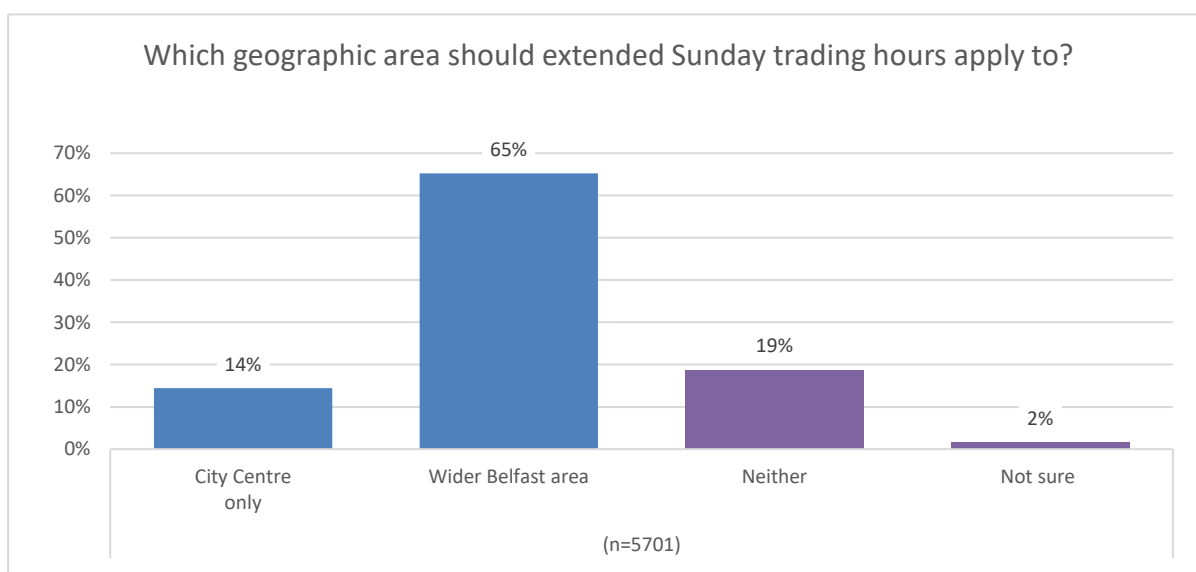




Respondents were asked to identify the factors that the council should consider most, when assessing the proposal to extend Sunday trading hours. They were allowed to pick more than one factor, and most respondents chose to do so. Responses varied depending on whether they saw the overall proposal as positive or negative.

Tourism and Visitor Experience (82%) and Economic Impact (75%) were the most selected factors by positive respondents, conversely, Worker Welfare (86%) and Community and Family Life (81%) were the most selected factors by negative respondents. Negative respondents were most likely to specify 'Other' factors, with 20% doing so. Additional factors covered a range of issues including religious observance, comparison of Belfast to other cities, sentiment that existing arrangements were archaic and concern about rest for workers.

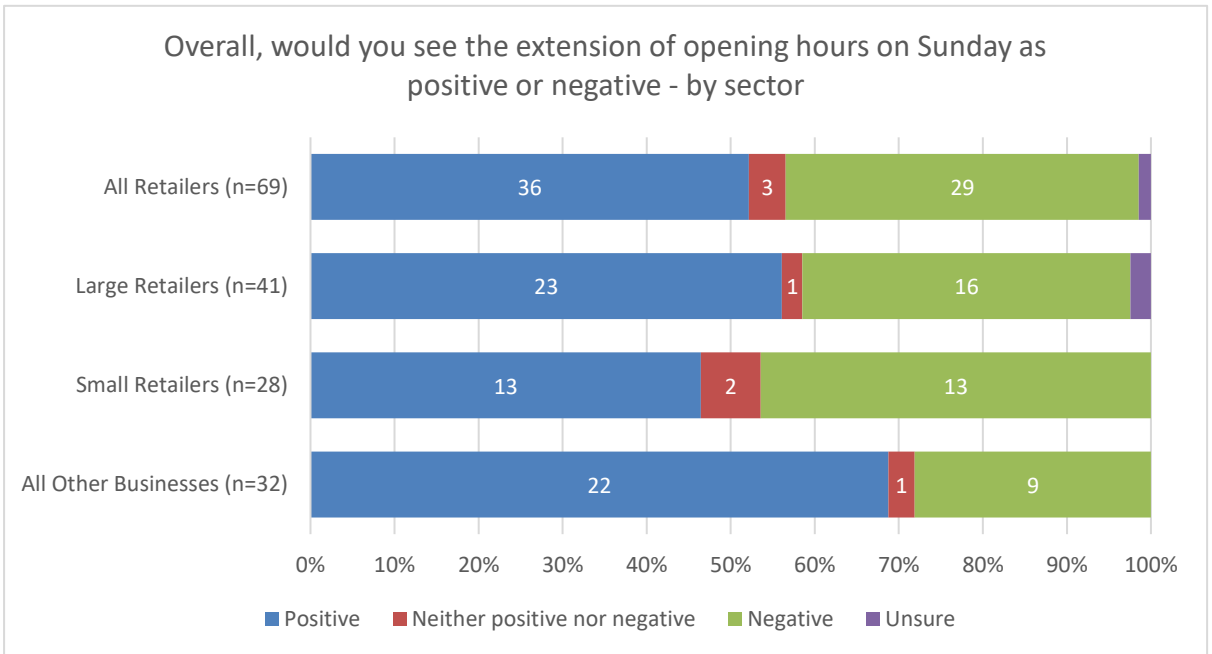
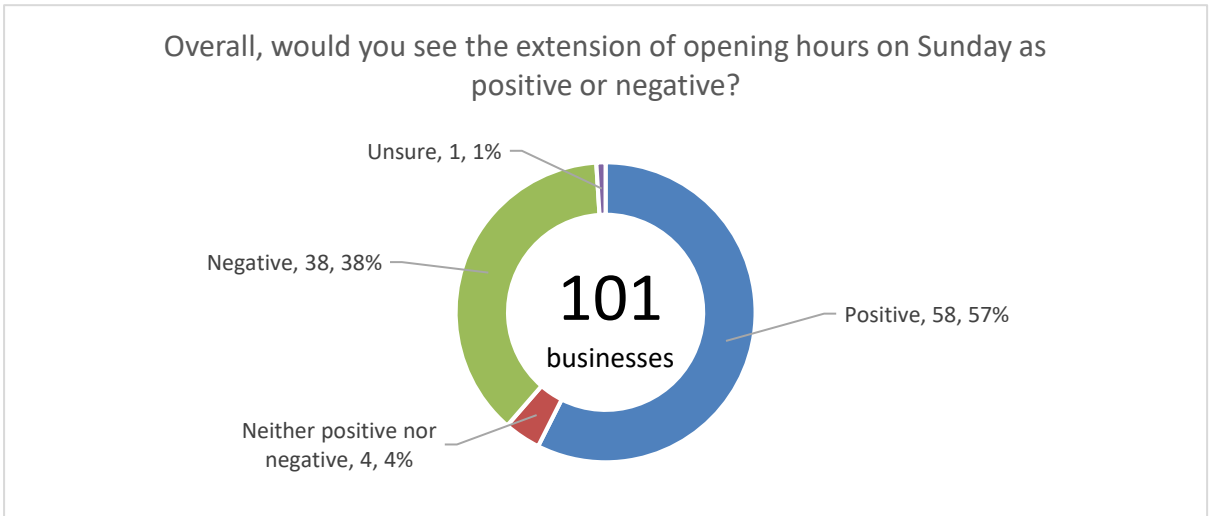
Respondents were asked where they thought the “holiday resort” designation should apply, a large majority of respondents (65%) thought that, should the designation occur, it should apply across the entire district, rather than solely for the City Centre. This was consistent with the responses to the 2017 and 2018 consultations.



3.4 Key Findings (Business Survey)

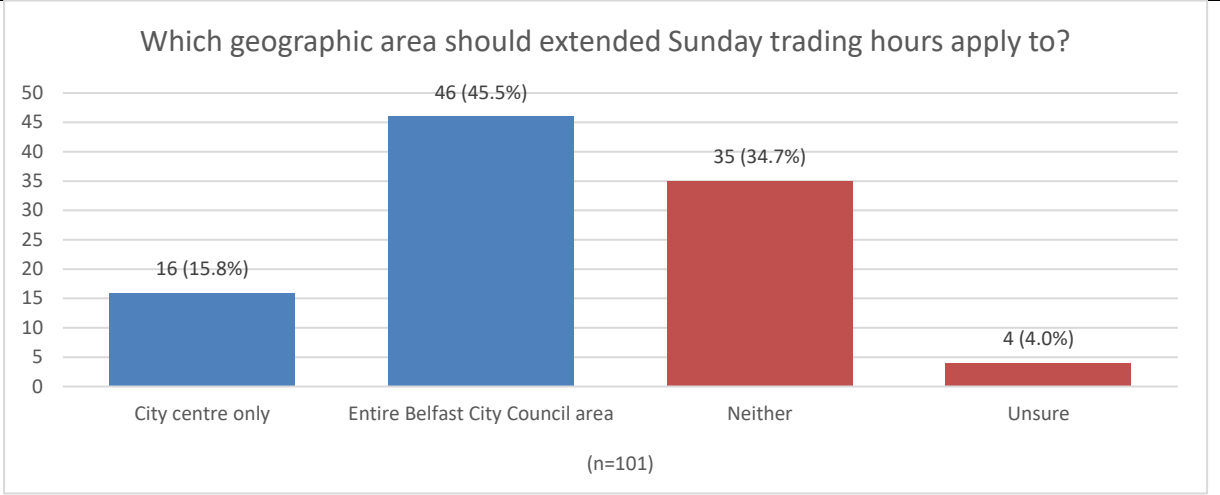
Similarly, a majority (57%) of businesses seen the extension of opening hours on Sundays as a positive with 38% expressing it as a negative. Most retailers (52%) also reported extending Sunday trading hours as positive. A larger proportion of large retailers were in favour, whereas

an equal number of smaller retailers reported the extension of opening hours as both positive and negative. A majority of all other businesses (69%) seen it as a positive.



Businesses were also asked which geographic area extended Sunday trading hours should apply to. The entire Belfast City Council area was the most frequent option of responding businesses (46%). Businesses were asked to explain their answer and a selection of responses are listed below:

- *“Having one rule for city centre and another for surrounding areas seems unnecessary and could be confusing to local patrons and tourists who increasingly stay in and visit wider areas of the city and surrounding countryside.”*
- *“We have premises in North, East, South, West and city centre.”*
- *“Visitors want to explore whole city”*
- *“As this is related to Holiday resort status, the city centre is where the highest % of tourists will be, it is logical, as with other towns throughout NI who have had their councils designate them HRS.”*



A detailed feedback report of the public consultation is attached at appendix 1. This includes a further breakdown of the respondents to each survey including crosstabs of results (where appropriate) and a summary of qualitative responses to open-ended questions.

3.5

Main Issues

Tourism and Economic Potential

Should committee agree with the in-principle decision to designate the entire Belfast City Council area as a Holiday Resort designation, large retailers will have the opportunity to extend their Sunday opening hours on 13 Sundays before the end of September as follows:

- July – 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th
- August – 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, 30th
- September – 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th

Analysing the 2026 Belfast Cruise Schedule with the above dates shows that there will be 8 cruise ships docking in the city with approximately 20,000 visitors. Many respondents noted the increase of neighbourhood tourism, highlighting that several tourist attractions and retail offerings are outside of the city centre boundary. This rationale was provided to explain the majority answer to recommend that the entire Belfast City Council area is designated as a holiday designation. Many respondents to the consultation survey highlighted the potential tourism benefits this proposal presents for the city and its neighbourhoods.

Employee Protections

Article 11 and Schedule 2 of the legislation provide employment rights for shop workers, except those contracted to work only on Sundays. They aim to ensure that shop workers are not compelled to work on Sundays against their wishes. The new rights apply irrespective of age, length of service or hours of work. The Schedule provides that dismissal of a shop worker (including dismissal for reasons of redundancy) is unfair if the reason for it was the worker's refusal to work on Sundays. It also provides the right not to suffer any other detriment (such as denial of normal promotion or training opportunities, or refusal to pay seniority bonuses etc) for refusing to work on Sundays. All shop workers employed when the Order came into operation (1997) are automatically eligible for these rights. Those who enter a contract of employment requiring Sunday working after the commencement date will be able to "opt out" of Sunday working subject to giving the employer three months' notice.

	<p>The core protections focus on any Sunday work rather than specific times (e.g., Sunday mornings). If a worker is protected or has opted out, the employer cannot require them to work any part of Sunday, including mornings, without agreement.</p> <p>Imposing Sunday work could however raise issues if it indirectly discriminates (e.g., on religious grounds), requiring justification and possible reasonable adjustments. Otherwise, there are limited employee protections for retail workers contracted to work solely on Sunday. It should be noted that in the Republic of Ireland, where Sunday trading is effectively deregulated, there is a Code of Practice on Sunday Working in the Retail Trade. The Code promotes best practice for Sunday rostering and compensation, recognising the impact on workers' quality of life while supporting business needs. It encourages consultation and agreement between employers and employees (or unions), promoting that existing staff should generally volunteer for Sunday work on a rota basis. The Code does not have the force of law, but it is admissible in evidence in proceedings before the Workplace Relations Commission, Labour Court, or civil courts.</p> <p>As part of the 2018 consultation process, the Council developed a draft Charter (attached at Appendix 2). This Charter sets out a voluntary undertaking for large retailers seeking to operate extended trading hours on designated Sundays.</p> <p>Should the Committee approve the implementation of the holiday resort designation, the draft Charter will be reviewed and updated in consultation with key stakeholders prior to any application process. This review will be undertaken with specific regard to the Northern Ireland Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill, to encourage retailers not to utilise zero-hours contracts in an exploitative manner when recruiting additional staff for extended Sunday trading.</p> <p>Religion</p> <p>Historically, Sunday trading laws in the UK have long reflected religious and cultural traditions, particularly the observance of Sunday as a day of worship and rest for many citizens within the Christian faith. This significance continues to resonate with many citizens, for whom Sunday serves as a vital day for religious practice, family time, and recuperation. The consultation process clearly reflected these concerns. A substantial number of respondents, particularly in response to all open-ended questions, expressed opposition to the proposed extension of Sunday trading hours on religious grounds. Many highlighted the potential erosion of Sunday's unique status as a day set apart from commercial activity, emphasising its importance for spiritual wellbeing and community cohesion.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Additional Responses</u></p> <p>There were written responses submitted on behalf of five organisations (USDAW, Belfast Chamber, Translink, NI Hotel Federation and Association of Convenience Shops). These are summarised below and attached at Appendices 3-7.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USDAW - Usdaw's survey of 220 Belfast retail workers shows strong opposition to extending Sunday trading. 82% view it negatively, with 76% of working parents and carers saying it would negatively impact their family life. Respondents fear increased pressure to work Sundays without additional pay, reduced wellbeing, and harm to work-life balance. They report that their workers would rather be spending time with family and engaging in community, sports and leisure activities or attending church. Usdaw also highlights concerns about negative impacts on smaller retailers (referencing in particular St. George's Market traders) who can already open and argues there is no clear economic benefit, urging the Council to retain existing arrangements.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast Chamber – A May 2026 Belfast Chamber member survey of 94 businesses found strong overall support for extending Sunday trading. 66% believe it would benefit business or the city, and 78.7% support opening before 1pm. Most (68.1%) do not anticipate staffing difficulties. Feedback highlights benefits for tourism, footfall, city activity and business flexibility, though a minority raised concerns around staffing pressures, employee wellbeing, and preserving Sunday as a day of rest. • Translink - while recognising potential benefits of extended Sunday trading, Translink stresses severe funding constraints. Current resources do not allow for extended or enhanced Sunday services across bus and rail networks, and any changes would require dedicated additional funding. Translink therefore takes no position on the proposal but confirms that it lacks capacity to support it operationally at present. • NI Hotel Federation - the NIHF supports limited extension of Sunday trading hours via holiday resort designation, viewing it as a pragmatic step to boost Belfast’s weekend economy. Current restrictions create a morning activity gap despite strong demand and high Saturday hotel occupancy. Extended hours would enhance the visitor experience, increase dwell time and spending, support hotels, and create a more vibrant, family-friendly city. The flexible, seasonal approach is welcomed as balanced and aligned with tourism needs. • Association of Convenience Shops - ACS opposes extending Sunday trading hours, arguing there is no unmet consumer need as convenience stores already open freely. The proposal would mainly benefit large supermarkets, displacing trade from independent retailers without increasing overall spending. It also extends beyond the city centre rationale and lacks evidence for supporting high street regeneration. ACS urges the Council to prioritise issues like rates, crime and accessibility instead of changes that could disadvantage small businesses and workers. • Retail NI - Officers also engaged the Chief Executive of Retail NI, who re-affirmed the organisation’s opposition to any designation of holiday resort designation within the city (particularly at a citywide geography), mirroring previous representations on this issue.
3.7	<p><u>Animation</u></p> <p>There is currently no budget available to deliver a dedicated city-centre, family friendly animation programme on Sunday mornings during any period of extended Sunday trading hours. Staffing resources are also prioritised on the successful delivery of the Fleadh. Nevertheless, there is scope to develop a comprehensive calendar of events highlighting “What’s On” across festivals, events, and activities delivered by both the council and partners funded through CMAG, CFF and the Bank of Ideas.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. Should council designate the entire Belfast City Council area as a Holiday Resort designation, officers from the Place and Economy department will lead the preparations required to enable larger retailer businesses to apply for extended Sunday trading hours. This will include the development of a schedule that will be made available to the public upon request. The Building Control Service currently perform the enforcement role in relation to Sunday trading under the 1997 Order and the designation of the Belfast district as a ‘holiday resort’ would require an additional level of resource to manage the registration of participating shops and enforcement of same.</p>

	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The decision to designate the entire Belfast City Council area (Sunday Openings 2026) has been subjected to an equality screening and Rural Needs Impact Assessment. The policy has been screened out with identified mitigating actions. These actions include monitoring and evaluation of the impact of extended Sunday opening hours. While the council's designation will impact future years, elected members do have the opportunity to de-designate the district as a 'holiday resort'.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Sunday Openings 2026 Public Consultation Feedback Report</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Draft Charter</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Translink response</p> <p>Appendix 4 – USDAW response</p> <p>Appendix 5 – Belfast Chamber response</p> <p>Appendix 6 – NI Hotel Federation response</p> <p>Appendix 7 - Association of Convenience Shops response</p>



Belfast
City Council

Sunday Openings 2026

Public Consultation Feedback Report



May 2026

Contents

Introduction	3
Designation as a holiday resort	3
Methodology	4
Individual Survey Results	6
Who Responded?	6
Headline Result – Positive or Negative (Individuals)	10
Current and Future Sunday Shopping Patterns.....	13
What factors should be considered in relation to extending Sunday trading hours	14
Positive and Negative Impacts for Individuals	15
What respondents had to say about the impact of extending Sunday trading hours.	16
Retail workers’ view on extending Sunday trading hours.....	19
Perceived Impacts of Sunday Opening on Workers	21
What retail workers had to say about the impact of extending Sunday trading hours	23
Where should extended Sunday Openings apply?	24
Impact on neighbouring areas.....	27
Business Survey Results	29
Who Responded?	29
Headline Result – Positive or Negative (Businesses)	30
The Views of Retailers	31
Additional Responses	33
Previous Consultation Results	34
2017 Consultation	35
2018 Consultation	35
2019/20 Consultation	35
Concluding Remarks	37
Summary and comparison of results from previous consultations	37

Introduction

At its meeting on 01 July 2025, the Council agreed, in-principle, to progress the Holiday Resort designation citywide under paragraph (9) of [The Shops \(Sunday Trading &c.\) \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1997](#), to be introduced on an ongoing basis commencing March 2026, following further consultation and engagement with relevant stakeholders, including trade unions.

Designation as a holiday resort

Under paragraph (9) of the above legislation, a council may designate “any area in its district as a holiday resort”. This means that for 18 Sundays between 1 March and 30 September in any calendar year (apart from Easter Sunday) a large shop which has a relevant floor area exceeding 280 square metres) may open on Sundays in accordance with notice given to council. Before making any designation, the Order is clear that a council should consult those likely to be affected by the proposed designation.

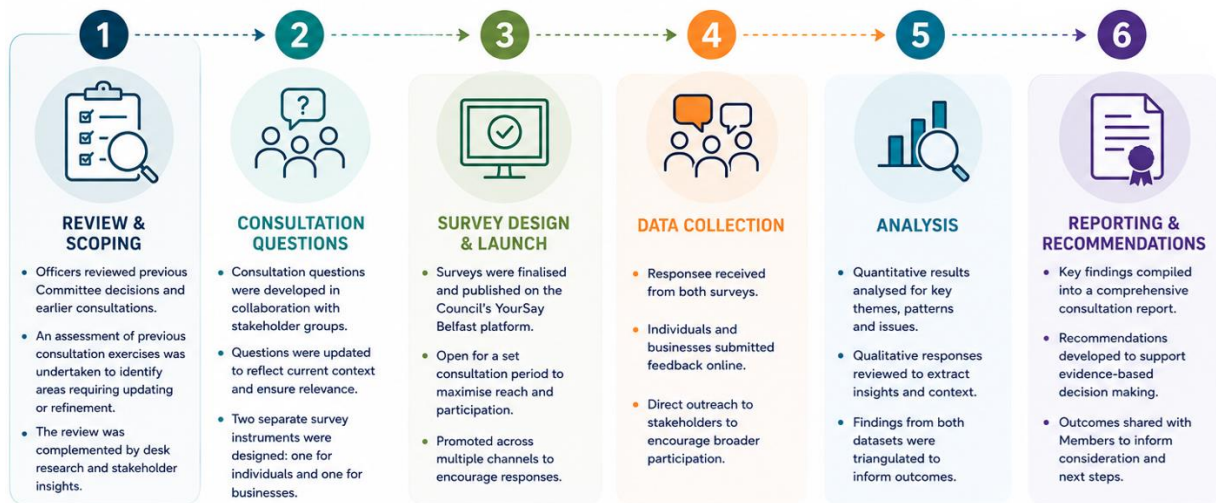
The council has consulted on the designation of the *city centre* as a holiday destination under the legislation on several previous occasions, most recently in 2019-20 but also in 2018 and 2017. On the previous occasions, there was engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including retailers (small and large); trades unions; statutory bodies; cultural sector; families; young people; tourism and hospitality representatives and transport providers.

The issues behind the proposals to designate the city centre as a holiday resort were similar to the current position: ongoing challenges to city centre viability; a desire to accommodate a growing tourism audience and a recognition that there was limited retail and hospitality provision in the city centre on a Sunday morning, compared to other days of the week.

The 1997 Order sets out in paragraph 10 that any resolution to designate a holiday resort can only take effect from a specified date, which must be at least one month after the date on which the resolution is passed. Should a decision be taken at this Committee, following due process the specified date on which the decision could take effect would be Sunday 5 July 2026. The extension of Sunday trading hours would therefore run for 13 weeks until Sunday 27 September 2026. The council will also have to publish a notice of the designation in such a manner as it considers appropriate.

The most recent engagement commenced in April 2025 linked to a Notice of Motion from September 2024 to deliver a Pilot Sunday City Animation Project. Council officers held a number of discussions with key stakeholders including management at Victoria Square, Castle Court and the Kennedy Centre, Belfast One, Cathedral Quarter and Linen Quarter BIDs, Belfast Chamber, Retail NI, NI Hotel Federation, Visit Belfast, Translink, USDAW and the Department for Communities. At that time, Shopping Centre management teams were generally supportive of any proposal to extend hours of opening on Sundays, suggesting that retailer buy-in to the proposal shouldn't be an issue. Views were expressed that flexibility was key for retailers and their workers, and that most would probably want to open from 11am onwards rather than anything earlier. The recent engagement and public consultation exercise has confirmed that the positions taken, and views expressed in previous consultations remain relevant.

Methodology



The methodology for the 2026 public consultation was developed to ensure that the engagement approach was proportionate, transparent and informed by previous council decisions and consultation activity.

In advance of launching the consultation, officers undertook a review of the most recent Committee decision to progress consideration of a holiday resort designation across the wider Belfast City Council area, rather than the city centre only, which had been the focus of earlier consultations. This review was complemented by an assessment of the questions used in previous consultation exercises to identify areas that required updating or refinement.

In light of the revised geographic scope and the need to capture views from different stakeholder groups, the consultation questions were updated accordingly. A decision was taken to develop two separate survey instruments: one aimed at individual respondents (residents, visitors and workers) and one designed specifically for business respondents (all sectors including retailers, business representatives, unions and community organisations), recognising the distinct perspectives and potential impacts for each group.

The individual survey comprised 15 questions and the business survey comprised 18 questions. Both surveys included a combination of closed questions and a series of open-ended questions, allowing respondents to provide qualitative feedback and elaborate on their views. Both the individual and business surveys included routing logic so that participants were only asked questions relevant to them. This helped streamline the respondent experience and ensured that the data collected was more focused, comparable and meaningful for subsequent analysis.

Both surveys were published on the council's engagement platform, YourSay Belfast, supported by accompanying background information, explanatory text, Frequently Asked Questions and relevant documentation to assist respondents in understanding the context and scope of the consultation. The consultation remained open for seven and a half weeks, from Monday 23 March 2026 until Wednesday 13 May 2026.

There were over 11,100 visits to the Sunday Openings 2026 webpage on Your Say Belfast. Almost half of these visits were directed via social media, over 80% of these visits came from Facebook, with the remainder coming from other platforms including Instagram, LinkedIn and Reddit. In addition, visitors to the page were also directed from the Belfast City Council website, search engines and from media outlets such as Belfast Live, the Irish News and the Newsletter.

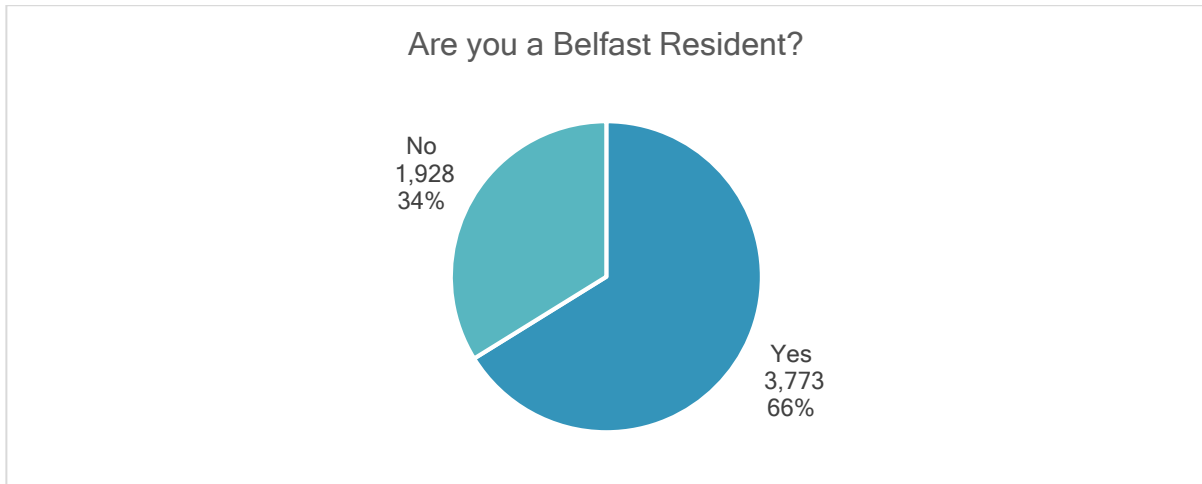
A total of 5,802 online responses were received during the consultation period. Of these, 5,701 responses were submitted by individuals, and 101 responses were submitted by businesses. In addition, 5 written submissions were received directly from stakeholders, including Translink, USDAW, Northern Ireland Hotel Federation, Belfast Chamber and the Association of Convenience Shops which were considered alongside the survey responses. Belfast Chamber conducted its own survey in which 94 businesses participated. USDAW also used the individual survey instrument to obtain the views of their members, receiving 220 responses. It is unknown whether respondents to these separate surveys also provided a response via Your Say Belfast and therefore they are reported separately. Officers also engaged the Chief Executive of Retail NI.

Quantitative results were extracted using the analytical tools available within YourSay Belfast, while qualitative responses were exported and subjected to tailored analysis using Microsoft Excel to identify key themes, patterns and issues raised by respondents. Findings from both datasets were then synthesised to inform this feedback report, which has been prepared to support Elected Members' consideration of the consultation outcomes and any subsequent decisions.

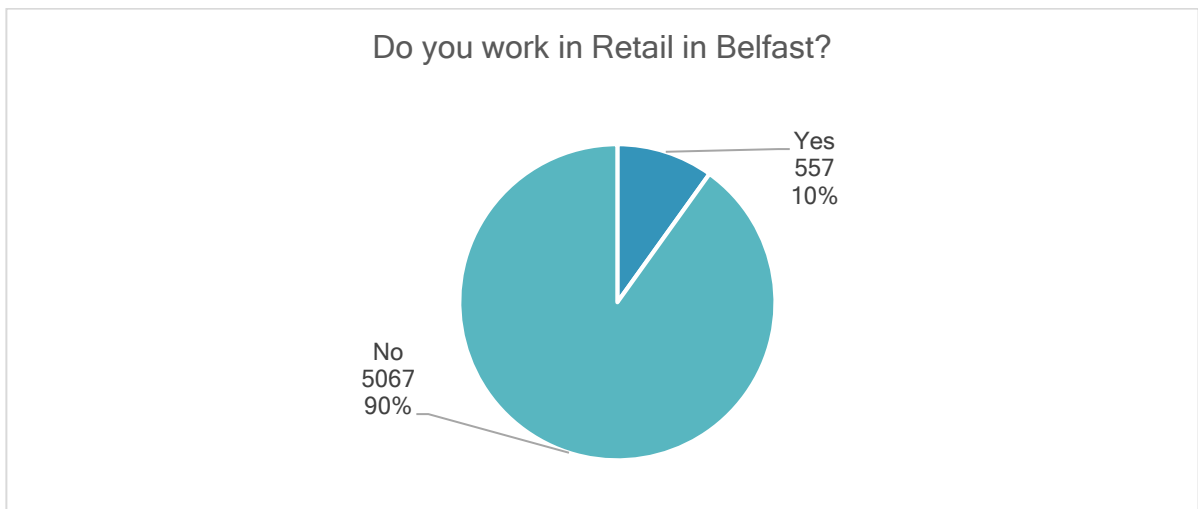
Individual Survey Results

Who Responded?

There were 5,701 responses to the individual survey. 3,773 responses identified themselves as residents of Belfast, representing two thirds of total responses.

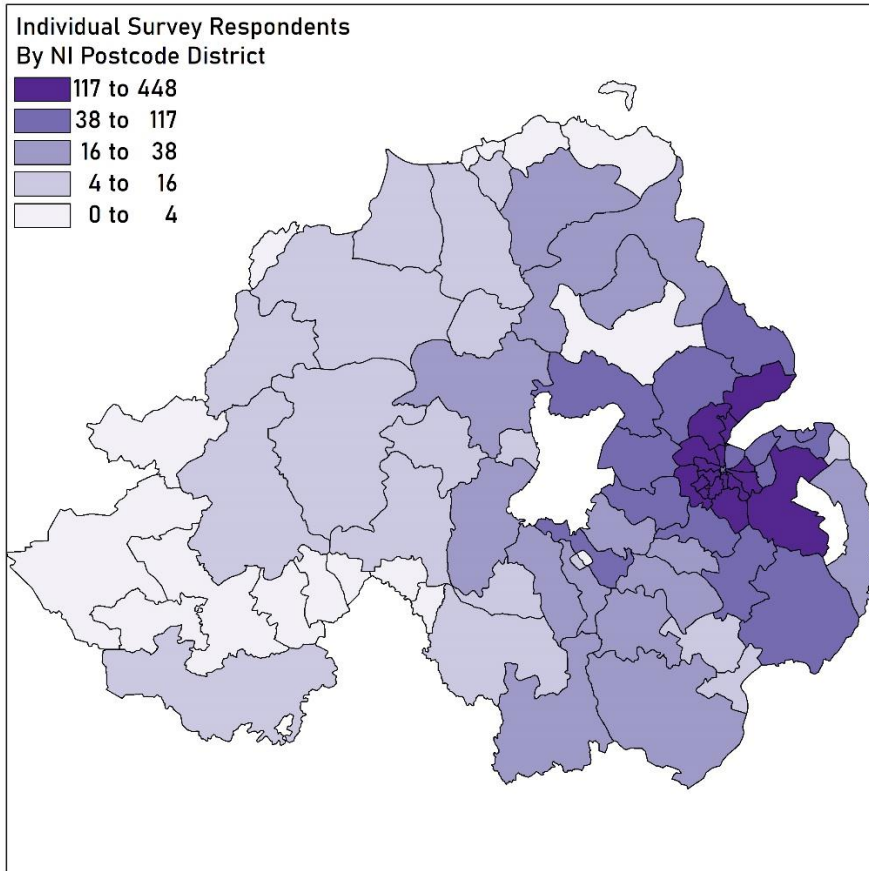


Recognising the obvious impact for affected workers, respondents were asked whether they worked in the retail sector in Belfast. In total, 10% of all respondents stated that they were retail workers in the city, representing 557 respondents.

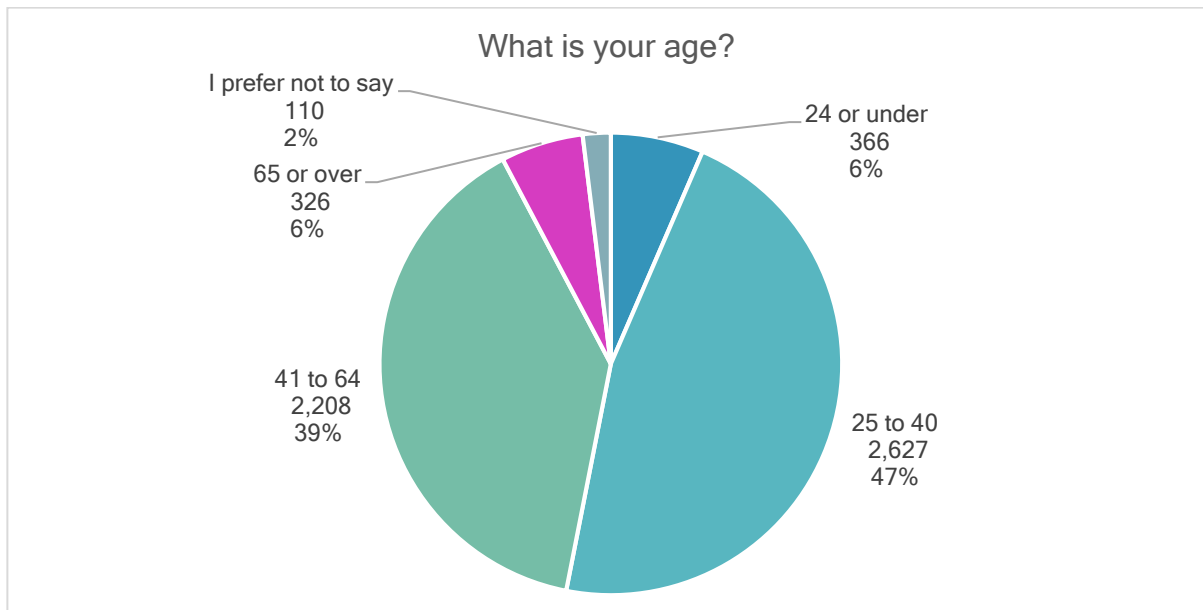


The consultation was however not limited to solely Belfast residents and retail workers. Visitors and tourists were also encouraged to respond and asked to provide their postcode district for analysis. A significant majority of responses came from individuals living in Postcodes in the greater Belfast area. The thematic map below shows the quantity of

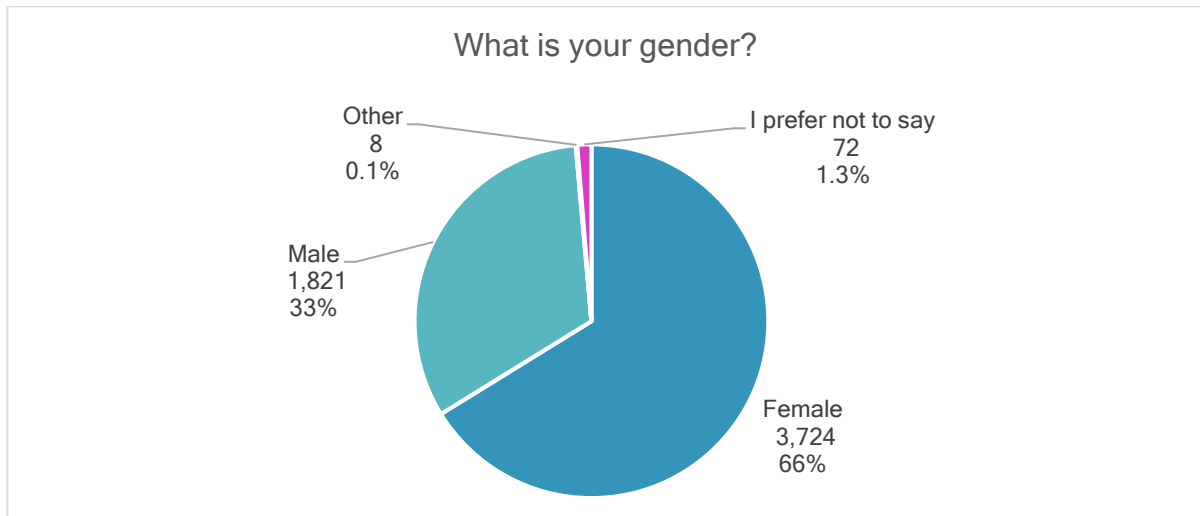
respondents from each postcode district in Northern Ireland. There were 11 responses received from individuals who lived outside Northern Ireland (GB & Ireland).



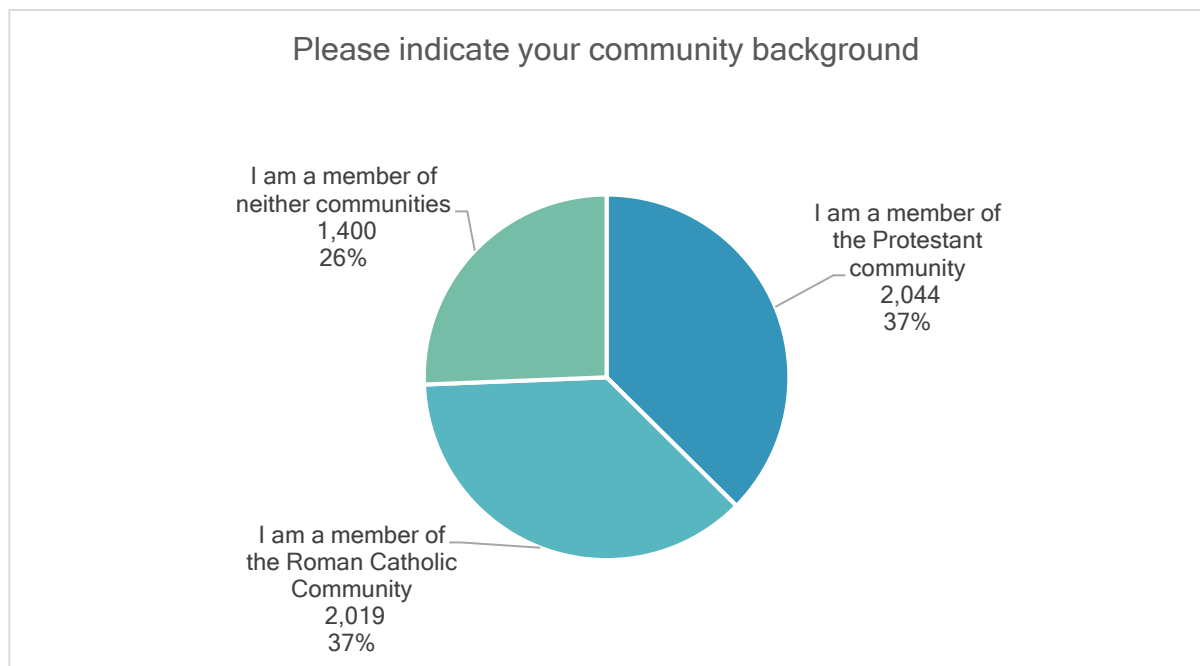
The survey attracted responses from all age groups. The age group most likely to respond was that aged *25 to 40 years old*. This age category comprised close to half of all responses.



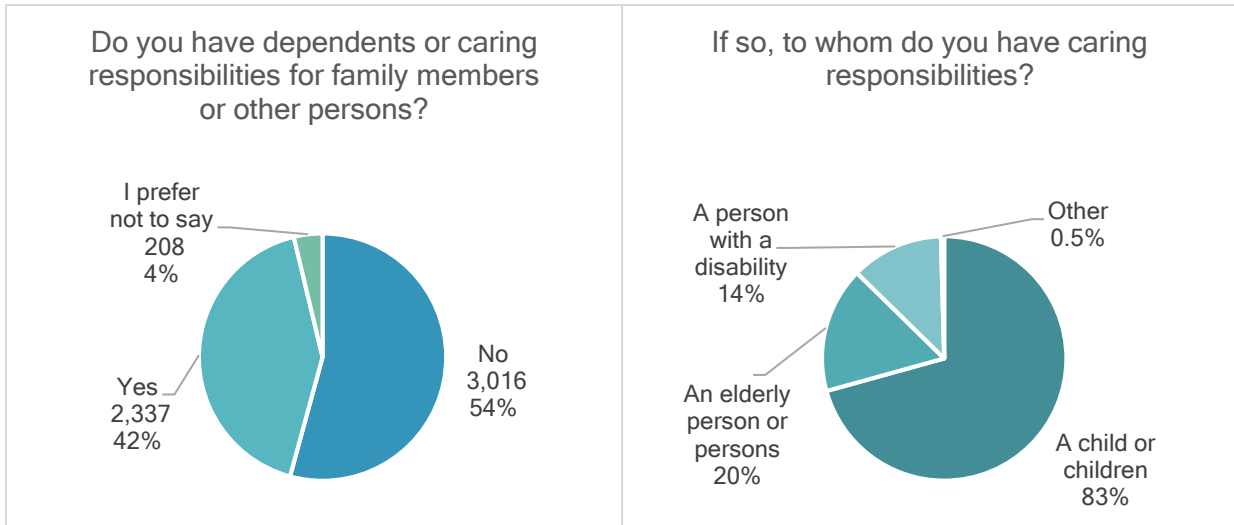
Those identifying as *Female* were most likely to respond to the survey, providing around two thirds of responses.



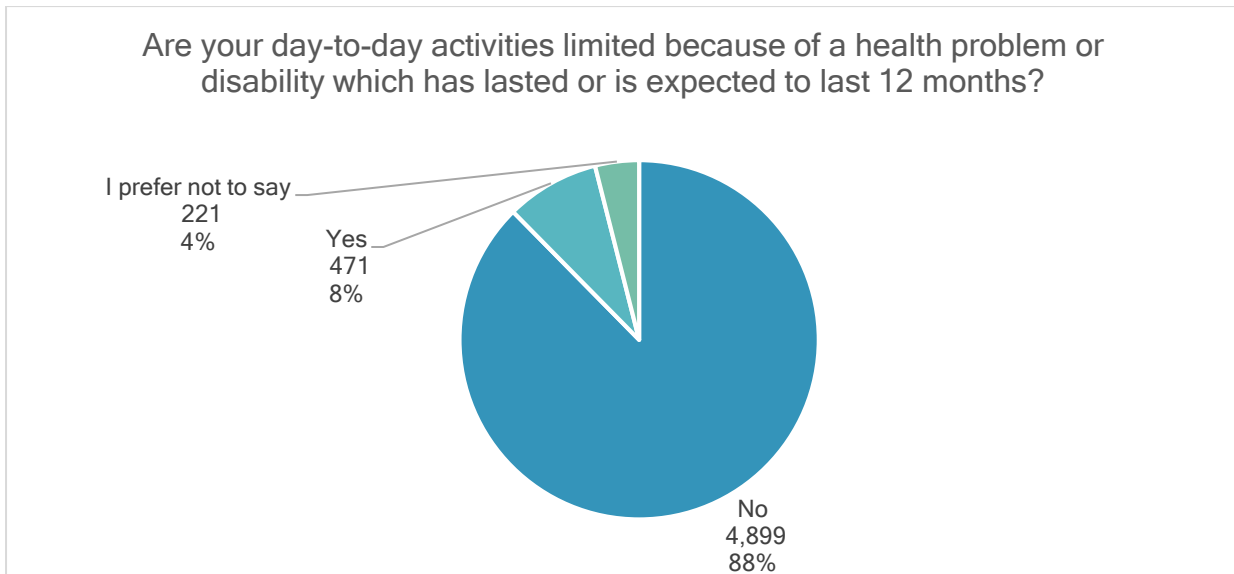
The consultation attracted responses from all community backgrounds (n=5463), with an equal proportion of responses coming from either the *Protestant or Roman Catholic communities*, with the remaining minority coming from those who identified as *belonging to neither community background*.



Respondents were asked whether they had dependents or caring responsibilities for family members, or other persons, and if so, to whom do they have caring responsibilities.



Respondents were asked whether they had a disability or long-term condition (n=5,591). A large majority (88%) indicated that they *did not have a disability*. On the other hand 8% indicated they *had a disability*, whilst 4% *preferred not to say*.

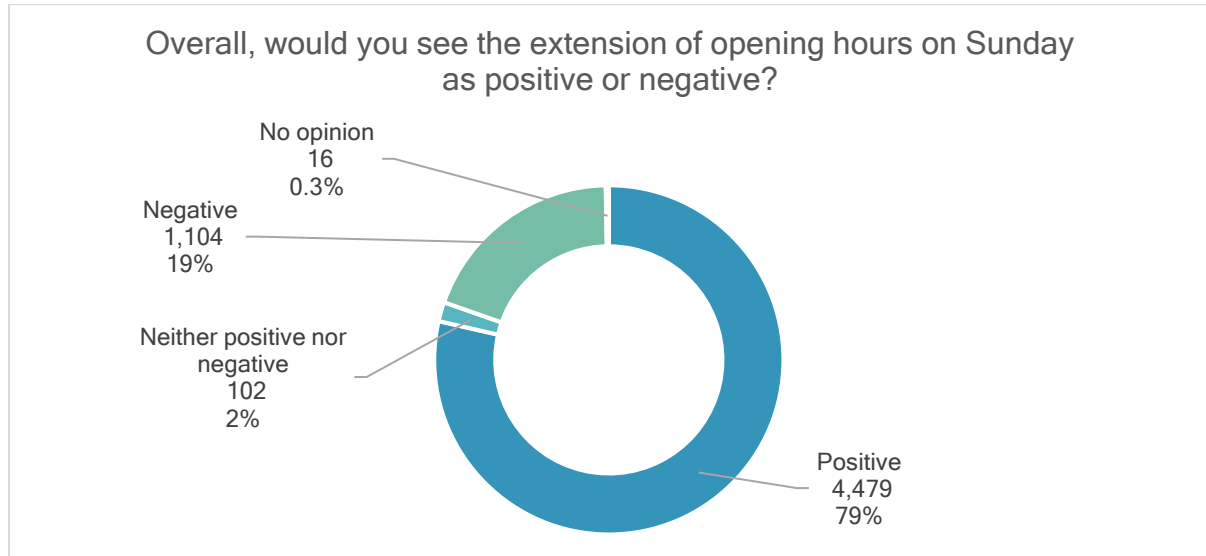


Furthermore, respondents were asked to indicate their ethnic group (n=5,423). Over 97% of respondents indicated that they were *white*.

Finally, respondents were also asked to indicate their marital status (n=5,512). The status with the largest number of responses was *married* with 51% of respondents. 28% indicated that they were *single*.

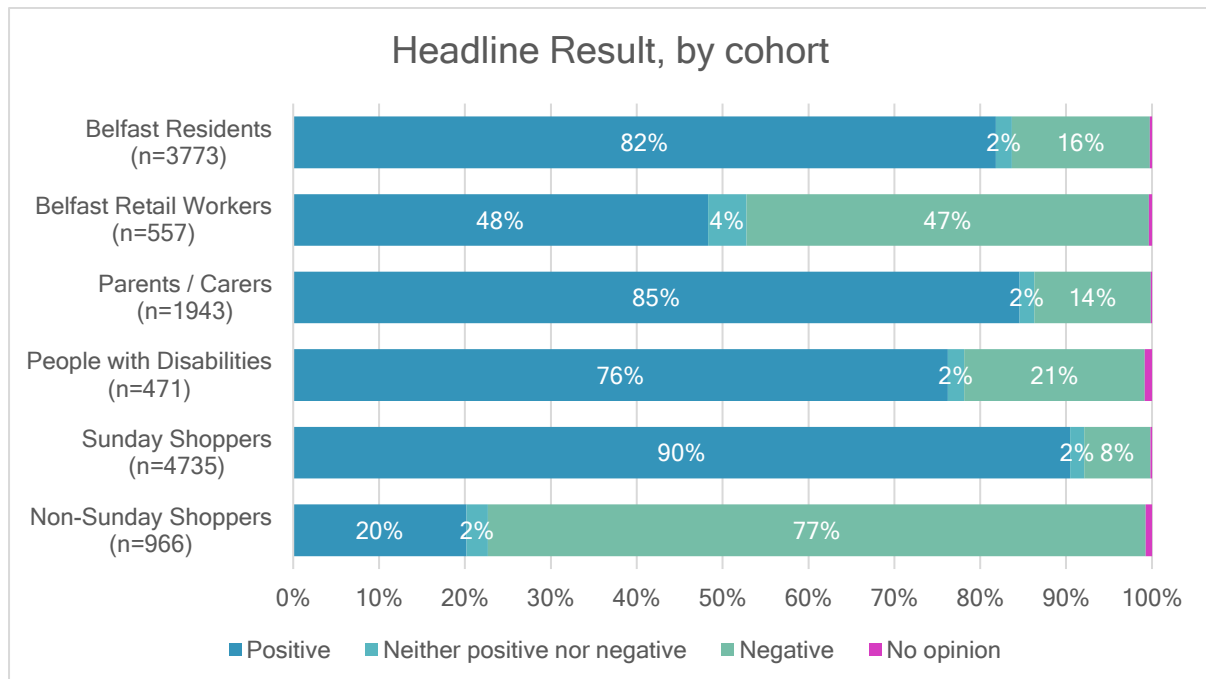
Headline Result – Positive or Negative (Individuals)

Overall, respondents expressed that the extension of Sunday opening hours would be *positive*, with almost 4 in 5 respondents (79%) expressing this view.

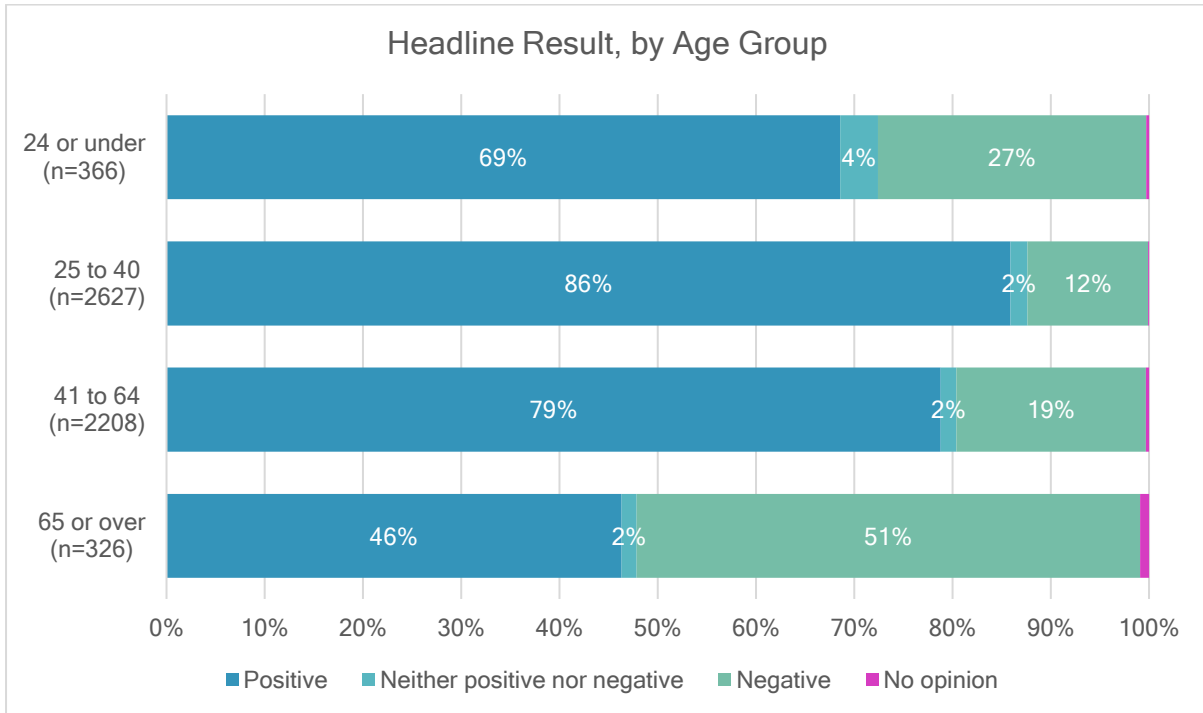


Disaggregation by specific cohorts of interest shows a range of perspectives:

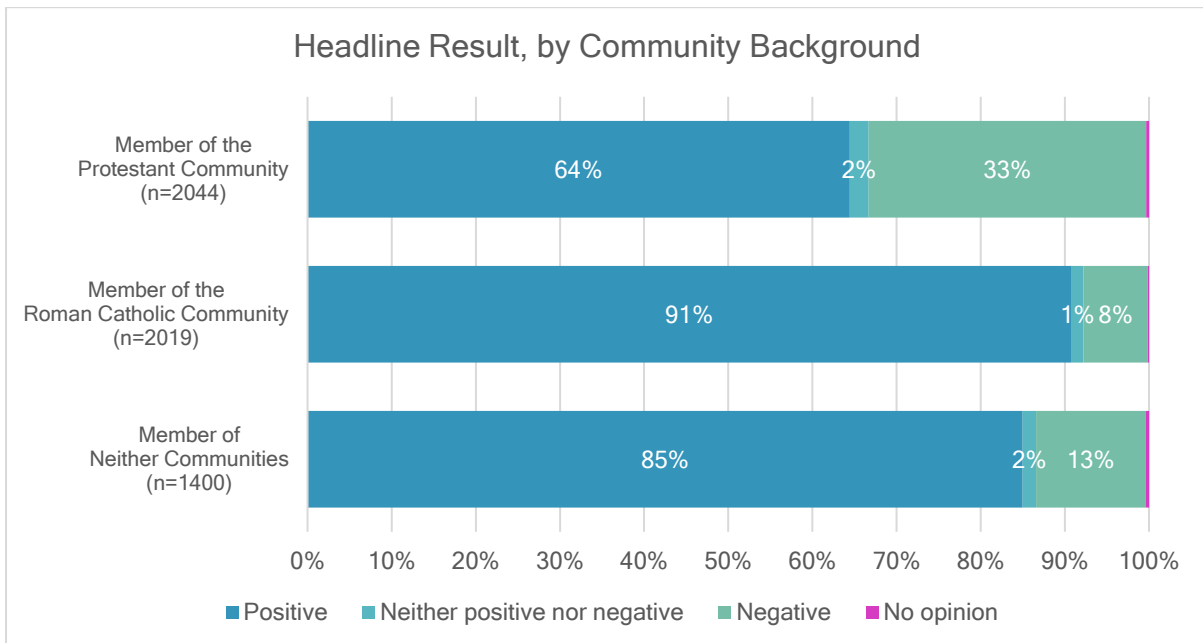
- Belfast residents are in favour (82%) of extending Sunday trading hours, by a slightly larger proportion than respondents overall
- Belfast retail workers are divided on the issue, with almost identical numbers of respondents expressing a *positive* (48%) or *negative* (47%) view.
- Those who stated they care for children (parents/carers) (85%) and people with disabilities (76%) are both heavily in favour of the proposal.
- There is a clear divide in views on the proposal based on whether the respondent currently shops on a Sunday. Those who currently shop on Sundays are 90% positive; whereas those who don't shop on Sundays are 77% negative.



Views on the proposal varied by age group. Those aged over 65 were the only cohort to express a majority negative opinion (51% negative) on extending Sunday trading hours. While it is notably that those aged 24 or under were less positive (69% positive) about the proposal than those aged 25 to 64 (86% positive).



Respondents from all three community backgrounds expressed majority positive opinions on the proposal. Those identifying as a member of the *Protestant community* were the least favourable, with 64% expressing a positive view compared with those from a *Roman Catholic background* who were 91% in favour.



support in-store retail recovery, reduce reliance on online shopping, and generate additional working hours for part-time staff and students.

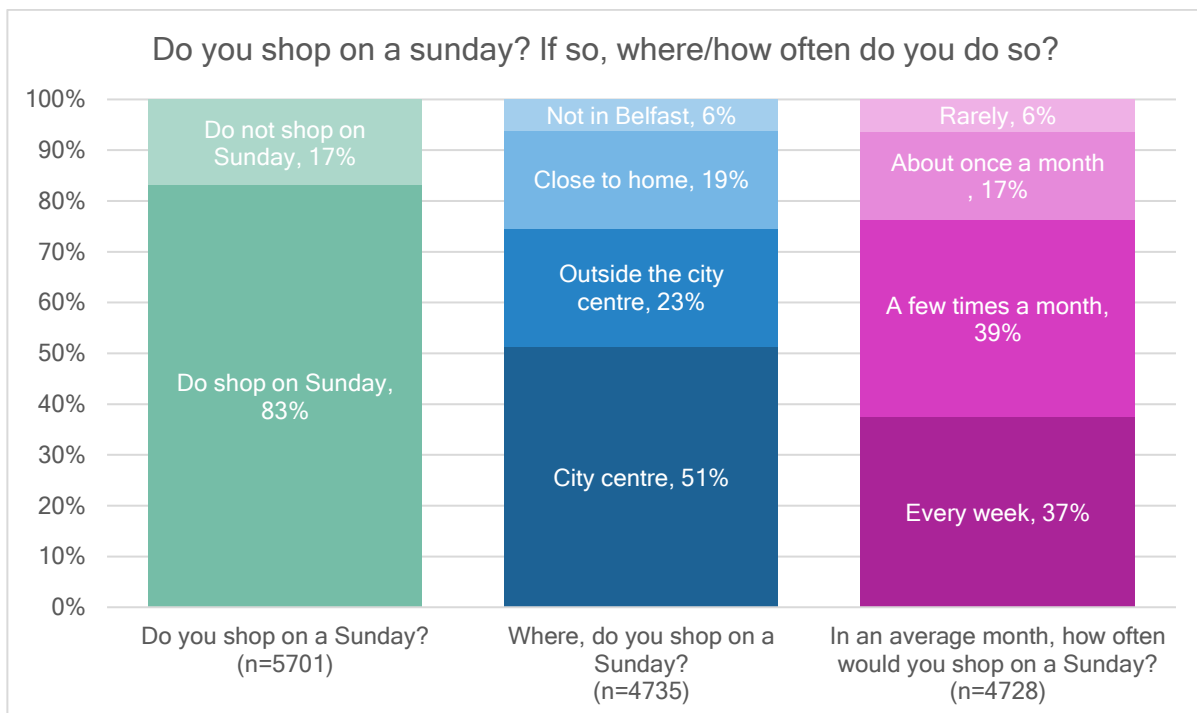
The theme of workers (4.5%) appeared across both supportive and opposing responses. While some respondents noted that extended hours could create more employment opportunities and greater flexibility in working patterns, others expressed concern regarding the potential negative impact on retail staff. These concerns were often linked to broader themes of work-life balance (2.0%) and family time (1.7%), with respondents highlighting the importance of maintaining a guaranteed period of rest and the potential for increased pressure to work additional hours.

Similarly, several respondents raised concerns grounded in religious or cultural considerations (2.2%), emphasising the significance of Sunday as a day of rest or worship. Others expressed concern that extended trading could result in Sunday becoming “like any other day,” with implications for community cohesion and personal wellbeing.

Additional themes included atmosphere (3.4%), with many respondents suggesting that extended hours could contribute to a more vibrant and active city centre environment, particularly during Sunday mornings, which were often described as currently “quiet” or “inactive.” References to other countries (2.4%) and historic context (2.7%) further indicate that respondents frequently framed their views in comparison to other cities and regions, with many describing current arrangements as outdated.

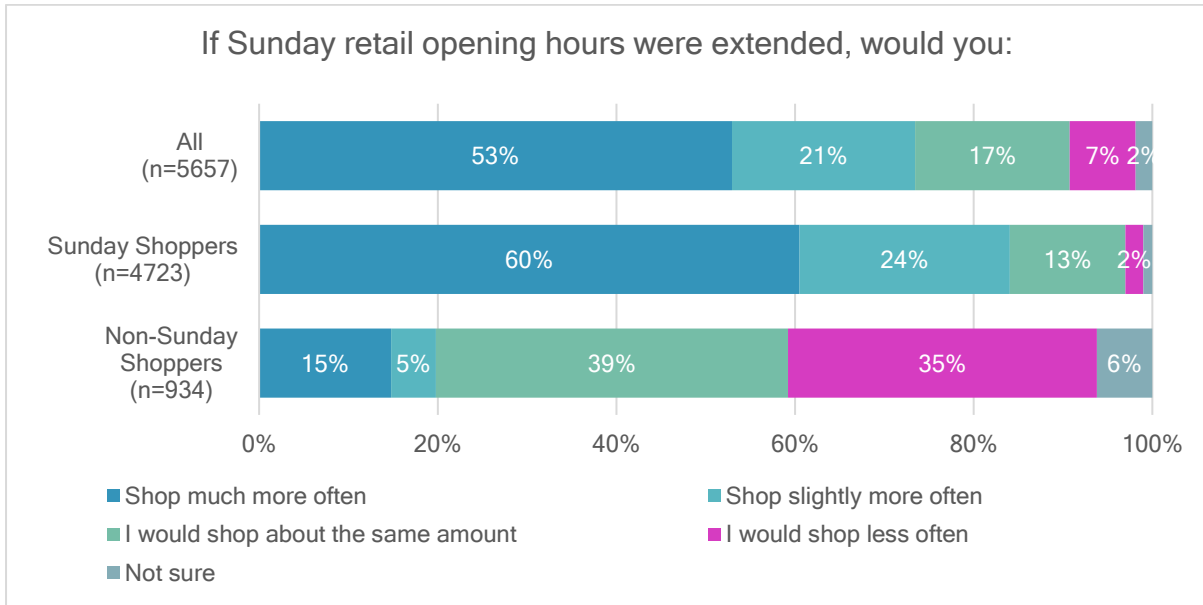
Current and Future Sunday Shopping Patterns

Respondents were asked where they most frequently shop on a Sunday, and how often they do so. There were 966 respondents (16.9%) who indicated that they do not currently shop on a Sunday. A slight majority (51%) of those who frequently shop on a Sunday indicated that they shop in Belfast City Centre.



Respondents were asked to indicate whether their shopping patterns would change if Sunday openings were extended. A majority of respondents (74%) indicated that they would *shop much more often* or *shop slightly more often*, if trading hours were extended. This proportion

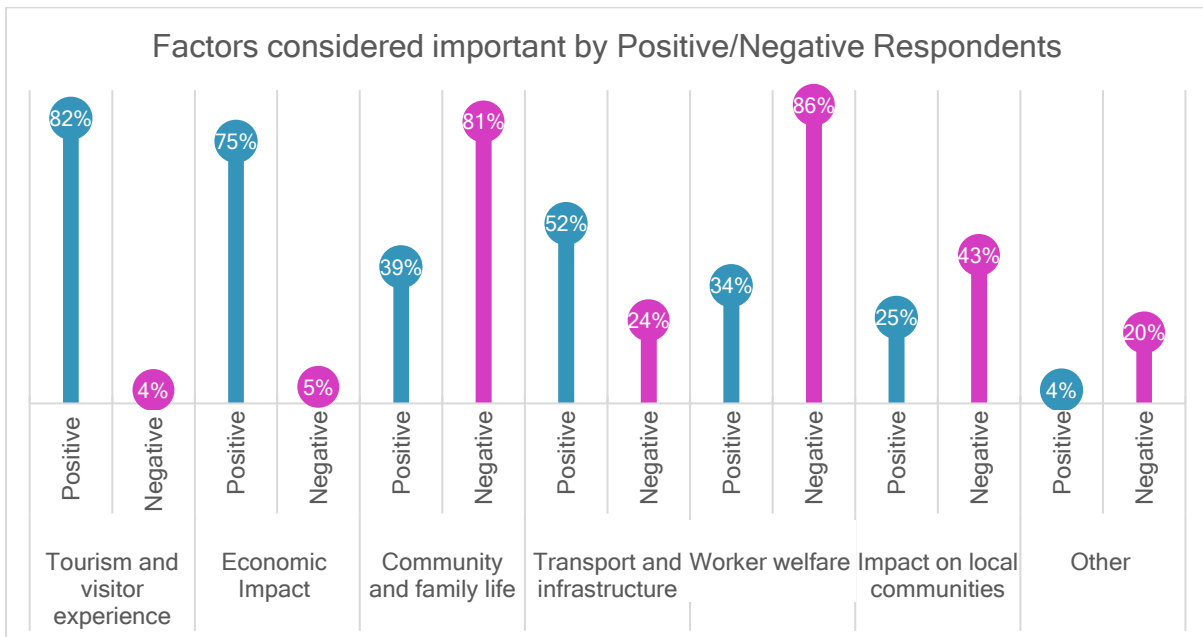
rises to 84% when considering those who indicate they currently shop on a Sunday. Conversely, 20% of those who don't currently shop on a Sunday stated they would shop *much more or slightly more often*.



What factors should be considered in relation to extending Sunday trading hours

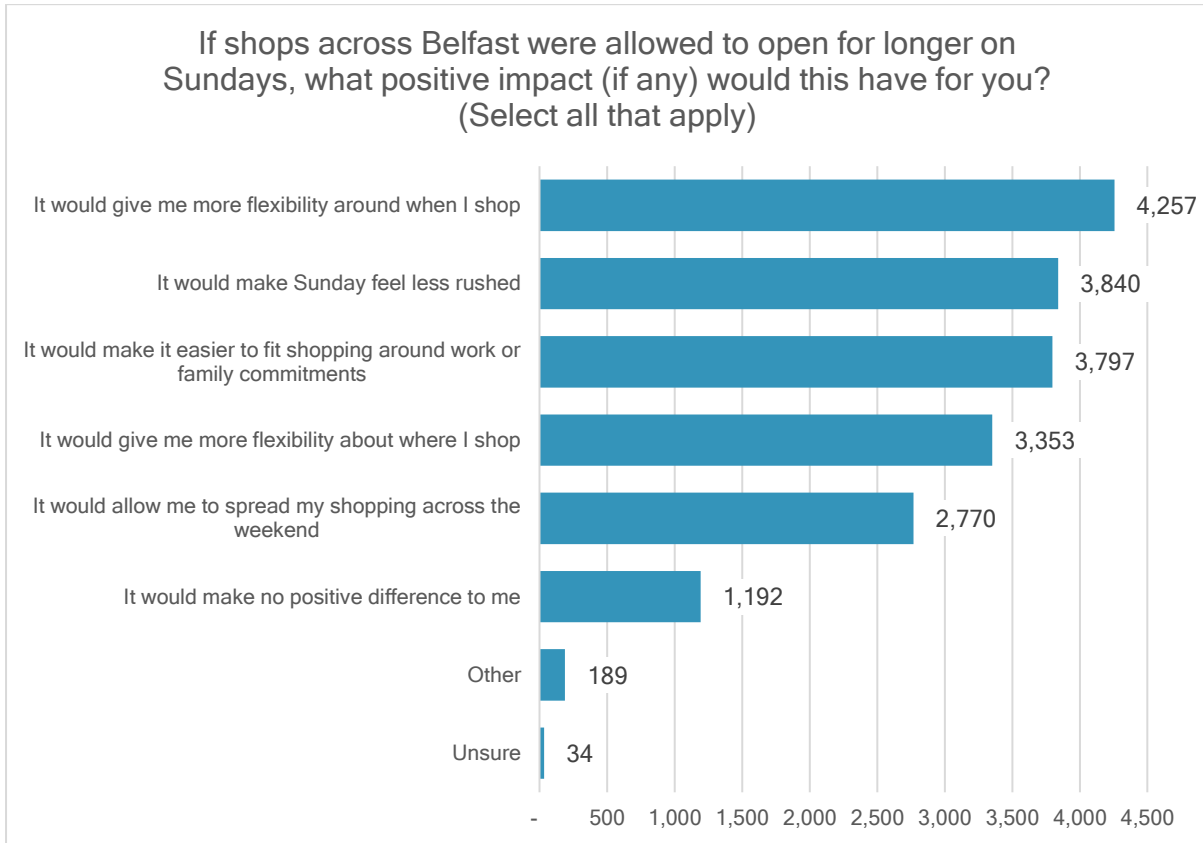
Respondents were asked to identify the factors that the council should consider most, when assessing the proposal to extend Sunday trading hours. They were allowed to pick more than one factor, and most respondents chose to do so. Responses varied depending on whether respondents saw the overall proposal as positive or negative.

Tourism and Visitor Experience (82%) and *Economic Impact* (75%) were the most selected factors by respondents who see the proposal as positive. Conversely, *Worker Welfare* (86%) and *Community and Family Life* (81%) were the most selected factors by respondents who view the proposal as negative.



Negative respondents were most likely to specify *Other* factors, with 20% doing so. Additional factors covered a range of issues including religious observance, comparison of Belfast to other cities, sentiment that existing arrangements were archaic and concern about rest for workers.

Positive and Negative Impacts for Individuals





What respondents had to say about the impact of extending Sunday trading hours.

A selection of responses from individuals who were positive about the proposal, are shown below.

Responses from Individuals who see Extended Sunday Openings as Positive

It would make life so much easier for me as a disabled person as I could take my time and not be having to rush which impacts on my chronic pain level

It would make Sundays more flexible and less rushed. I also used to work in retail, and Sunday was the worst as a full day of shopping was condensed into 5 hours. It was always ridiculously busy which made it more stressful for workers and consumers. Additionally, it is really inconvenient for people with life events or other places to attend on a Sunday. I can't recall how many times I've needed something last minute on a Sunday and been unable to get it because of trading hours. Business is being lost to the South or smaller market retailers that be open.

It would enable a better balance for working families as the traditional non-fri working pattern isn't the norm any more. There is additional stress placed on families to have everything done either on a Saturday or waiting until the 'rush' at 1pm. Having the ability to shop spread across a weekend makes sense. It also allows for parents to attend children's activities rather than 1 parent having to choose the shopping on a Saturday. Also given we live in a much more secular society, with also a variety of religions, Sunday doesn't equate to everyone's 'day of rest'.

It would boost tourism as if you go to other countries they rarely have restrictions on Sunday trading hours so tourists are coming over here for a weekend and are restricted to what they can do on a Sunday.

It makes Sunday less rushed and allows families to spend more time together later on in Sunday afternoon. It also stops a peak traffic and rush at 1pm

Tourism will benefit and there will be positive impact on the economy. It will be up to the shop to decide whether they would open- it shouldn't be mandatory.

Greater choice, potential for retail staff to have a wider choice of hours that could fit work-life balance better.

Extending the Sunday opening hours provides a great opportunity for the city to increase economic activity, improve individuals' freedom regarding when shopping can be carried out, and removed the stigma of Sunday opening restrictions being associated with religious or conservative regulations (this is often how people see them even if it is not the main motivation for retaining Sunday trading restrictions currently).

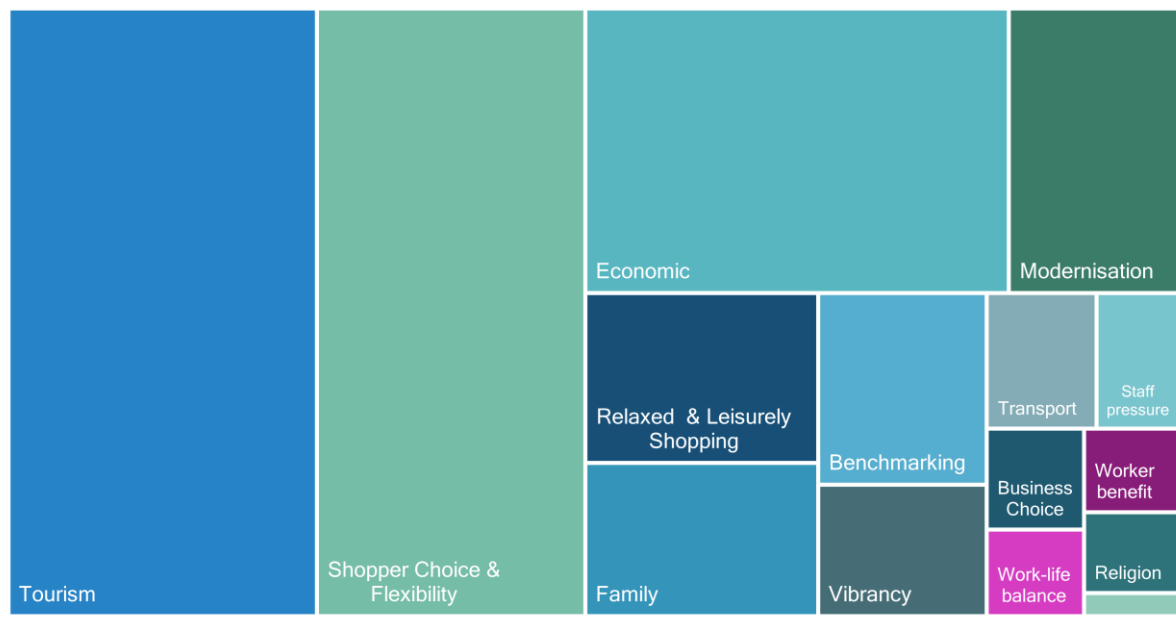
The fact that a capital city in the UK has such antiquated rules about when a shop can open, to serve the people that live here on one of the two days that the majority of people are off work is beyond belief in 2026

The shop owners should be able to pick their own opening hours on a Sunday

Better for tourism. Northern Ireland would fall more in line with UK

Extended Sunday trading hours will bring Belfast in line with other modern Cities and increase trading, footfall, and vibrancy around the city. As Belfast expands in the tourism market, extended opening hours will encourage more visitors to explore Belfast during the weekend and allow local businesses to benefit from increased footfall.

Qualitative analysis of key themes of positive respondents' comments



Individuals were invited to explain their answer, after they had stated that extended Sunday trading was either *positive* or *negative*. Qualitative responses to this open-ended question were subjected to tailored analysis to identify key themes, patterns and issues raised by respondents. These themes are presented in the above treemap chart. *Tourism*, *Shopper Choice & Flexibility*, *Economic impact*, *Modernisation* and *Relaxed & Leisurely Shopping* were the top 5 themes for respondents who seen the extension of Sunday trading as positive. There were also a considerable number of responses that referenced the positive impact *on family life*, *benchmarking with other cities/ countries* and *likely increase to footfall and city vibrancy*.

A selection of responses from individuals who saw the proposal as negative are highlighted in the table below.

Responses from Individuals who see Extended Sunday Openings as Negative

Would have a negative impact on smaller business. Would have a negative impact on retail staff work life balance.

This takes our province further from God and moral values. It doesn't take too much intelligence to figure out how rapidly moral standards are slipping and even more extended opening of businesses would only further deepen the wound ... families need family time for bonding not split up by some, particularly parents working ... it surely sets the precedent for children to copy very poor examples .. what's bred in the bones eventually manifests in the flesh!

The current Sunday trading laws are archaic and extremist. Businesses should be allowed to trade when they like, people should be allowed to shop and work when they like

Staff would get no down time. Everyone should have the one day of rest in week

The current arrangement is a holdover from another era. Giving shops the option of opening earlier on Sundays benefits all, potentially-- though no one should be required to work on Sunday morning or at any time if to do so would prevent them from practicing their faith.

5 hours is plenty of time to shop. Workers are burnt out as it is.

Added trading hours will lead to increased mental health issues, anxiety and exhaustion for the workforce - it will also add pressure in families and even help in the break down of the family unit. The Sabbath is a day for worship -that opportunity ought not to be taken away from families and for individuals.

It will make Sunday just like any other day and not special the way it currently is

I am a retail worker and I find this idea very unfair. Us retail workers work every day except 2 days of the year, most of us work long hours with little appreciation from customers and we work everyday public holiday. A Sunday is the only day that these working hours are slightly lessened for us and I think that extending opening hours on a sunday would be very negative for retail staff.

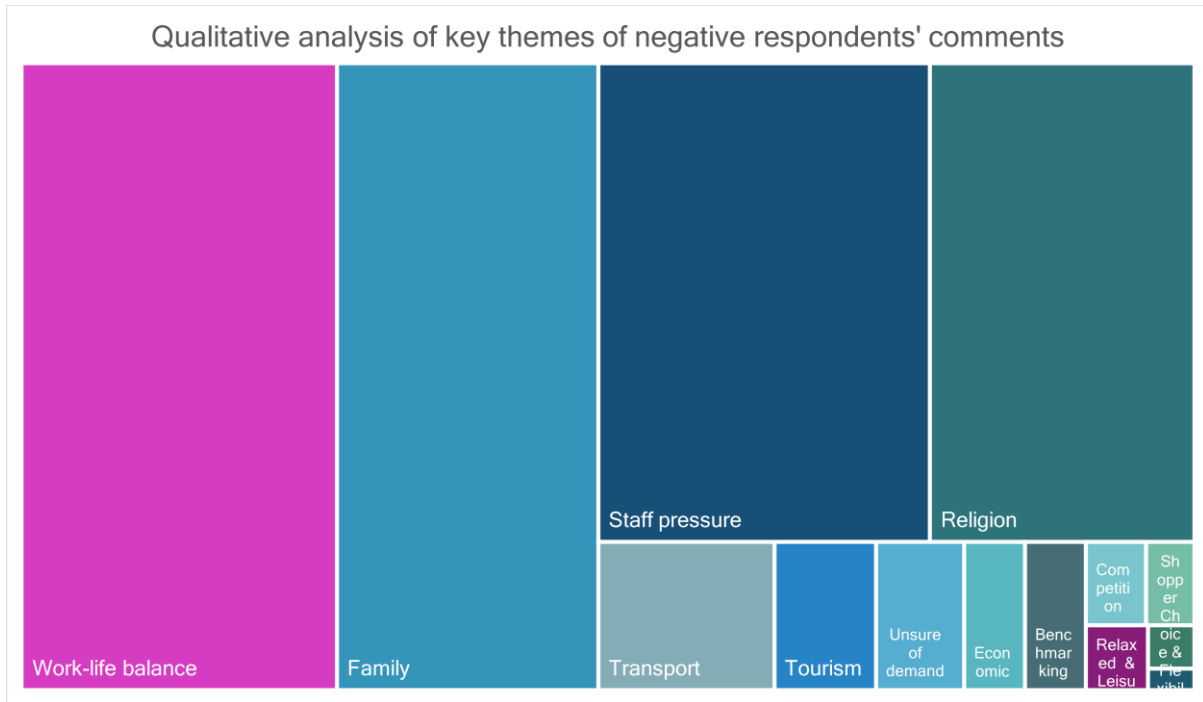
I hate the line of how backward this makes NI. We're holidaying in Europe this summer and in France, Italy, Austria and Germany where we're going I have to plan carefully for Sunday arrivals as supermarkets and general retail is not open. It's perfectly normal and we still open for 5 hours in the pm. We need to direct tourists to things that are open on Sunday am, St George's market, Titanic, local coffee shops etc. Belfast isn't London or Paris, it doesn't need 24/7 buzz. It's perfectly normal to have things closed all day on Sunday so the fact our shops open for five hours is plenty.

It would make Sunday like any other day of the week, whereas we need one day in seven to rest and keep special.

It would negatively effect (sic) my work life balance.

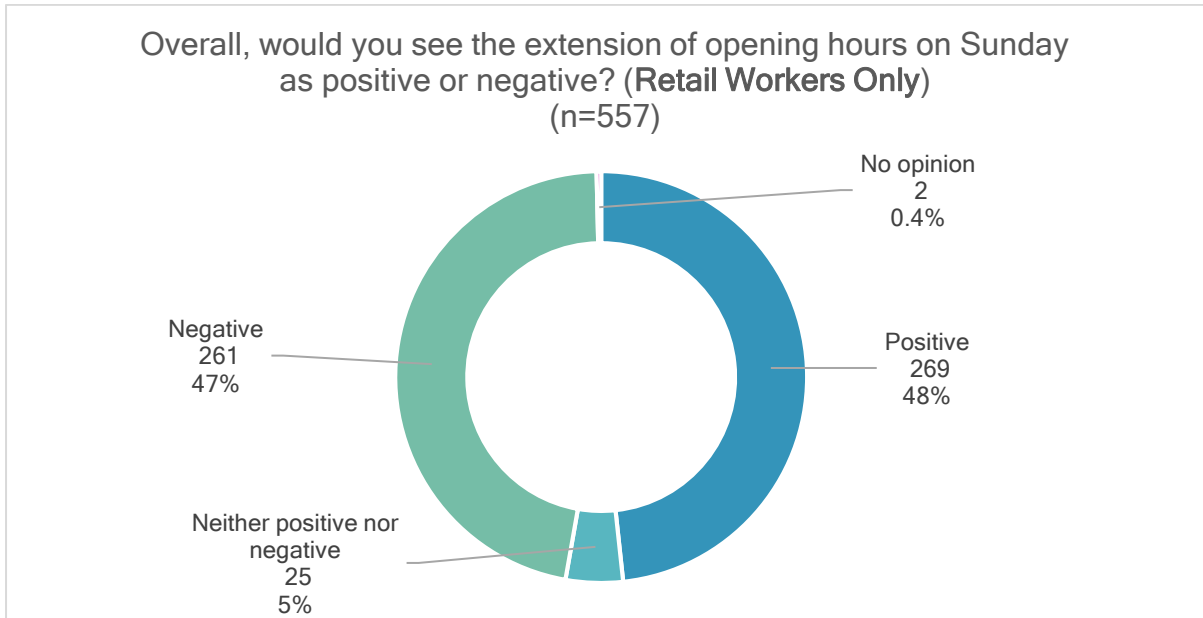
I just think there's no need for it. I think that people's social life is already constrained by a hard work life balance & opening on Sunday will make it worse, especially for young people.

The below treemap chart presents the main themes and issues raised by respondents following a qualitative analysis of the answers provided by individuals who see the extension of Sunday opening hours as *negative*. *Work-life balance, Family life, Staff pressure, Religion and Transport challenges* were the top 5 themes. It is noteworthy that '*Family life*' was raised by both positive and negative respondents perhaps identifying the impact on shoppers and workers respectively.

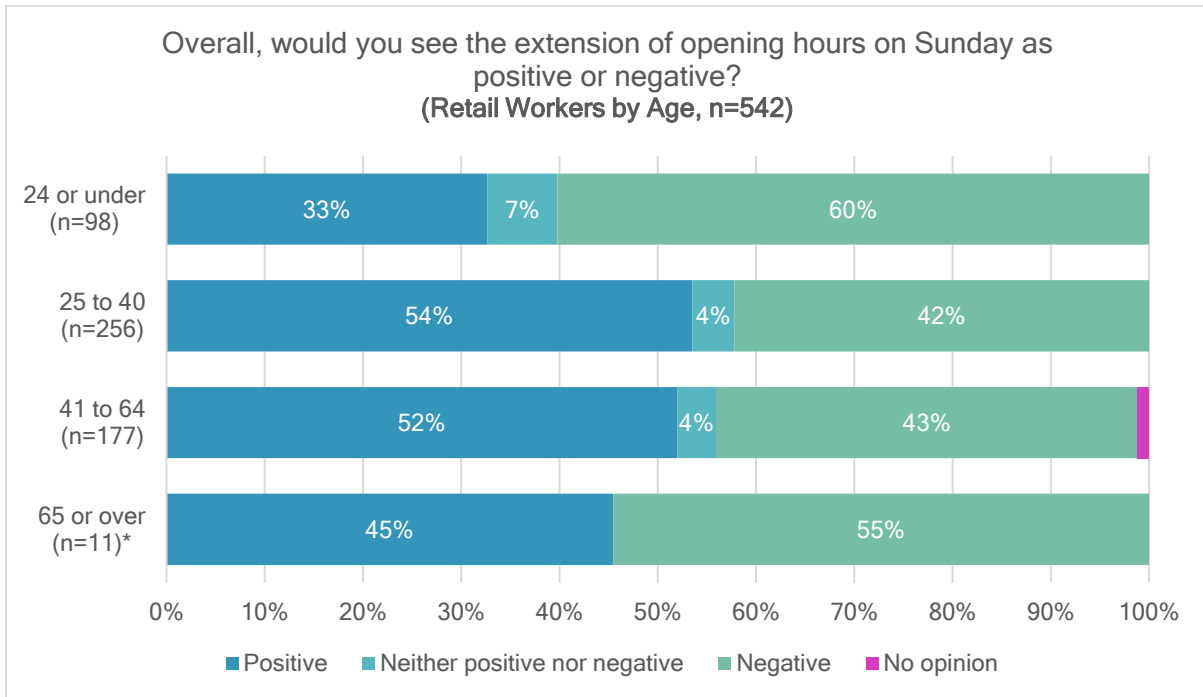


Retail workers' view on extending Sunday trading hours

There were 557 responses from Belfast retail workers expressing their views on extending Sunday Trading opening hours. An almost equal proportion of retail workers reported the extension of opening hours on Sunday as positive (48%) as those who reported it as negative (47%).

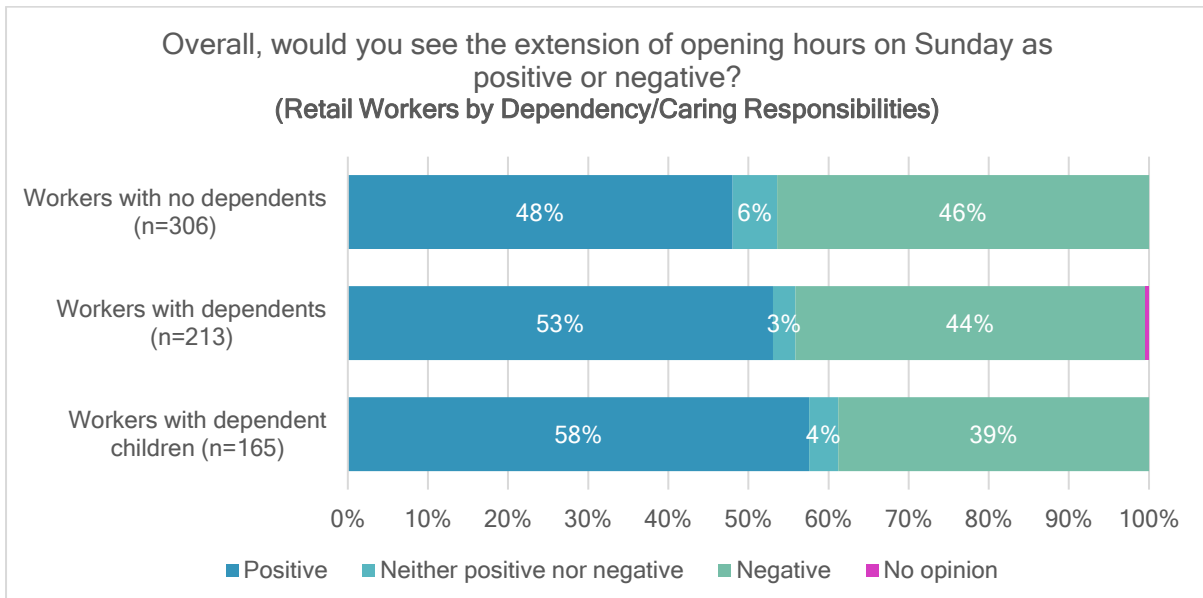


Views on the proposal varied by age. Younger workers (aged 24 or below) expressed a majority negative opinion on the proposal, while workers aged from 25 to 64 were in favour. Those aged over 65* were also against the proposal.

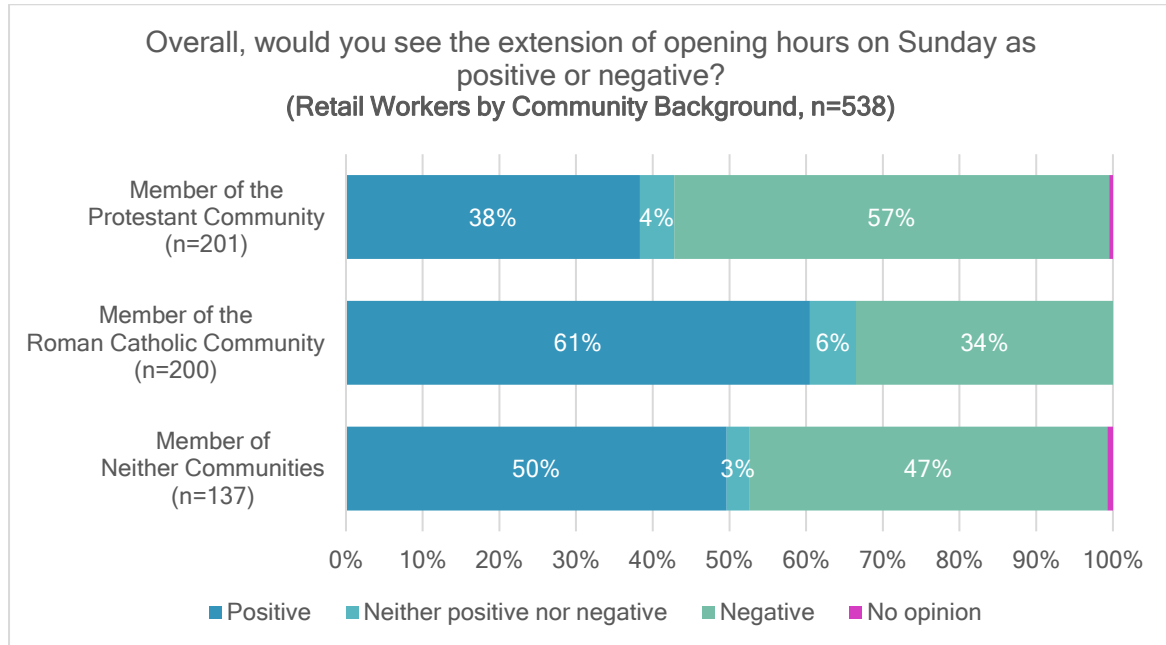


* Note: Small sample size

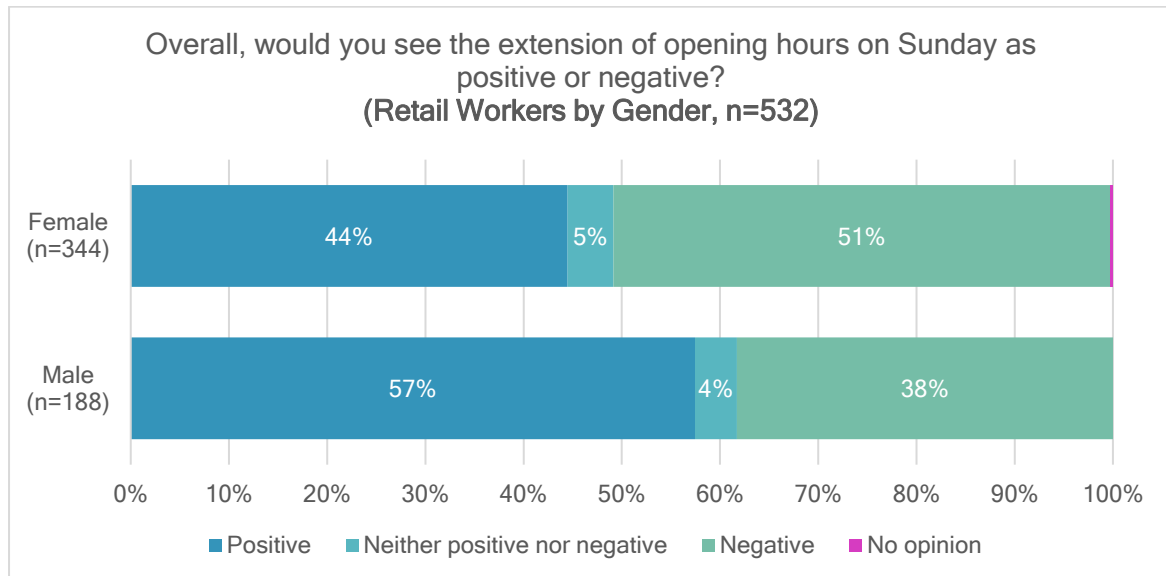
The majority of respondents who work in retail indicated that they have *no dependants or caring responsibilities* (306 responses). This cohort of workers expressed views roughly in line with that of all workers. *Workers with dependents*, and those who indicated they had *caring responsibilities for children* were both more in favour of the proposal, with 53% and 58% of respondents, respectively indicating a positive view.



There was significant variance between workers of different community backgrounds, with a majority of retail workers from a *Protestant community background* expressing a negative view of the proposal (57%). Workers from a *Roman Catholic community background* were the most in favour with 61% stating a positive opinion. Workers identifying as from *neither community background* had a more mixed view.

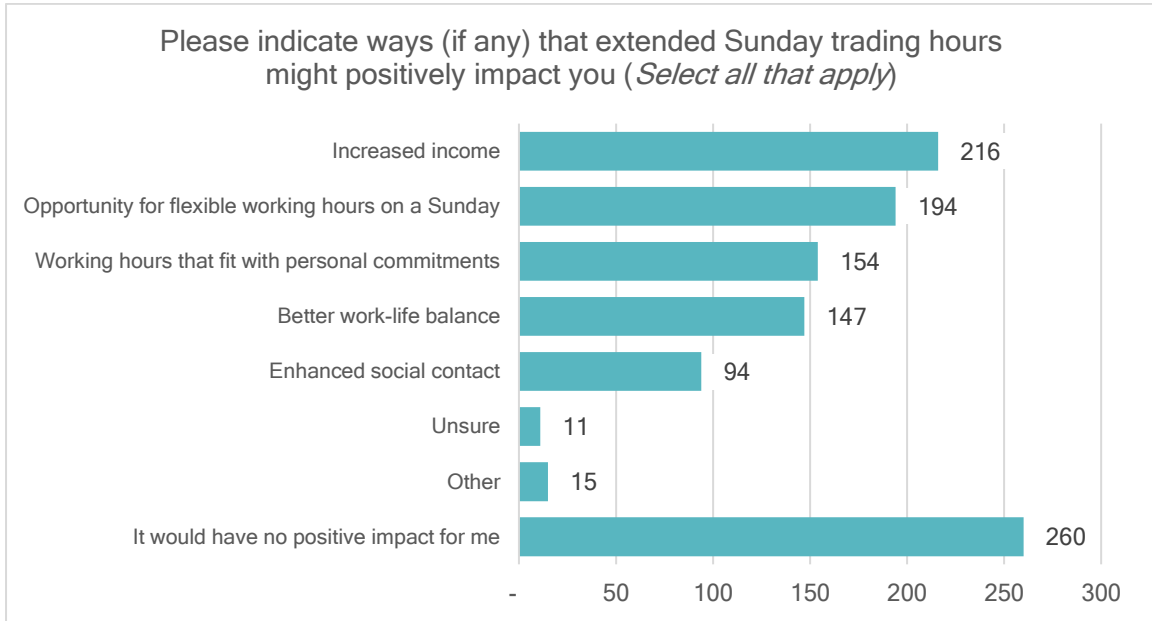


There was divergence in the views of *Male and Female* workers who responded to the consultation, with female workers showing a very slight majority against the proposal, whereas male workers were by a sizeable margin in favour of the proposal.

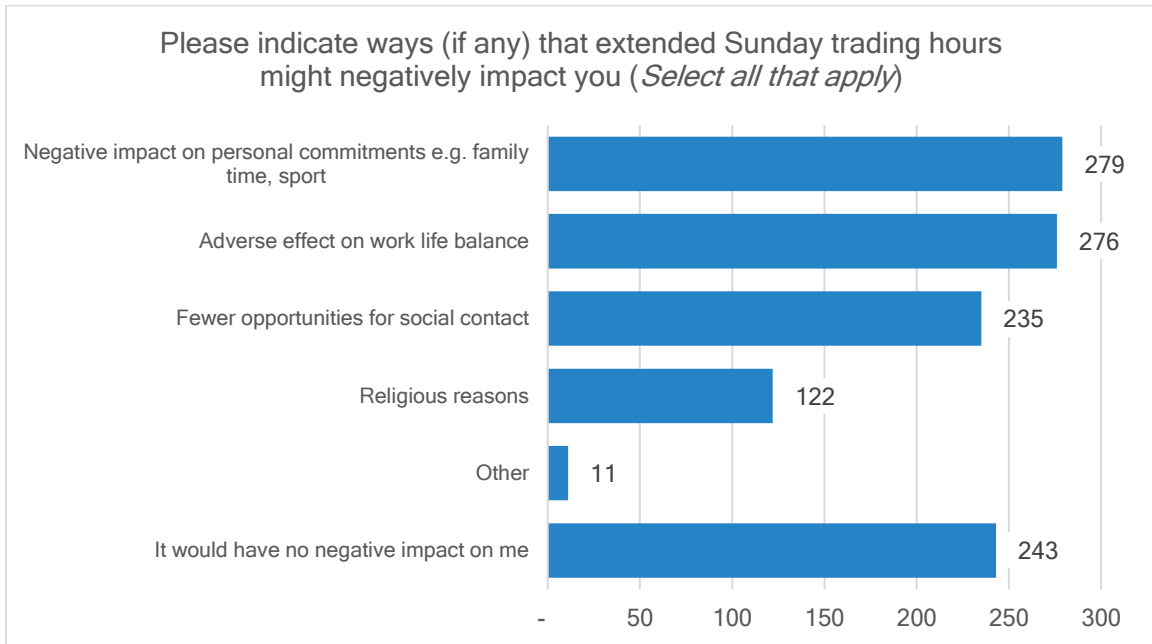


Perceived Impacts of Sunday Opening on Workers

Retail workers were provided with a list of potential positive and negative impacts and asked to identify any they thought would apply to them. Firstly, on positive impacts, 216 respondents (39%) thought they could *increase their income* and 194 (35%) thought it could *provide opportunity for flexible working hours* on a Sunday. 260 respondents (47%) thought it would have *no positive impact*.



On the other hand, regarding negative impacts, 279 respondents (50%) thought the proposal would have a *negative impact on personal commitments*. In addition, 276 (50%) thought it would have an *adverse effect on work-life balance*. On the contrary, 243 thought it would have *no negative impact*.



What retail workers had to say about the impact of extending Sunday trading hours

A selection of responses from workers who were positive about the proposal, are shown below.

Responses from Workers who see Extended Sunday Openings as Positive
<i>"I work in a gift shop in town, and it has such a bad impact on the business on a Sunday as it's a ghost town until 1pm so opening the shops earlier as we open at 9am it would bring a lot more footfall"</i>
<i>"It would allow me to work more hours, and I can easily get my child minded on the weekend but not the weekdays so it would benefit me greatly"</i>
<i>"It will make Sunday less of a rush day, it will give more time to do things with the family, rather than having to wait to shops open, we can get the shops out of the way early, it means Sunday afternoons can be left for family activities/meals etc. It will help businesses generate more income to make them more sustainable in climates when it is hard to make a profit, it will increase opportunity for new shifts, new employment and more hours to staff."</i>
<i>"Working Monday to Friday limits my ability to shop. I usually have to be very busy on a Saturday to get everything done whereas if it were on a Sunday to have wider availability on shops opening hours, I would have more freedom "</i>
<i>"We have an ever-increasing reliance on tourism. Sunday opening has nothing to do with protecting workers rights; it is a religious artifact that we need to leave behind. "</i>
<i>"There are a lot of tourists around Belfast on a Sunday, and they would avail from earlier hours. As a retail worker I would love to work a Sunday morning and take a weekend evening off instead to be with my kids after school. It would also be great to be able to go to Tesco etc on a Sunday morning when I'm off."</i>
<i>"People will [have] greater flexibility, Sunday shopping hours are very limited currently and it is difficult for those who are travelling from beyond Belfast as for a lot of people a Sunday may be the only day that suits them to travel to Belfast and what for? Only a few hours in the shops. Bottom line is that it needs to be increased as it will encourage spending and visiting and enable us to have more flexibility of when we shop on a Sunday."</i>
<i>"It would allow tourists to go shopping on Sunday mornings, I work in grand central hotel and everyone who comes wants to shop on Sundays but simply can't! They think it's ridiculous and i agree too - needs to be looked at."</i>
<i>"Life should not stop on a Sunday, if an individual worker does not want to work on Sundays for religious reasons that is their right however people are not that focused on religion anymore and would actually like to work on a Sunday. For myself I would rather work a Sunday than any other day."</i>
<i>"More options, better flexibility. City centre can be like a ghost town in mornings with tourists nowhere to go or young families. Embarrassed as a city that's shut!"</i>

A selection of responses from workers who saw the proposal as negative are highlighted in the table below.

Responses from Workers who see Extended Sunday Openings as Negative
<i>"Staff get burn out doing extra hours, and decide to look for a new role, which doesn't have these punishing hours. Then colleagues are left to work even harder till a replacement is found and trained up. Maybe not so bad for retailers where staff only work a few hours, but please remember there are retailers where staff already work full time"</i>
<i>"I work 45 hours a week in retail and often have to do more as I am a manager, as it stands working a Sunday for me means 10am-7pm. We do not open till 1pm which allows time for a reset of the store after the weekend. If we opened earlier my shift may have to start at 7am, which is what time I start the rest of the week, taking away the only lie in and time with my partner in the morning I get, and I know many other people working in retail would be in the same boat"</i>
<i>"I have no desire to work longer Sunday hours. The shorter day is all the respite I get from working the whole weekend, every weekend."</i>
<i>"I would have less time with my family who I see little enough of due to late night openings. I already can't book holidays during times schools are off to be with my kids as it doesn't fit "the needs of the business". And now you want to take away the few hours that I do have to spend with them so the bosses can make big money while the rest of us struggle on minimum wage?"</i>
<i>"It would be negative! Little enough time with my family, less Saturday nights out, more tax being paid & National Insurance, a day missed when the whole family can sit down & share a Sunday roast. Many families rush around on Saturdays doing weekly shop, being a taxi driver for their kids & getting caught up on housework. With new employment laws arriving in April many shops won't be able to afford to employ more staff!! "</i>
<i>"I am a retail worker, and I find this idea very unfair. Us retail workers work every day except 2 days of the year, most of us work long hours with little appreciation from customers and we work everyday public holiday. A Sunday is the only day that these working hours are slightly lessened for us, and I think that extending opening hours on a Sunday would be very negative for retail staff. "</i>
<i>"I feel for workers welfare and as a practicing religious person, shorter hours of 1-6 are beneficial to allow those who work to be able to attend other commitments over the weekend, especially as I work most Saturdays and I am based in community healthcare. I still have a very busy and challenging workday despite these shortened hours"</i>
<i>"I think yes it would create more profits but why change something that has worked so well. Everyone deserves a shorter shift and fair working hours. It's unfair to all workers and business as it creates more pressure on scheduling. As well as workers not being able to use public transport as there isn't enough to accommodate the difference in hours"</i>
<i>"It is unfair to ask those in a Christian country to work on a Sunday morning. Bringing retail staff in earlier on a Sunday decreases their work life balance. Retail staff are overworked and underpaid as it is. I do think if businesses wish to open earlier such as small, local companies then they should be allowed to do so, but it is unfair to change the entire dynamic of a Sunday for the sake of tourists."</i>
<i>"Keep one morning a week for family and social cohesion. The shops are open long enough. Online shopping is already available day and night!"</i>

Where should extended Sunday Openings apply?

Respondents were asked where they thought the holiday resort designation should apply. A large majority of respondents thought that should the designation occur, it should apply *across the district*, rather than solely for the city centre.

limiting advantages to the city centre. Respondents also expressed an appetite for extension of Sunday opening hours across Northern Ireland (5.9%). Whilst this is beyond the scope of this report, the results highlight the desire for a unified approach to Sunday trading which supports retailers across the region.

Many respondents indicated that extending trading hours across the wider council area would also support greater flexibility and convenience in daily routines, particularly enabling individuals to better manage their time and plan activities. This was reflected in recurring references to time efficiency, convenience, and proximity to home, with respondents highlighting the benefits of being able to shop locally rather than travel into the city centre. These views were frequently linked to concerns about transport challenges, including limitations in Sunday public transport, which were cited as a barrier to accessing the city centre.

There was also a perception that a wider geographic approach would contribute to increased vibrancy across neighbourhoods, rather than concentrating activity solely in the city centre. Respondents suggested that this could help to distribute footfall more evenly and reduce congestion associated with current opening patterns. At the same time, tourism was identified as an important consideration, with some participants highlighting the potential for a stronger and more consistent Sunday offer to enhance the city's appeal to visitors. Many participants also noted that several tourist attractions and retail offerings are outside of the city centre boundary and it would not be logical to exclude access to these based on the geography of the holiday designation zoning.

In other findings, respondents emphasised the importance of maintaining choice and flexibility for businesses, with options for business featuring prominently in responses. Many supported a model whereby individual retailers could determine whether to extend their opening hours, reflecting a preference for a voluntary rather than mandatory approach which is consistent with legislation around Sunday trading.

Several concerns were also raised. Some respondents highlighted the potential risk of displacement of economic activity, noting that extended trading could redistribute rather than increase overall footfall and spend. There were also concerns that benefits may disproportionately favour larger or national retailers, with potential implications for smaller, independent businesses and local shopping areas.

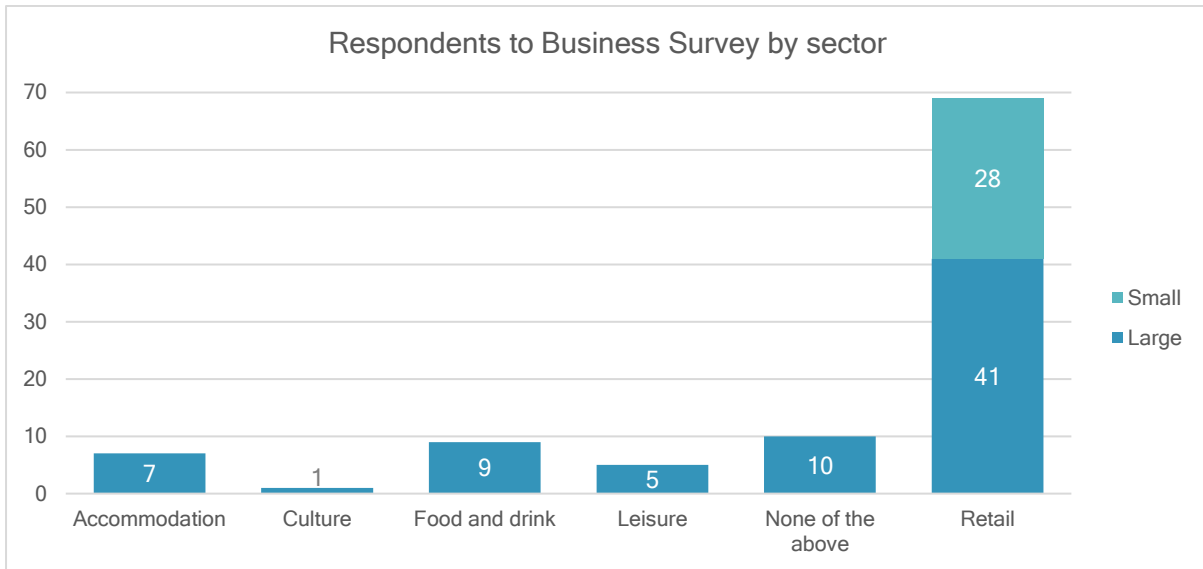
In terms of the broader Sunday offering, while existing attractions such as St George's Market were recognised as important contributors to footfall, respondents noted that the current early Sunday provision remains limited. Several participants suggested that a more diverse and coordinated offer which combine retail, hospitality and cultural activity would be required to meet expectations, particularly for visitors and tourists.

atmosphere/vibrancy (10.0%) and *options to choose* (9.3%). Economic considerations were also prominent, with *economic impact* and *tourism* referenced widely. Social considerations were also evident, with *workers' rights*, *family life* and *displacement* of activity from local areas to city centre frequently raised. It should be noted that respondents often referenced multiple themes within a single response.

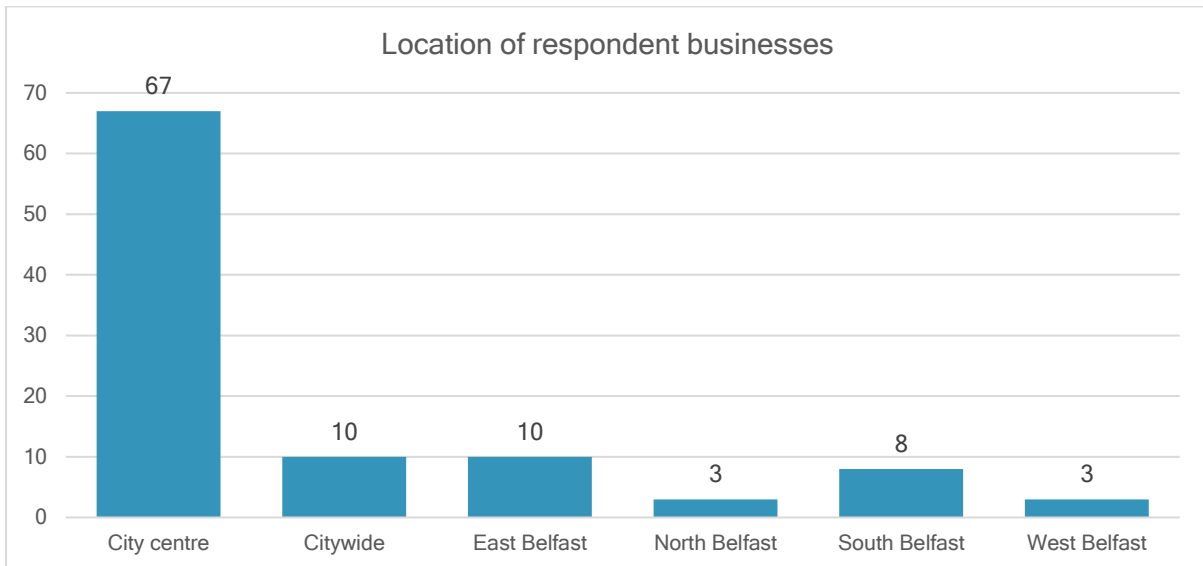
Business Survey Results

Who Responded?

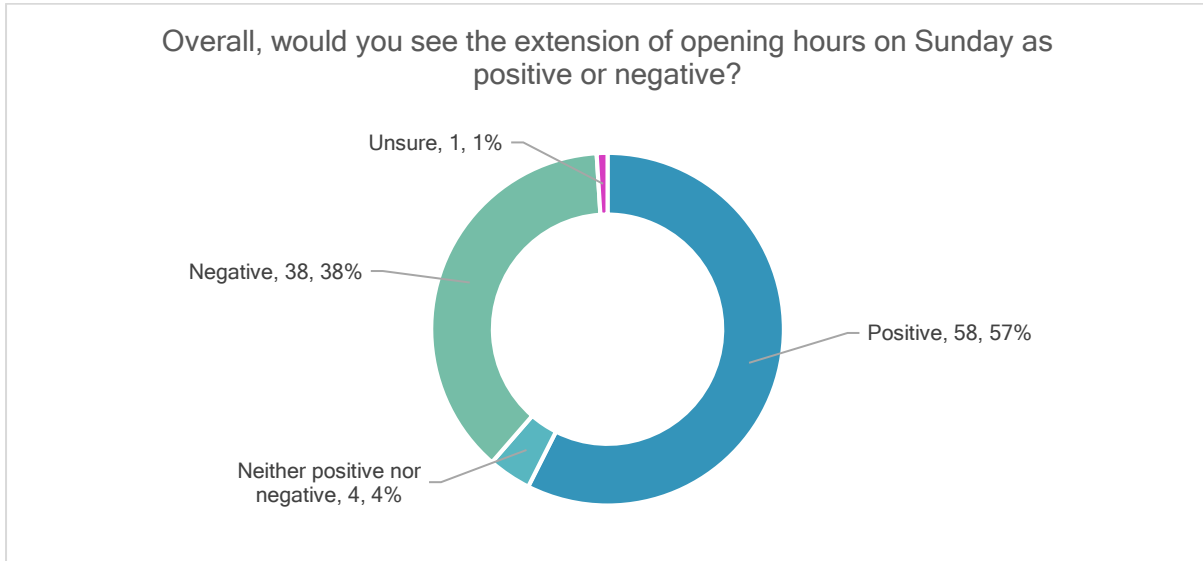
There were 101 responses to the business survey. Over two-thirds (68%) of the responding businesses were from the *retail sector*, including 41 large retailers and 28 smaller retailers.



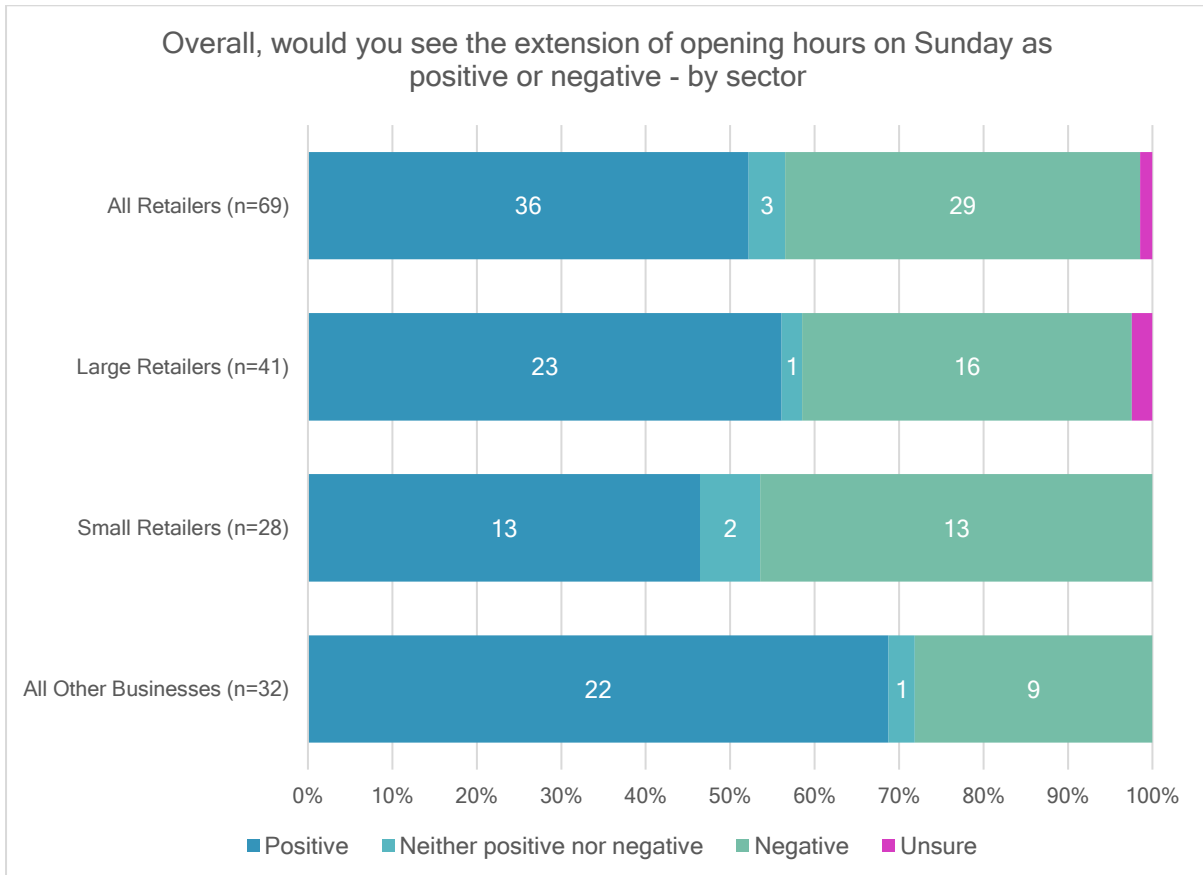
The majority (66%) of responding businesses were located in the city centre. Responses were received from businesses located in all areas of the city.

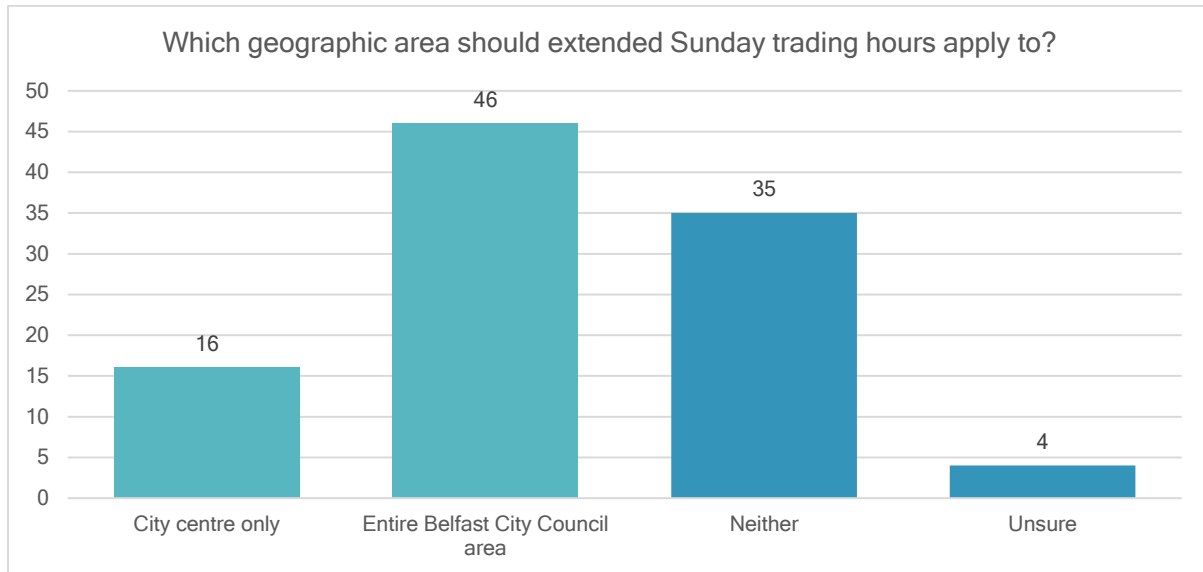


Headline Result – Positive or Negative (Businesses)



A majority of responding businesses (57%) reported the extension of Sunday opening hours as *positive*. Most retailers (53%) also seen the move as positive - this included a majority of larger retailers (23 of 41 responding businesses). There was an equal number of smaller retailers who reported the move as positive (13 of 28 responding businesses) as there was negative (13).



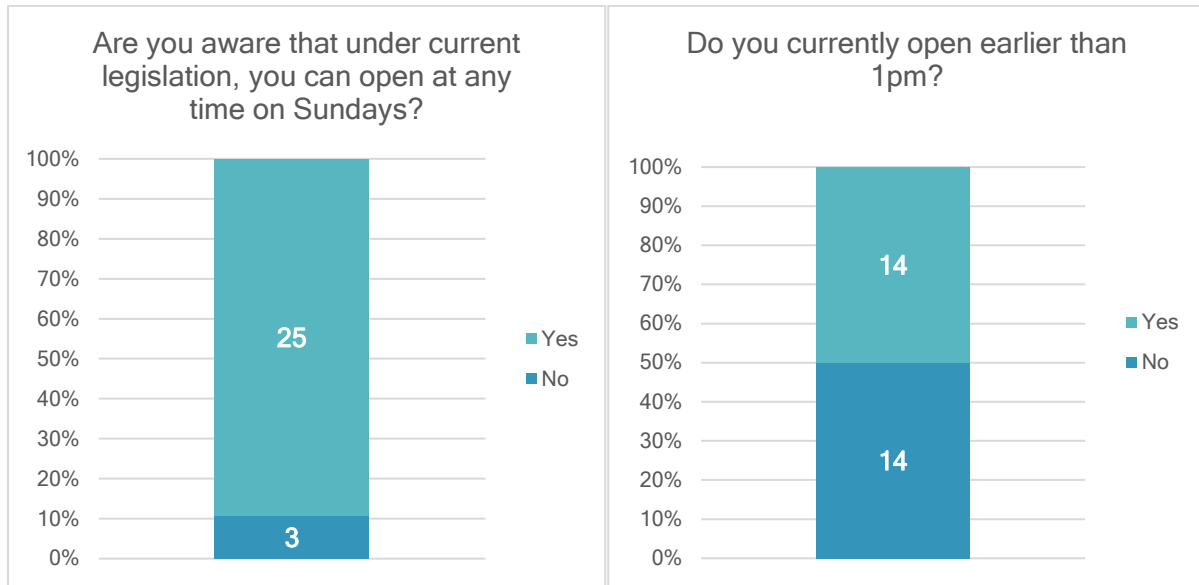


Businesses were asked which geographic area extended Sunday trading hours should apply to. The entire Belfast City Council area was the most frequent option of responding businesses (46). Businesses were asked to explain their answer and a selection of responses are listed below:

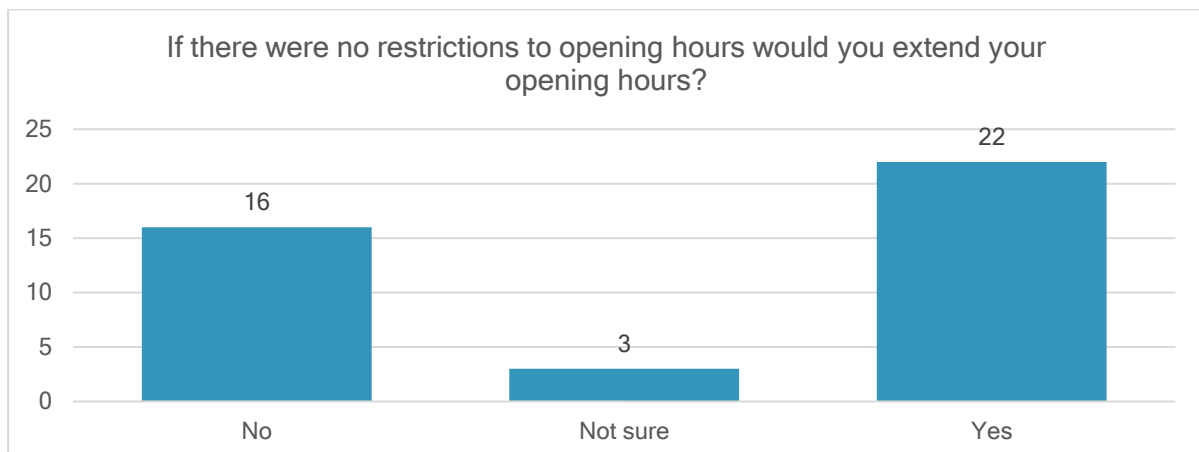
- *“Having one rule for city centre and another for surrounding areas seems unnecessary and could be confusing to local patrons and tourists who increasingly stay in and visit wider areas of the city and surrounding countryside.”*
- *“We have premises in North, East, South, West and city centre.”*
- *“There should be a unified approach across all areas of Northern Ireland not just Belfast”*
- *“I feel to align with the rest of Europe with retail opening hours is the way forward.”*
- *“Visitors want to explore whole city”*
- *“As this is related to holiday resort status, the city centre is where the highest % of tourists will be, it is logical, as with other towns throughout NI who have had their councils designate them HRS.”*
- *“Trial this area [city centre] first and measure impact”*

The Views of Retailers

There were 69 responses to the Business Survey from the retail sector, including 41 from large retailers and 28 from smaller retailers. Depending on the organisation’s size, they were presented with a series of routed questions based on their awareness of the legislation, current processes and impact of any policy change.



Most smaller retailers (25 of 28 respondents) were aware that the current legislation, currently affords them the opportunity to open at any time on Sunday without restrictions. Half of all responding small retailers reported that they *currently open before 1pm*. Of the 14 retailers who don't open earlier, 4 reported that they *would consider opening before 1pm* if larger retailers were also allowed to open earlier on Sundays. The remaining 10 stated that they would *not consider opening*.



Larger retailers were informed that retail businesses with a floor space exceeding 280 square meters cannot open outside of 1pm-6pm on a Sunday. They were questioned whether they would extend their opening hours if there were no restrictions. Half of respondents (22 of 41) reported that they would open, 16 reported that they would not open and 3 were unsure. Availability of staff and additional utility costs were the most popular reasons reported by businesses who stated they would not open. Other reasons included *colleagues need down time, staff enjoy the shorter shift, low footfall and prefer that the community rests*.

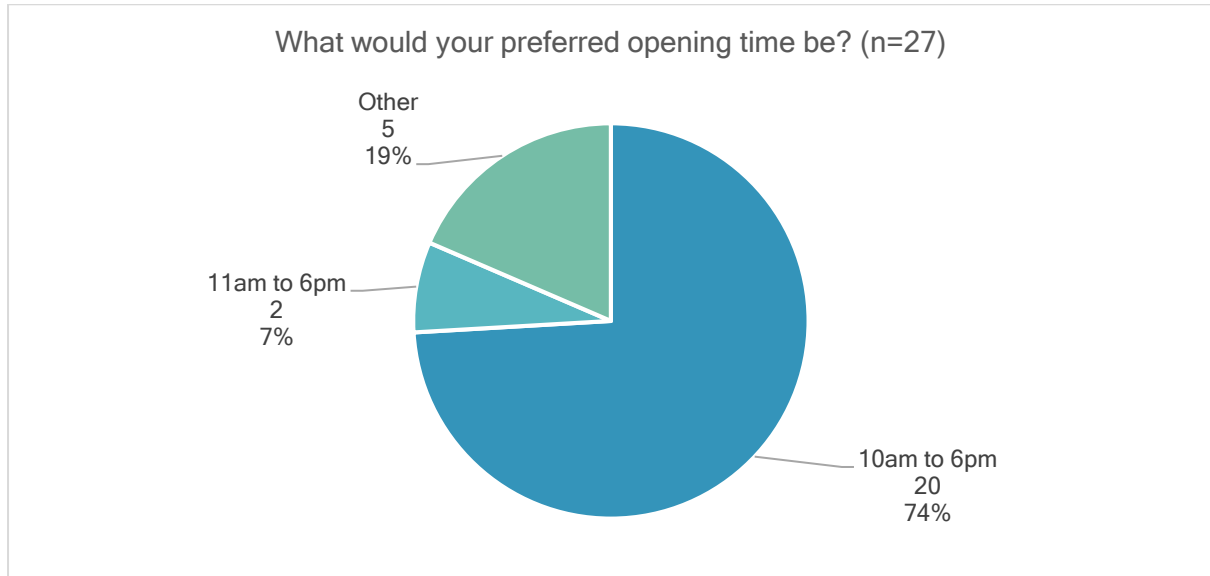
Given the limited sample size, more detailed analyses lack statistical robustness necessary for reliable interpretation and have therefore not been included within the report.

Most respondents (24 of 25 retailers) reported that they expect extended Sunday trading hours to increase their total weekly revenue, with most (17) expecting it to significantly increase. The remaining respondent was unsure.

Research from other cities suggests that opening earlier on a Sunday may provide a number of positive opportunities. Businesses were presented with a range of factors and asked to indicate how important they were to their business. There was unanimous agreement that all factors (opportunities to generate new sales; target new customers; enable staff to access

more flexible working hours on a Sunday; and target visitors or tourists during the summer months) were important.

Conversely, respondents were also presented with a list of negative factors and asked to select all factors that they think would cause negative impacts and discourage them from opening. *Staff related issues and staff costs* were the most frequently identified negative factors.



Those businesses who reported that they were considering the opportunity to extend Sunday opening hours were questioned on their preferred opening and closing times. The chart below indicates that 10am to 6pm was the most popular response. Other suggestions included: 11am to 5pm; 9am to 10pm; 10am to 8pm (during the tourist season); and 8am to 8pm.

Additional Responses

There were written responses submitted on behalf of five organisations (USDAW, Belfast Chamber, Translink, NI Hotel Federation and Association of Convenience Shops). These are summarised below.

- **USDAW** - USDAW’s survey of 220 Belfast retail workers shows strong opposition to extending Sunday trading. 82% view it negatively, with 76% of working parents and carers saying it would negatively impact their family life. Respondents fear increased pressure to work Sundays without additional pay, reduced wellbeing, and harm to work-life balance. They report that their workers would rather be spending time with family and engaging in community, sports and leisure activities or attending church. USDAW also highlights concerns about negative impacts on smaller retailers (referencing in particular St. George’s Market traders) who can already open and argues there is no clear economic benefit, urging the council to retain existing arrangements.
- **Belfast Chamber** – A May 2026 Belfast Chamber member survey of 94 businesses found strong overall support for extending Sunday trading. 66% believe it would benefit business and/or the city, and 78.7% support opening before 1pm. Most (68.1%) do not anticipate staffing difficulties. Feedback highlights benefits for tourism, footfall, city activity and business flexibility, though a minority raised concerns around staffing pressures, employee wellbeing, and preserving Sunday as a day of rest.
- **Translink** - while recognising potential benefits of extended Sunday trading, Translink stresses severe funding constraints. Current resources do not allow for extended or

enhanced Sunday services across bus and rail networks, and any changes would require dedicated additional funding. Translink therefore takes no position on the proposal but confirms that it lacks capacity to support it operationally at present.

- NI Hotel Federation - the NIHF supports limited extension of Sunday trading hours via holiday resort designation, viewing it as a pragmatic step to boost Belfast's weekend economy. Current restrictions create a morning activity gap despite strong demand and high Saturday hotel occupancy. Extended hours would enhance the visitor experience, increase dwell time and spending, support hotels, and create a more vibrant, family-friendly city. The flexible, seasonal approach is welcomed as balanced and aligned with tourism needs.
- Association of Convenience Shops - ACS opposes extending Sunday trading hours, arguing there is no unmet consumer need as convenience stores already open freely. The proposal would mainly benefit large supermarkets, displacing trade from independent retailers without increasing overall spending. It also extends beyond the city centre rationale and lacks evidence for supporting high street regeneration. ACS urges the council to prioritise issues like rates, crime and accessibility instead of changes that could disadvantage small businesses and workers.

In addition, council officers also engaged the Chief Executive of Retail NI, who re-affirmed the organisation's opposition to any designation of holiday resort designation within the city (particularly at a citywide geography), mirroring previous representations on this issue.

Previous Consultation Results

Sunday trading in Belfast has been considered by the council on a number of occasions over the past decade, with decisions reflecting changing economic conditions, policy priorities and evidence available at the time.

2017 Consultation

In May 2017, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee considered proposals to extend Sunday trading hours through designating Belfast as a holiday resort under the Shops (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. The initial proposal was made in response to a strong lobby within the city to improve the tourism offering in Belfast (particularly on a Sunday morning), to boost the local economy and to support the overall regeneration of the city centre. The consultation included the priority question: “Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?”

A total 2,471 people and organisations responded to the consultation; 1,531 answered Yes (62%); 934 answered No (38%); and 5 did not answer. Respondents were also asked, “What area should the designation apply to?” Of the total 1,858 people and organisations who responded via the Citizen Space online tool, 1,398 (75.2%) indicated all of the Belfast City Council area; 291 (15.7%) indicated Belfast City Centre only; and 169 did not answer (9.1%).

Following consideration of public consultation feedback and stakeholder evidence, including a number of deputations to the Committee, members voted against the proposal and it was declared lost. This position was subsequently accepted by the full Council.

2018 Consultation

At its meeting on 16 February 2018 the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed that the council undertake an additional 6-week consultation between 19 February and 02 April 2018 on the key questions. The purpose of this supplementary consultation was to allow consultees to further contribute to the existing evidence base and to provide members with up-to-date information upon which to make any decision to designate Belfast as a holiday resort or otherwise. The consultation survey repeated similar questions included in the 2017 edition.

In total, 5,196 people and organisations responded to the supplementary consultation. Some 2,092 responses were collected via Citizen Space (the council’s online consultation tool), with the remaining 3,104 responses being comprised mainly of hard copy surveys (1,695), survey postcards (1,369) written correspondence (22) and emails (18).

In response to the question, “Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?” a total of 2,528 answered Yes (48.7%); 2,635 answered No (50.7%); and 33 did not answer. Responding to the second question, “What area should the designation apply to?”, 2,344 respondents (87.7%) answered “all of the Belfast City Council area”; and 330 (12.3%) indicated Belfast City Centre only.

Following a series of deputations, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter. In May 2018, members of the SP&R Committee agreed not to designate the Belfast district (or the city centre) as a holiday resort and that a report on animating the city on Sundays be submitted to a future meeting.

2019/20 Consultation

Following the fire at the Bank Buildings in August 2018, the council as well as a range of public and private partner organisations invested in a programme of activities to support city centre development. Following on from an initial response focusing on “City Centre Recovery”, the programme moved on to focus on “City Centre Revitalisation”. This reflected a need for a longer-term approach to investment, taking account of all the possible functions of the city centre. At the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on 11 September 2019, members agreed to undertake a focused research, engagement and consultation exercise to inform a future approach to specific proposals for investment in the city centre on a Sunday.

At its meeting on 12 February 2020, the CG&R Committee were presented with the findings of the “Sundays in the City” engagement programme which took place between October 2019 and January 2020 and included the following elements:

- Online public consultation – using the council’s online engagement portal (Citizenspace). The consultation was opened for eight weeks and closed on 17 January 2020. It received 1,440 responses, more than 70% of which came from Belfast residents. In total, 78% of respondents reported the extension of opening hours on a Sunday as positive; 20% seen it as negative and 6% had no opinion.
- Market research – engagement with a series of survey-based market research exercises targeting users of the city (including workers), NI residents and out-of-state visitors.
- Focus groups – held with several key demographic and target groups including old people, young people, disabled individuals, family groups and city centre businesses
- One-to-one meetings: senior officers held a series of one-to-one meetings with key statutory partners (DfC; Tourism NI; PSNI), business organisations (including Retail NI; NI Retail Consortium; Belfast Chamber; Hospitality Ulster; NI Hotels Federation), trades unions (USDAW and Prospect) and other interested partners including the Interfaith Forum

In March 2020, the City Growth and Regeneration Committee reaffirmed the earlier position of the SP&R Committee by deciding not to extend Sunday trading hours. Instead, the Committee supported an alternative approach focused on cultural animation, family-friendly activity and improving the Sunday morning experience in the city centre without extending retail opening hours.

Concluding Remarks

The 2026 public consultation demonstrated broad support for the extension of Sunday trading hours. A significant majority of individual respondents (79%) were positive about the proposal, while business responses were more divided but still showed a net positive position (57% positive). This indicates that the majority of those who participated in the consultation are supportive of holiday resort designation, thereby enabling an extension to Sunday trading hours.

Summary and comparison of results from previous consultations

Unlike the most recent public consultation, previous engagements were undertaken on the basis of designating the Belfast City Centre area. Furthermore, the priority question changed between 2018 and 2019/20 from, “Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?” to “Would you see the extension of opening hours on a Sunday as positive or negative?”.

Nevertheless, it can be suggested that public opinion regarding the extension of Sunday trading hours is growing more favourable. A total of 4,537 responses (individuals and businesses) in the 2026 consultation viewed the proposal positively. This represents the highest number of positive responses received across all consultations to date, indicating increasing public support for reform.

Q: Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?

	YES	NO	Sample Size
2017	1,531 (62%)	934 (38%)	2,471
2018	2,528 (49%)	2,635 (51%)	5,196

Q: Would you see the extension of opening hours on a Sunday as positive or negative?

	Positive	Negative	Sample Size
2019/20	97 (78%)	20 (16%)	1,440*
2026 (Individuals)	4,479 (79%)	1,104 (19%)	5,701
2026 (Businesses)	58 (57%)	38 (38%)	101

* Note: This question was **Not Answered** by 1316 respondents.

This page is intentionally left blank

EXTENSION OF SUNDAY TRADING HOURS

CHARTER

As a participating shop, having given notice to Belfast City Council to open and trade on Sundays between June 2018 and September 2018, the following voluntary undertaking is given;

No worker will be compelled to work on a Sunday.

No worker will be subjected to any detriment, direct or indirect, as a result of declining to work on a Sunday. In particular, we commit that any such worker will be afforded the same opportunity to access overtime, additional hours and any other benefit. We also respect the work/life balance, family and faith considerations and beliefs that workers may hold and accept that they are an entirely legitimate basis for declining Sunday working.

Workers will be asked to volunteer to undertake additional Sunday hours and if a sufficient pool or number is not available, new employees will be recruited but without detriment to existing workers. Alternatively the store will not trade during the extended hours if the required compliment of staff is not available.

Through the Chamber of Trade, a liaison officer has been identified to deal with any issues raised on behalf of employees by Trade Union Representatives. As a participating shop we undertake to engage with the Chamber and Trade Unions and to work earnestly to resolve any issues that have been identified.

As a participating shop, commitment is re-affirmed to equality and meeting all prevailing legal requirements. To this end, and to publicly demonstrate our commitment to workers, this charter will be displayed prominently on Sundays at this shop when it is open in accordance with the designation by Belfast City Council.

This page is intentionally left blank

Translink Response to Belfast City Council Consultation on the Extension of Sunday Shopping Hours – April 2026

Introduction

Translink welcomes the opportunity to respond to Belfast City Council's consultation on proposals to extend Sunday trading hours in the city.

As Northern Ireland's principal public transport provider, Translink delivers approximately 13,000 bus and rail services each day and recorded over 84 million passenger journeys in 2024/25. Around 600,000 of these journeys are undertaken on a weekly basis within Belfast.

As a public body sponsored by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI), Translink is committed to providing safe, accessible and sustainable public transport, supporting economic development and connecting people to employment, education, services and social opportunities.

Public transport is a key enabler of economic activity and plays a central role in urban development and connectivity, ensuring that people within and beyond the city boundary can access Belfast city centre. Reliable and effective public transport connections are essential for those who work, shop, and socialise in the city, supporting placemaking and contributing to a vibrant and prosperous urban core.

The wider economic value of public transport is well established. Research undertaken by Grant Thornton in 2019 indicated that every £1 invested in public transport returns approximately £4 in wider economic value. That research also found that Translink contributed £185 million to the local economy in 2019, equivalent to approximately £245 million in 2026 when adjusted for inflation.

Significant recent and ongoing investment further demonstrates the contribution of public transport to Belfast's growth and regeneration. This includes the delivery of Belfast Grand Central Station as Ireland's largest multi-modal transport hub, the new York Street Station (acting as a key connection point for Ulster University and the Cathedral Quarter), the roll-out of a zero-emission Metro fleet, the introduction of an hourly cross-border Enterprise service between Belfast and Dublin, the continued success of the Glider service, and progress towards the much-needed Phase 2 expansion.

In addition, the introduction of late-night services at weekends has played an important role in supporting Belfast's night-time economy.

Context

Translink services are integral to everyday life in Belfast and across Northern Ireland, supporting economic growth, social inclusion and environmental wellbeing, and contributing directly to the delivery of the Executive's Programme for Government.

However, a longstanding and well- documented challenge for public transport in Northern Ireland is funding. Public transport has been underfunded for a number of years, placing sustained pressure on Translink's ability to maintain and develop Public Service Obligation (PSO) services. Many of these services are not commercially profitable but are socially essential, supporting access to employment, education, and services for a wide range of communities.

This funding context is directly relevant to Translink's response to the proposal to extend Sunday shopping hours. While Translink takes no position on the policy proposal itself and broadly recognises the potential economic benefits of measures that support Belfast's city centre, we must emphasise that, within the current financial settlement, there is no funding provision to extend public transport services on Sundays.

This applies across the network, including Metro and Glider services, as well as Ulsterbus, Goldliner, and NI Railways. Any extension of operating hours or increase in service frequency would require additional dedicated funding.

This position is consistent with the approach taken to late- night services, which currently operate on Friday and Saturday nights only. These services operate on a pilot basis and are supported through specific funding arrangements, including contributions linked to supporting the city's night- time economy. They are not funded to operate on additional days or during extended trading hours on Sundays or other public holidays.

Translink recognises that there is demand for enhanced Sunday service provision, particularly along certain corridors, and draft plans exist to introduce improvements across the network over time. However, given the current funding pressures, Translink would not be in a position to extend or enhance Sunday bus or rail services in line with any earlier opening or extended trading hours.

Conclusion

With appropriate and sustainable funding, public transport delivers wide- ranging benefits across Northern Ireland, including urban revitalisation, reduced congestion, improved air quality, progress towards climate targets, and improved access to health, education and employment.

While Translink does not take a position on the proposed extension of Sunday shopping hours, we acknowledge the ambition behind the consultation and the range of issues raised by stakeholders.

From a public transport perspective, however, and in light of the significant and ongoing funding challenges currently faced by Translink, there is no capacity at this time to extend or enhance Sunday public transport services.

This page is intentionally left blank



Belfast Sunday Openings Business Survey

Overview

Usdaw is the UK's fifth largest trade union, representing around 365,000 members. Our members are predominantly employed in retail stores, however we also have significant membership across distribution, road transport, home delivery, food manufacturing and pharmaceutical industries.

Usdaw has longstanding recognition agreements with some of Northern Ireland's largest retailers including Tesco, Asda, Co-op, Primark and Sainsbury's. The strength of these agreements demonstrates the benefits that a union working together in partnership with employers can achieve for both workers and businesses.

Sunday opening has been an issue that Usdaw has campaigned on for many years, and our members have told us time and time again that they do not want Sunday trading laws to be extended.

Usdaw is disappointed that the issue of extended Sunday trading hours in Belfast is yet again being discussed by the City Council. This was reviewed last year, in 2024, 2020, 2017 and numerous times before that. On all of those occasions, it was determined that such an extension is not the right move.

Usdaw members and other retail workers deserve to have their voices heard in this conversation; and we are tired of having to make the case year after year. The changes proposed have no evidencable benefit for Belfast, and yet they would have a significant detrimental effect for retail workers.

Sunday trading in Belfast currently represents a compromise that suits everyone – retailers have a chance to trade, and shoppers have an opportunity to shop if they wish to; but retail workers have a chance to rest and spend time with their families. We see no compelling reason why this should change.

Please see overleaf for Usdaw's response to the **Business Survey**.

1. What sector do you operate in or are associated with?

Retail

Accommodation

Food and Drink

Leisure

Culture

None of the above

2. What size of business do you represent or are you associated with?

Large shop (greater than 280 sq m)

Small shop (less than 280 sq m)

3. Currently retail businesses with a floor space exceeding 280 sq m cannot open outside of 1pm-6pm on a Sunday. If there were no restrictions to opening hours, would you extend your opening hours?

Yes

No

Not sure

4. You indicated that you would not open earlier if there was a change to Sunday trading hours for larger retailers. Can you confirm the reason for this decision.

Additional costs

Availability of staff

Other: Usdaw is a trade union with a membership of 360,000 across Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and 13,000 workers in the private sector in the Belfast area — primarily working in retail.

Our members have told us clearly that they do not support the extension of Sunday Trading in Belfast, and feel they would come under pressure to work more hours at the weekend — diminishing family time, and putting pressure on caring responsibilities.

In a recent survey of Usdaw members in the Belfast area, **82%** told us that they viewed the extension of Sunday trading hours in Belfast as a negative, with **76%** of working parents and carers saying it would negatively impact their family life.

5. In which are of the city is your business located

City Centre

North Belfast

South Belfast

East Belfast

West Belfast

Citywide

6. Which Geographic area should extended Sunday Trading hours apply to

City Centre only

Entire BCC area

Neither

Unsure

7. Please explain your answer:

Usdaw does not feel Sunday trading should be extended anywhere in the Belfast area. The rules Belfast City Council are proposing to use are clearly intended for use by seaside towns in the busy summer period. We feel this the proposal to use this rule is not in the spirit for which it was intended.

Belfast is a vibrant and thriving urban city, it is not a holiday resort.

8. Overall, would you see the extension of opening hours on Sunday as positive or negative

Positive

Neither positive nor negative

Negative

Not sure

Sunday working does not attract any form of premium payments for workers within the retail sector. It is a day which is used by retail workers to catch-up with families, relax and, for many, attend religious services. Due to flexible working contracts prevalent across the retail sector, Sundays are the only days where many families can be guaranteed to be able to spend time together. There is not an adequate business case for family life across Belfast to be so disrupted.

9. Please feel free to add any other thoughts or feedback you have on the proposal to extend Sunday opening hours:

Usdaw members in Northern Ireland have been surveyed twice in recent years (2020 and 2026), and on both occasions the response has been clear – retail workers want to keep Sundays special and oppose any extension to Sunday trading hours in Belfast.

We surveyed our members in May 2026, using the questions from BCCs own consultation survey, over 200 people responded, and the feeling was clear:

- **82%** of members said extending Sunday opening hours in Belfast would have a negative impact.
- **40%** said it would have a negative impact on their family life.
- This rose to **76%** when we look at people who have caring responsibilities – showing the scale of the impact for parents and carers who work in retail in Belfast

The individual responses to the survey have been submitted to BCC planning department for inclusion in the 'individual survey' consultation.

In 2020, during a previous Sunday trading consultation, our members told us:

- 91.69% of respondents thought that shops **should not open longer on Sundays.**
- 82.54% of respondents currently **work at least some Sundays**, whilst over a quarter work every Sunday.
- Over two-thirds of respondents (68%) said that they have **already come under pressure** to work on Sundays.
- 61.49% said the main impact on them and their family from working Sunday was **less time with family/friends.**

Retail workers as well as retailers, should be key stakeholders in this discussion. Increased pressure to work on Sundays will have a direct and negative impact on them and their families, which should not be considered with equal weight as with the perceived convenience of some extra shopping hours for customers.

During the pandemic, retail workers were identified as key workers. Vital to the economy. Too often undervalued and subjected to abuse by customers. The incredible contribution that retail workers already make across such a large proportion of the week should not be forgotten or taken for granted.

Usdaw's Freedom From Fear campaign has shown that threats, abuse and violence against shopworkers is on the increase. Our survey of shopworkers found that in 2025 78% of shopworkers experienced verbal abuse in their workplace and over half experienced threats. Sadly 11% were physically assaulted.

Usdaw has campaigned for over two decades for 'Freedom From Fear' for shopworkers and for stronger laws to protect workers and tougher sentences for those who do commit these crimes. Such strengthened provisions are still not in place within Northern Ireland.

Therefore the abuse continues and so it is vital that our members have the opportunity to get a proper break from their workplaces and the jobs that too often lead to stressful and traumatic confrontations. The consultation does not clearly consider the mental and physical impact on workers who will be asked to put themselves in harm's way for greater periods of time.

Usdaw urges Belfast City Council to consider the views and wellbeing of retail workers in the city, and to keep trading hours as they currently are.

10. Please explain your answer:

Allowing large stores to open for longer on Sundays would have a negative impact on retail workers, their families and our communities.

Longer Sunday trading would take a heavy toll on staff who would come under even more pressure to work, when they would rather be spending time with family and engaging in community, sports and leisure activities or attending church.

There would also be a detrimental impact on smaller retailers who can already open longer hours on Sundays. These traders rely on the boost in trade they get on Sunday morning, with St George's Market being a prime example.

There is no evidence that extended Sunday opening hours would lead to significant economic benefits in the retail sector, or job creation. Whilst there may be an increase in the length of time shoppers are in the city centre, it does not follow that this would significantly boost sales overall. Consumers will still have the same limited budgets – extending opening hours simply stretches the window when customers can make their purchases.

This is why there is no appetite from retailers to extend trading hours, on Sunday or any other day of the week. In fact, across the UK there has been a trend in recent years of retailers reducing their trading hours. It has become increasingly apparent that longer trading hours do not translate to a boost in profits but merely redistributes sales, while at the same time increasing costs and overheads. However, we can expect that larger stores would feel obliged to open longer to retain customer loyalty and gain a competitive advantage. There would not be a financial benefit to workers of getting extra hours, as Retailers are used to changing staffing hours to suit shopping times, so staff would simply lose working hours in the week and have to work on Sundays.

Belfast is already a thriving city economy. According to the Demos-PwC Good Growth for Cities Index, it one of the fastest growing cities in the UK. It performed strongly, on growth and was projected to outpace average UK economic growth in 2025/26. One of its notable strengths in the report was that the city was growing, but “not at any cost”, with a good work-life balance to workers in the city specifically mentioned.

Other industry bodies have also expressed concern with the proposal – Glyn Roberts, Retail NI Chief Executive has said: *“To completely deregulate Sunday trading and create another normal shopping day shows a poverty of ambition and ideas for the city. It is an idea that belongs to the past and not to a modern progressive 21st century city.”*

“We need new thinking to animate Sunday mornings and offer shoppers and visitors something different. This proposal will provide large multinationals with even more trading time, directly at the expense of small independent retailers who use trading time on Sunday mornings to sustain their business.”

We know that small businesses are concerned about a detrimental impact on their trade if Sunday trading is extended in Belfast. The current rules mean that smaller, often independent, retailers do have the opportunity to open on Sundays – driving leisure and retail trade to these retailers in our neighbourhoods, and giving them a potential boost while the big brands on the high street are closed.

If the rules change and Sunday becomes ‘just like any other day’ there is no day of differentiation for this type of leisure shopping. There will be no time when small, independent stores can open without the competition from large multinationals. This will be a detrimental step for small independent retailers in Belfast.

If Belfast City Council is committed to creating an enhanced city centre retail offer to drive footfall and economic growth, then fundamental change is needed. The challenges in retail are due to an accumulation of factors over many years, with some being more complex than others. Retailers have been vocal about their priorities and what is needed to help the sector in this current climate and this is sharply focused on fundamental issues such as business rates, high rents/long leases and many other factors that have burdened the sector in recent years. Usdaw is keen to engage with the council to develop and support a strategy to drive growth which has decent work and respect for retail workers at its core.



SUNDAY TRADING SURVEY RESULTS

SUNDAY TRADING SURVEY RESULTS

This survey has been conducted with Belfast Chamber Members in May 2026. Responses were obtained over 1 week, from 94 businesses across all sectors.

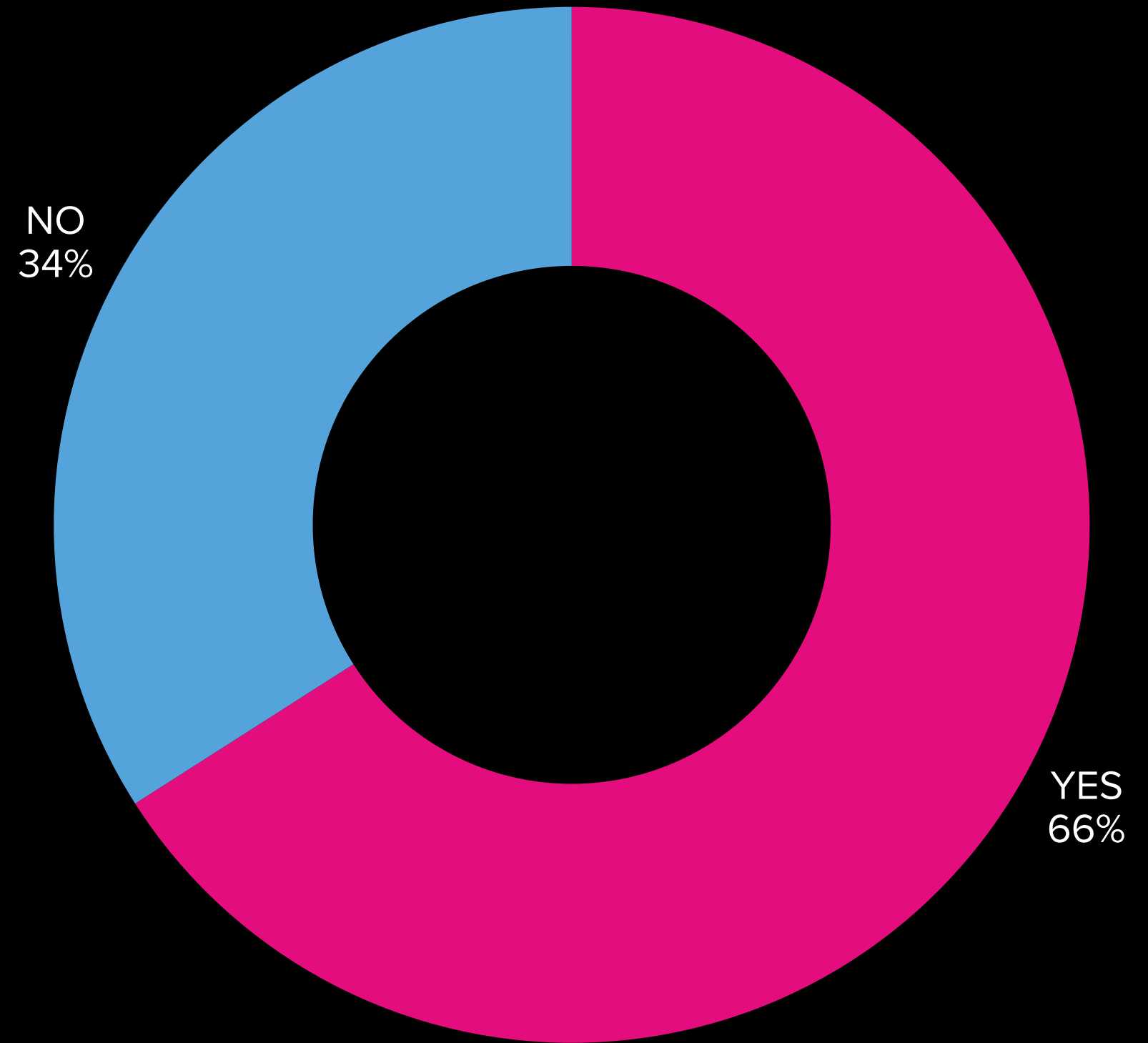
Other feedback has been gathered verbally and the results show overwhelming support for extending Sunday trading.

SUNDAY TRADING SURVEY RESULTS

Would your business or the city benefit from extending Sunday opening hours?

Yes - 66%

No - 34%

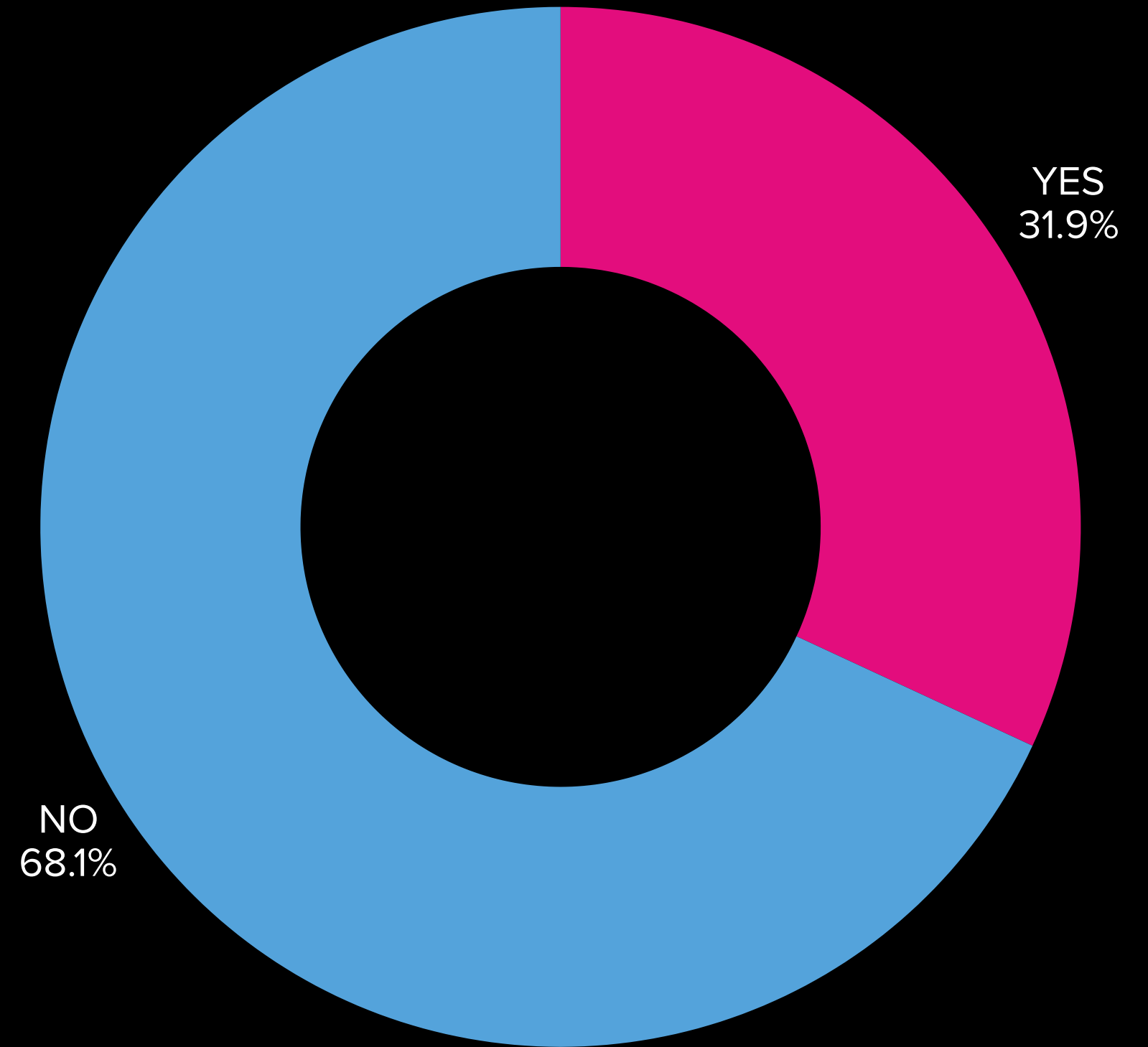


SUNDAY TRADING SURVEY RESULTS

Do you foresee any difficulty
with staffing for extended
Sunday opening?

Yes - 31.9%

No - 68.1%

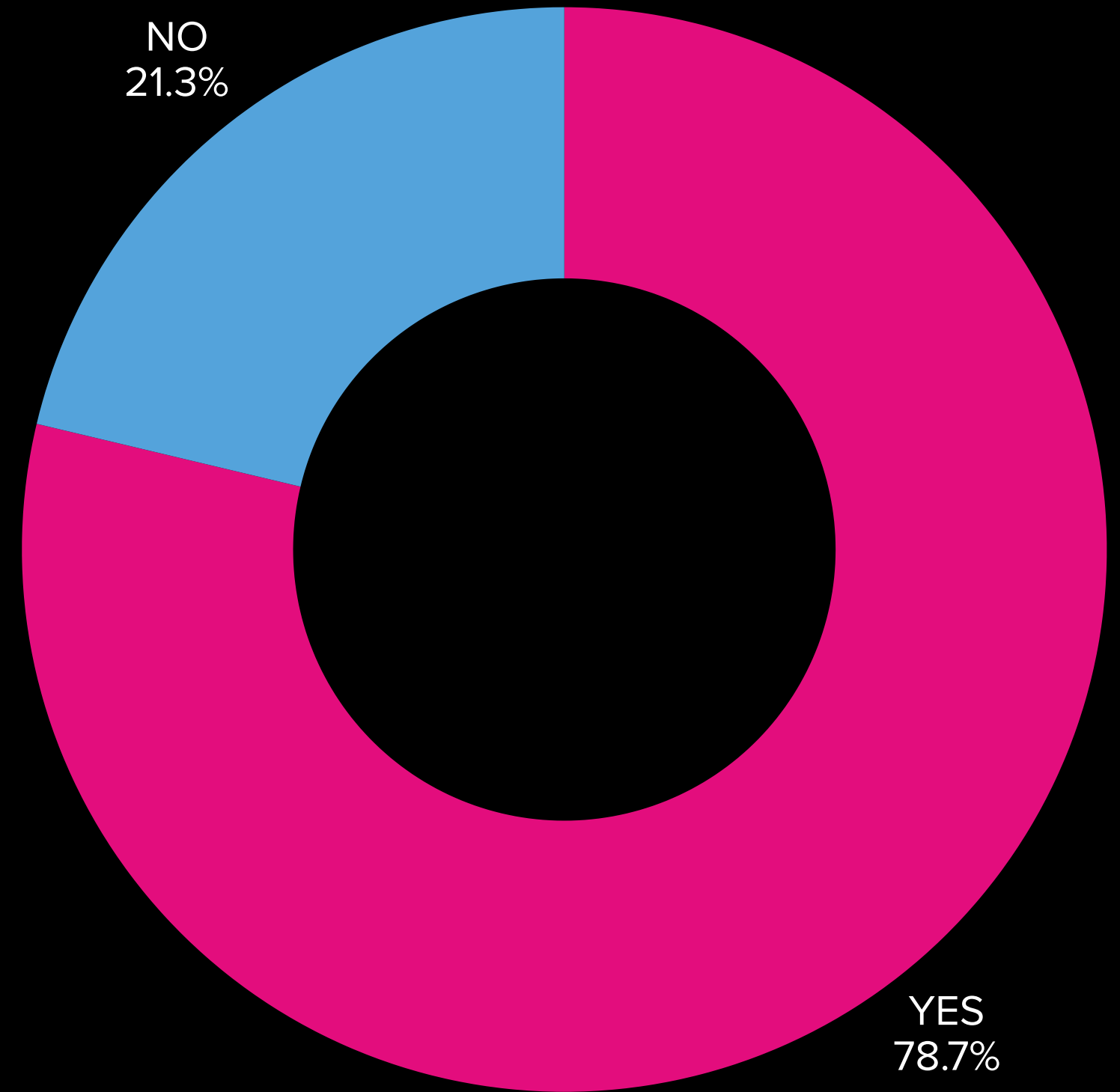


SUNDAY TRADING SURVEY RESULTS

Do you agree with opening
before 1pm on a Sunday?

Yes - 78.7%

No - 21.3%

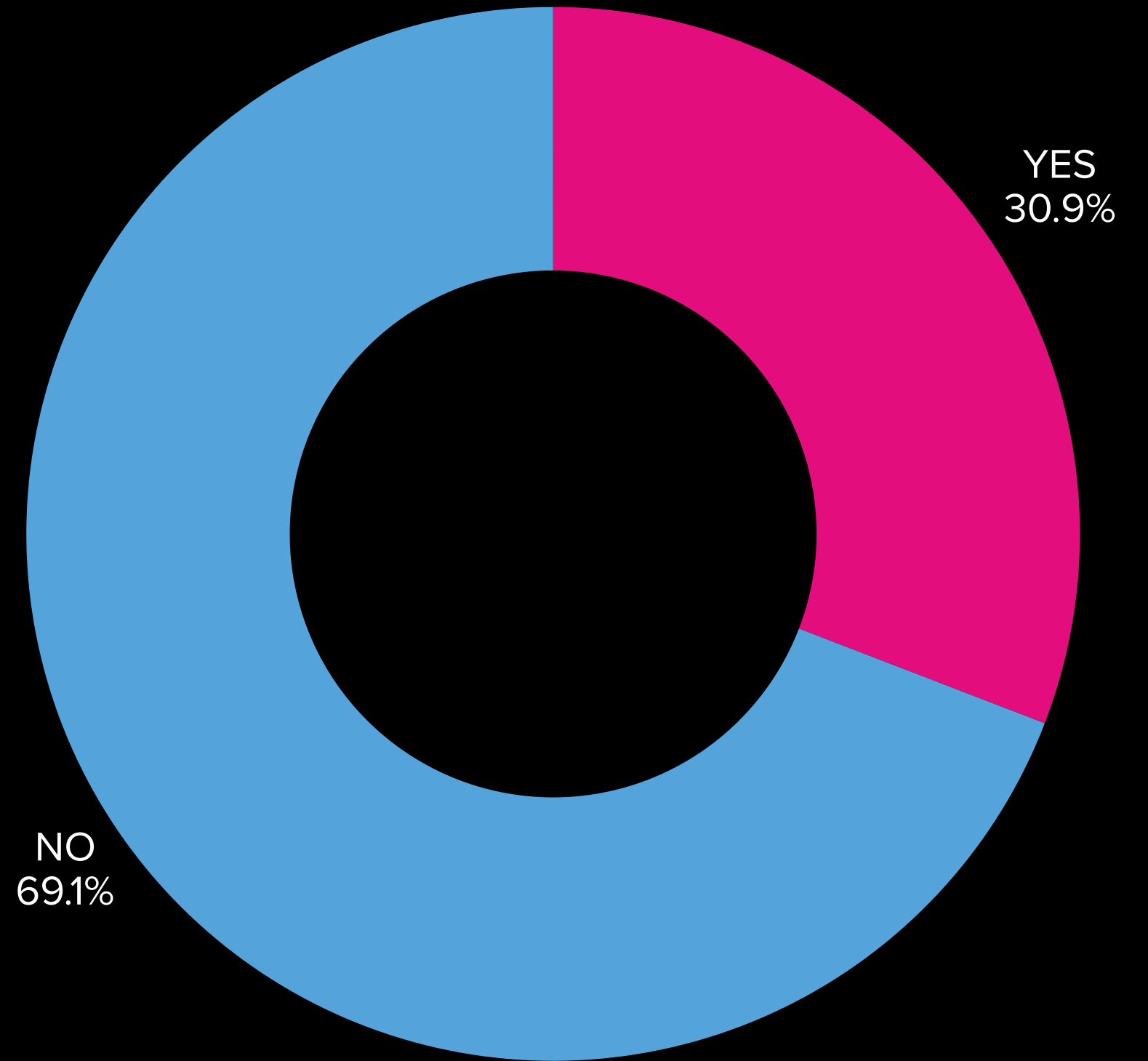


SUNDAY TRADING SURVEY RESULTS

Is your store/business premises above the Sunday trading size threshold of 280 square m?

Yes - 30.9%

No - 69.1%



Additional Comments Feedback

Free-text responses were largely supportive of extending Sunday opening. Respondents cited benefits for tourism, city-centre activity and business flexibility.

There were a minority of concerns around staffing, employee wellbeing and keeping Sunday distinct as a day of rest.

For change: better visitor experience, stronger footfall, and a more active city on Sunday mornings.

Conditions: fair staffing, employee choice, and practical implementation.

For caution: protect family time and day of rest.

Patterns Across the Feedback

Tourism and visitors - Many comments say Belfast feels too quiet before 1pm and that earlier opening would better serve tourists, weekend visitors, and city-centre footfall.

City vitality and revenue - A recurring view is that longer opening would make the city feel more active, support spending, and help retail, hospitality, and related services.

Choice for businesses - Several respondents argue that businesses should decide their own trading hours rather than having restrictions set centrally.

Staff wellbeing and family time- A small minority of the comments (4%) concern is that extended hours could worsen staffing pressure, add strain on workers or reduce protected rest time. Some see Sunday as a distinct day for family time, quiet, or religious observance.

Selection of Comments

There is a negative impact on tourism especially those on weekend breaks to the city. We want people to stay for the full day and spend money in shops, cafes and bars.

Sunday opening hours are significant for tourism, and it is strange for a large city not to come to life in the shopping district until 1pm. Walking through the city centre before 1pm, with the low footfall and individuals that hang around the streets at that time, can be intimidating. I'm sure it doesn't give a safe and welcoming atmosphere to visitors, nor for many Belfast people themselves.

As a customer - our business is not affected by Sunday opening - I am fully supportive of extended hours which I believe will add to the economic output of the city, both in retail as well as hospitality and services. Appropriate remuneration for employees of course, with infrastructural improvements (eg more bus services) but new changes require new thinking!

We support full Sunday opening
The biggest complaint from tourists and visitors is nothing to do on Sunday mornings.

We're a service business and operate 7 days a week. It's what our clients expect. Retail should be treated no differently and it should be up to the business owner to decide trading hours. At the end of the day, we're here to satisfy supply and demand.

As a charity the opening hours doesn't affect the running of the business. However, if you look at the carparks and traffic around the city from noon on a Sunday it is apparent this is a busy shopping day.

Our business does not trade with the public but I fully support earlier opening times for personal convenience and additional revenue opportunity for such businesses

I believe the current trading hours are adequate. From a wellbeing perspective, it is essential to have a designated time when all family members are free from work obligations, allowing them to spend quality time together.

This page is intentionally left blank

Northern Ireland Hotels Federation (NIHF)

Response to Belfast City Council Consultation on Sunday Openings

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on extending Sunday trading hours through potential 'holiday resort' designation across the Belfast City Council area.

Overall, we are supportive of the proposal and believe it represents a positive and pragmatic step towards strengthening Belfast's weekend economy, enhancing the visitor experience, and supporting the hospitality sector.

Supporting a More Vibrant Sunday Economy

Current Sunday trading restrictions limit large retailers to opening between 1pm and 6pm. This creates a clear gap in city centre activity during the morning period, at a time when there is already strong demand from both residents and visitors.

Evidence within the consultation highlights that:

- Sunday footfall is significantly lower than other days, with activity only peaking mid-afternoon
- Saturday nights are among the busiest for hotel occupancy, exceeding 85%
- There is growing demand for Sunday morning activities, including brunch and family-friendly experiences

Extending retail opening hours would help address this imbalance by encouraging earlier movement into the city centre and creating a more complete and attractive Sunday offer.

Benefits for Hotels and the Visitor Economy

Hotels are particularly well placed to benefit from increased Sunday morning activity. A significant proportion of hotel guests stay on Saturday night, yet currently encounter a limited offer on Sunday mornings. Extending opening hours would:

- Improve the overall guest experience by providing more things to see and do before departure
- Encourage visitors to stay longer in the city, increasing secondary spend across retail, food and beverage and attractions
- Strengthen Belfast's competitiveness as a weekend destination, aligning more closely with other UK and Irish cities where Sunday trading is less restrictive

In practical terms, a more active Sunday morning economy supports higher spend per visitor and reinforces the value of overnight stays, which is critical to the sustainability of the hotel sector.

Supporting City Animation and Family-Friendly Activity

The proposal aligns with wider ambitions to make Belfast a more vibrant, accessible and family-friendly city.

At present, options for families and visitors on Sunday mornings are relatively limited, with only a small number of attractions operating early in the day.

Allowing greater retail participation would:

- Create a more balanced and engaging city centre experience
- Support linked activity across cafés, restaurants and attractions
- Encourage a shift towards a full-day Sunday economy rather than a compressed afternoon peak

Proportionate and Flexible Approach

We note that the proposed approach is limited and controlled, allowing extended opening on up to 18 Sundays between March and September. This provides:

- Flexibility for businesses to opt in where there is demand
- A seasonal focus aligned with peak tourism periods
- A balanced approach that respects existing legislation and local considerations

Conclusion

We support the introduction of holiday resort designation for Belfast as a means of extending Sunday trading hours on a limited and managed basis.

From a hospitality perspective, the proposal would:

- Enhance the visitor experience
- Increase city centre footfall earlier in the day
- Drive additional spend and economic activity
- Strengthen the overall competitiveness of Belfast as a destination

We would encourage the Council to proceed with the proposal and to continue working with the hospitality sector to maximise the benefits of a more vibrant and commercially sustainable Sunday economy.

ACS Response – Sunday Openings in Belfast

1. What sector do you operate in or are associated with?

Retail

2. What size of business do you represent or are you associated with?

Small shop (less than 3000 sq ft)

3. Under current legislation, you can currently open at any time (on Sundays) without restrictions? Are you aware of this?

Yes.

4. Would you see the extension of opening hours on Sunday as positive or negative?

Negative

Please explain your answer:

ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores) does not support the extension of Sunday trading hours and urges the Council to retain the current trading framework. Our position is consistent with our [2017 submission](#) and our October 2024 response (with Retail NI) to the proposed pilot scheme.

1) There is no clear consumer access problem to solve

Stores under 280 sqm – including most convenience retailers – are already free to set their own opening hours on Sundays and routinely trade in the morning. Consumers who wish to access groceries, newspapers, household essentials or hospitality on a Sunday morning can already do so. The proposal does not address an unmet consumer need; it changes which type of store is permitted to be open.

2) The proposal primarily benefits larger stores and risks displacing trade

Extending Sunday morning trading would predominantly benefit larger supermarkets and out-of-town retailers, which would gain up to five additional trading hours each Sunday. Evidence from temporary extensions of trading hours elsewhere in the UK shows independent retailers consistently lose trade when forced to compete with larger outlets on Sundays (Oxford Economics, 2015). Public and worker support for the current framework also remains strong: 66% of UK consumers favour the existing rules (Yonder, 2023) and 91% of shop workers oppose longer Sunday hours (USDAW, 2020).

3) A citywide proposal that goes beyond the stated rationale

The consultation rationale focuses heavily on Belfast city centre – footfall, hospitality demand, hotel occupancy, St George's Market, and the family-friendly city centre ambition. The proposed designation, however, applies across the entire Belfast City Council area, including suburban districts where large supermarkets – not city centre attractions – would be the principal beneficiaries. There is a significant mismatch between the stated objectives and the geographic scope of what is being proposed.

4) Sunday trading reform has not been shown to support high street or city centre regeneration

No recent major review of high streets has identified Sunday trading hours as a barrier to vitality or regeneration. The House of Lords Built Environment Committee report *High*

Streets: Life beyond retail? (November 2024), and the UK Government's response (February 2025), focus on business rates reform, planning policy, public realm, transport access, anchor public services and town centre management – not Sunday trading. The Northern Ireland Executive's *Delivering a 21st Century High Street* (2022) makes no mention of Sunday trading. The Federation of Small Businesses' *The Future of the High Street* (August 2024) does not identify it as a priority either.

5) Changing hours does not create new spending – it shifts when and where it takes place

Household budgets are not increased by extending opening hours. Allowing larger stores to open earlier on Sundays does not generate additional consumer spending; it redirects existing spending away from smaller retailers and from other trading periods. The likely outcome is reduced trade for independent shops without any net benefit to the wider city economy.

6) An unwelcome distraction from the real issues

The substantive challenges facing Belfast's retail and hospitality sectors – business rates, retail crime, energy costs, vacant units, and accessibility for visitors and residents – are well documented and remain the priorities for high street regeneration. We urge the Council to focus on these issues rather than on legislative change that would primarily benefit large out-of-town operators at the expense of independent retailers and shop workers.