



FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS TO DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

Strengthening Disability Support Services

Consultation feedback summary

August 2026

Prepared by Global Research Ltd

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About this report

Findings from the 2026 Disability Support Services consultation on further improvements to disability support services, which ran from 8 June to 31 July 2026.

How people took part

379 survey responses, 432 workshop attendees and 55 written submissions – more than 850 participants in total.

Consulting with the disability community

About DSS

Disability Support Services (DSS) is a dedicated business unit within the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) that provides services and supports to disabled people.

Other government services within health, education and welfare, as well as Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), provide disability services and support alongside those offered by DSS.

Consultations so far

In 2024 an independent review of DSS found a lack of fairness and transparency around what support disabled people can access, and that spending was becoming unsustainable. Later that year a consultation asked the disability community about their experiences; this was followed by a consultation in 2025 that looked into the assessment and allocations process, including administering flexible funding.

Building on these, in 2026 a third consultation asked about further improvements that DSS could implement to deliver support services that are fair, transparent, and that meet people's needs.



Engagement summary

Introduction

This summary report presents findings from the 2026 Disability Support Services consultation that focused on further improvements to disability support services. This consultation ran from 8 June to 31 July 2026.

The information presented in this summary report reflects the views of people who contributed via attending a workshop, by completing DSS's online survey, and people who made a submission.

Disability Support Services is currently two years into a programme of improvements. Some changes have already been introduced in response to feedback from earlier consultations, and further improvements are planned over the next five years.

This consultation took place shortly after several major changes were introduced, including a new nationally consistent approach to assessments and funding decisions (from February 2026) and the removal of purchasing guidelines for people using flexible funding (from April 2026). Many people who receive DSS support had not yet experienced these changes before the consultation commenced. The consultation also took place while Parliament was considering the

DSS Act 2026. We acknowledge the experiences shared and the feedback received from the community in this context.

Many shared the significant challenges they face in their daily lives and difficulties getting the support they need from the broader disability support system, which cuts across multiple government agencies and community groups. For many there were significant feelings of distrust in the system, and we heard many shared stories of unfair and inequitable access to support. We greatly value the time people took to share their deeply personal experiences.

DSS will consider feedback from this – and prior – engagements as part of its ongoing work to strengthen the disability support system.

ENGAGEMENT REACH

850+ participants



379

Survey responses



432

Workshop attendees



55

Submissions

Key themes

Across this consultation several themes came up repeatedly, no matter which questions had been asked or which topics people were giving feedback on.

These repeated themes are revealing because they show what matters to most people.

People want



THEME 01

Support that is built around them



THEME 02

A system that is easy to navigate



THEME 03

Confidence and trust that decisions are fair and consistent



THEME 04

Support before crisis point led by trusted relationships



THEME 05

Carers and whānau recognised



THEME 06

Real choice and control that work with the realities of daily life



THEME 01

Support that is built around disabled people



Support and success look different for each person

- We heard that support needs to meet the person where they're at, it needs to help people move towards the goals that **they** want to achieve, and it needs to be strengths-based. This was shared when discussing DSS outcomes and wider benefits.
- People urged DSS to consider participation, connection and inclusion in society as key support needs.
- Flexibility in support was a key aspect of a person-centred approach. This is discussed below, in the section titled '**Real choice and control**'.
- People said disabilities can change over time, meaning that support needs change too. While some people's disabilities require less input from DSS or providers over time, some need more.
- People want DSS or providers to tailor their approach to each individual situation so they don't have to go through unnecessary assessments or do a lot of administration work.

“ Some will have minimal support needs, others will need lifelong support. There are different levels of education, different hearing needs, different educational experiences, lots of language deprivation, issues with reading comprehension and listening. Everyone's context is different, so cultural bridging is essential to help people know what is out there for them. Some people will need to see examples of what is available.

Workshop

“ Provide supports that help disabled peoples live their lives according to Enabling Good Lives principles – equitable, individualized outcomes ...relevant to the individual and their family

Survey

“ Measure success through people's experiences of wellbeing, belonging, participation, relationships and personal aspirations alongside traditional service measures

Submission

“ I enjoyed my EGL funding where I have one personal budget and I can tailor it to my needs, which change often

Survey

“ Disabled Community is so broad, there must be good fit-for-purpose options

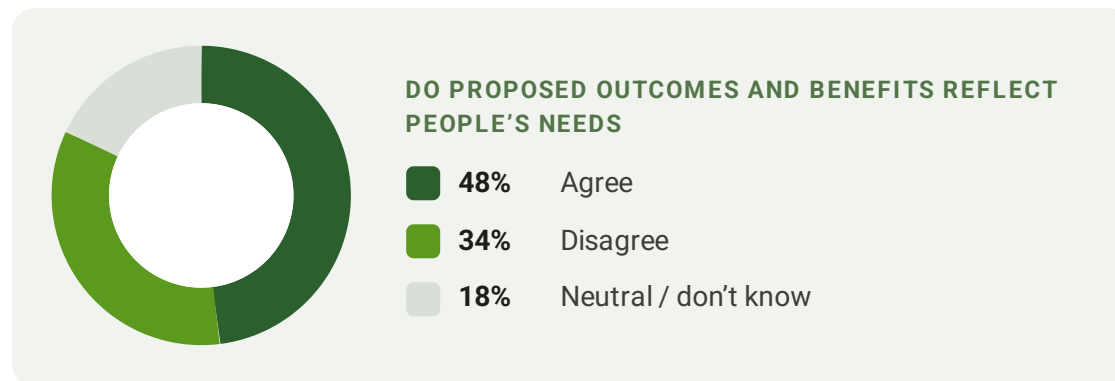
Workshop

“ Happiness that comes from using funding allocation as we see fit without having to have a plan

Survey

People want personalised, tailored supports

- We heard clearly from disabled people, whānau and carers across all engagement methods that everybody's needs are different. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach will not deliver supports that meet people's needs. People said that the entire disability support system should reflect this diversity, including needs assessments, getting support from DSS providers, the allocation of funding and how it can be used, education or employment, support for daily life, and respite.
- When survey respondents were asked how much they agree or disagree that the proposed DSS outcomes and wider benefits reflect the needs of all people that access DSS support, many agreed that they do. However, both those who agreed and disagreed warned that people's needs vary.



“ We all need help, but the 'how' differs from person to person and their unique circumstances

Survey

“ Disabilities are unique to the individual and I find that we are categorised into what suits the service not the person

Survey

“ Respite for me would look like, food, some in-home support for her (she is not able to do standard home activities like laundry). Respite would be me not having to do two people's household chores, having someone cooking for me

Workshop

“ You need to ask us if things are improving in our lives. We are the best people to decide that

Survey



THEME 02

**A system that is easy to
navigate**

A good system is one that actively helps people access support

- People said they would benefit from dedicated support to help navigate across systems, e.g., a single contact or 'navigator,' or cross-agency coordination would make it easier.
- People feel the system is fragmented and complex. The forms, phone calls, applications, questions, and other admin makes getting support hard.
- People said that needs assessors should introduce people to what support is available, and help to identify needs, rather than the support offered being dependent on 'saying the right thing.'

Accessible support is integral to people's wellbeing

- People told us that if supports are easier to find and get, this will be one way to know that disabled people's lives are improving.
- We heard that the success of the system should be measured by asking people about their experience of finding and getting support. Also, if DSS wants to find out what is working, they should measure people's personal outcomes rather than just what services are delivered.

Simpler processes, more flexibility and autonomy would help make navigating supports easier

- People said that rigid guidelines, eligibility requirements, spending restrictions and related admin — including the time taken for DSS to process paperwork — all make accessing support harder, slower and more complex.

“ A truly person-directed system recognises the whole person and coordinates support across services, rather than expecting individuals and families to navigate fragmented systems

Submission

“ NASC are waiting for families to say specific words to activate certain supports - and if they don't say those words, even if it's needed, they don't get offered it

Workshop

“ I believe an important outcome is missing: accessibility and navigation. It does not matter how much funding or how many services exist if people cannot understand how to access them

Submission

“ [Things are improving when] people spend less time determining eligibility. Fewer appointments and repeated assessments are required. There are fewer delays between asking for help and receiving it. Disabled people experience less stress navigating support systems

Submission

Clear, up-to-date and easy-to-access information makes it easier to find and use supports

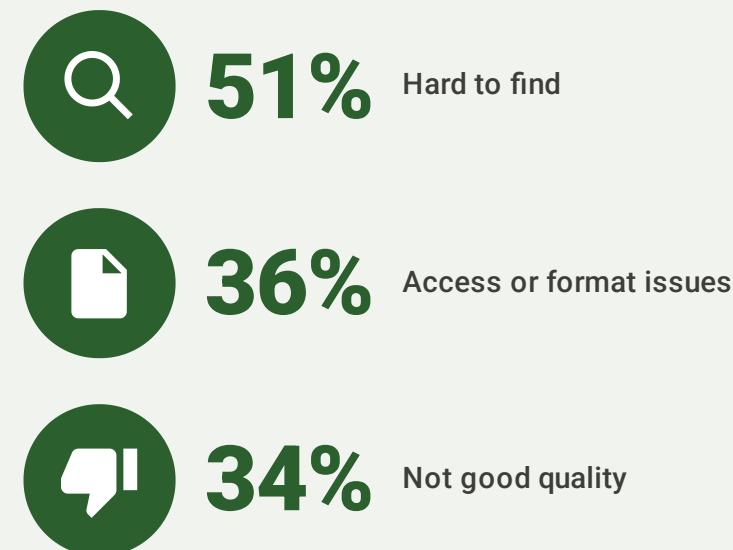
- We heard that information should be clear and available in accessible formats. People also want a single source of information, such as an online website or portal, or a single contact who can navigate on behalf of the person seeking information.
- We were told that sources of information – including DSS, government agencies and disability support providers – are often fragmented, meaning that information is scattered and sometimes inconsistent. This makes it difficult for people to find the right information for their situation.

INFORMATION PEOPLE WANT OR NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DSS SERVICES



“ Families currently navigate multiple assessment processes across disability, health, education, mental health and social services, often providing the same information repeatedly to different agencies
Submission

BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING INFORMATION ABOUT DSS



“ There are so many agencies ...A lot more could be done to get things online in ONE spot
Survey

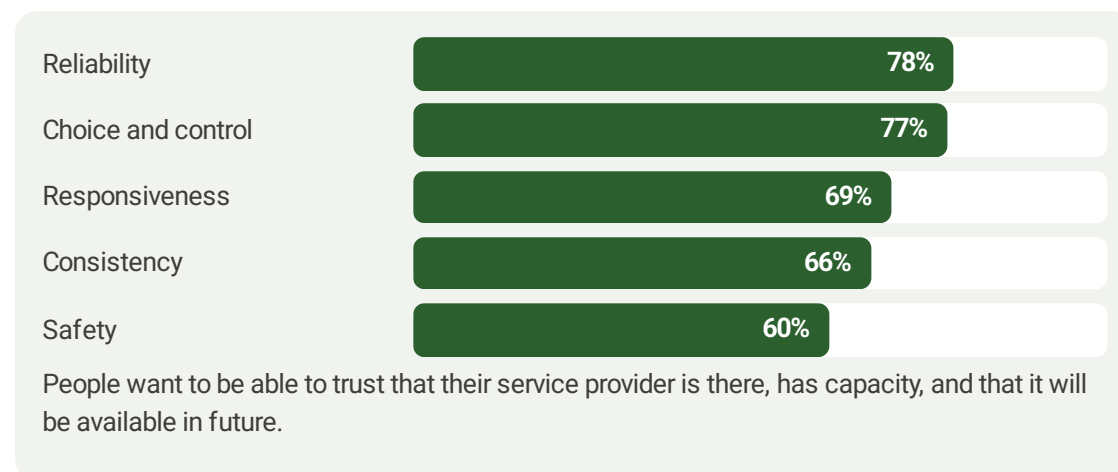


THEME 03

Confidence and trust in decisions

Reliability is important when receiving support

When survey respondents were asked **What matters to you most when you are being supported**, most people selected reliability.



People want assessments that are fair and consistently applied

- We were told that Needs Assessment Service Coordination (NASC) needs to build trust and create a positive and constructive environment for assessments. These assessments shouldn't be based on face-value assumptions about people's capacity or needs.
- We heard that while assessment should work towards creating a personalised support plan as the final output, it's important to introduce people to what support is available, what might be possible, and support them to identify needs.
- People don't want to have to 'prove' that they need things, they want to be able to anticipate how their needs might change and plan their supports around that.

“ System should prompt – i.e., “we haven't heard from you in a while, how's it going? When would you like us to contact you?” At the moment, people are waiting until their assessment. When NASC hear from people it is for an emergency
Workshop

“ Reliable and linked to inflation. Not subject to sudden change of funding under the guise of extra flexibility
Survey

“ Word 'assessment' can be a fear factor – not something you look forward to. Needs a change in culture, it should be 'this is more about your needs, we are touching base to check in' - make people feel more supported rather than an assessment
Workshop

“ They wouldn't give me a breakdown of how [residential package] was calculated, so I have no understanding of how they worked it out, and no basis for comparison. Is it even a fair package? I wouldn't know. So more clarity, understanding and trust, being able to unpack and understand the support and decisions, and have a constructive dialogue, not one that feels punitive
Workshop

A better feedback and complaints process

- We heard that a good feedback system is one that is accessible and easy to use.
- People want to be able to trust that their support won't be impacted if they make a complaint, and that their feedback will be acted upon.

Preferred ways to give feedback

- People want DSS to provide regular opportunities for disabled people to provide feedback about the services they receive.
- When survey respondents were asked, they selected a variety of ways to provide feedback about the support services they receive. Popular ways to provide feedback or report concerns were:



45%

Email



40%

Via an advocacy org.



36%

Talking with a manager

There is support for a short survey to monitor supports

People said they would trust the system more if feedback were encouraged – a majority of survey respondents agreed that a regular, short survey to monitor supports was a good idea.



REGULAR SURVEY IS A GOOD WAY TO MONITOR SUPPORTS

- **68%** Agree
- **16%** Disagree
- **16%** Neutral / don't know

“ We have not had to complain. However, if we did, knowing the process would be the first step, knowing that it was safe to raise a concern and to know what action would happen, or change
Survey

“ People should have multiple options for providing feedback, including online forms, email, phone, written submissions, face-to-face discussions, and accessible formats
Submission

“ A complaints process should demonstrate learning and change, not simply produce a response that closes the complaint
Survey

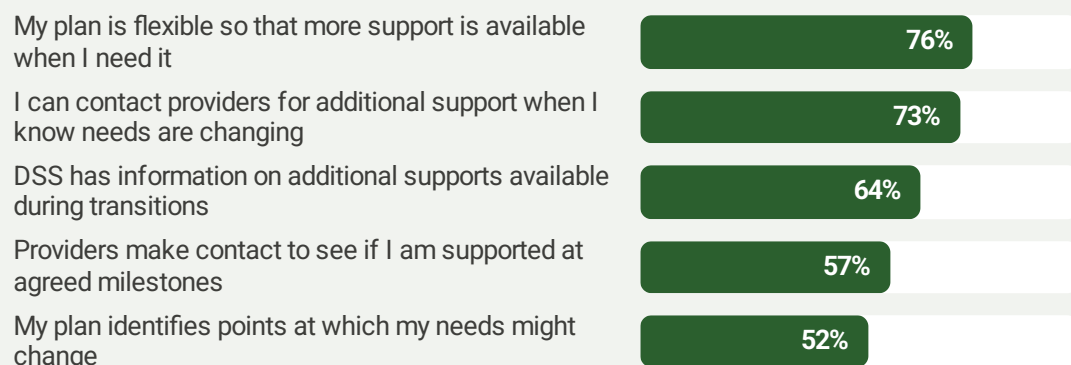


THEME 04

Proactive support

A proactive system is responsive to change

- Disabled people, carers, whānau and the wider community consistently wanted to see flexibility, so it is easy to increase support, including at short notice, and to secure support in advance of anticipated changes.
- Those who provided feedback via the online survey were asked directly about what they want to happen differently from how things work now. More than three-quarters selected 'my plan is flexible so more support is available when I need it':



We heard that a proactive system would result in people:

- knowing where to go
- being communicated within a reasonable timeframe
- communicating with someone who can make decisions.

“ Life stages: for a family, having a key contact point, knowing where to go, and having an easy and consistent experience in accessing funding disability support, or information. Transition points need more planning: want similar experiences to non-disabled people, but reality is that there will always need to be some kind of support present

Workshop

“ Support should anticipate life transitions rather than waiting for people to request help

Submission

“ Greater flexibility in funding during transition periods would also allow people to respond to changing needs without unnecessary delays or administrative barriers

Survey

Key transition points can be anticipated and flag a change in support needs

- People want to make it easier to access supports, either by providing a dedicated transition coordinator to assist, or by simplifying processes through better cross-agency coordination.
- People said there should be proactive monitoring and planning approaches to pre-empt upcoming changes rather than managing them reactively.
- People also want more accessible and timely assessments, so they don't have to wait.

Early intervention will result in better outcomes for disabled people

- People told us that early intervention and investment, planning, and proactive communication are key hallmarks of a more proactive system.
- People thought that early interventions could save the system money in the long run.

“ Having a plan for my disability supports which identifies the milestones or transitions where my needs might change in the future. [It] needs to be flexible and can change easily as needs change, used as a guideline to the persons support rather than a fixed plan of action

Survey



THEME 05

Carers and whānau recognition

Support and recognition for carers

- Overall, people want to see carers receive more acknowledgement and support from the disability support system. Carer wellbeing should be maintained over time rather than managed reactively.
- Carers want to be treated as partners, rather than viewed as a taken-for-granted and low-cost care provider.

Barriers to accessing respite care

- The overarching issue people identified was a lack of respite services to accommodate disabled people and allow carers to take time off.
- We also heard that there is a lack of suitable services or trained staff to provide care for people with specific disability needs, or that it is hard to find respite that suits people's age, interests and cultural needs. This was reported for people seeking both mainstream services and independent carers to provide in-house care.
- People said that respite options should cater to what suits households best and not be limited by strict definitions.

Changes to help carers take a break

- We heard that there needs to be more respite services and a wider variety of options for respite, including more flexible options.
- People reported that respite can be difficult to arrange, and they stated that access would be easier if costs were reduced.

“ Need true flexibility around what it takes for a family whānau carer to provide lifetime support. About enhancing and maintaining their wellbeing. Carers simply seen as a workforce and how do we change that to value them as a great contributor in this space

Workshop

“ It is difficult to access respite because the services just aren't available. And the support provided isn't enough

Workshop

“ When we asked about respite care I was told I would be placed in either a facility for those experiencing mental health crises, or an elderly rest home

Survey

“ [Where I live] there has been no respite for over a decade. The only available medically trained support we could use would get us 4 days a year with our current respite budget

Workshop

“ Resource appropriately - fund an amount that would actually be able to employ appropriate staff for the care. Allow the caregiver to say what respite is to them and fund it accordingly - maybe that's staying together and not leaving the person but maybe it's making memories together

Survey



THEME 06

Real choice and control

Improving flexibility and choice when using funding

62%

More options and choice of who and when

56%

Fund more smaller providers

42%

Help to access mainstream services

30%

Other

Providing services that work well for all users

- When survey respondents were asked about ways that DSS could improve services to work well for all users, most often they selected the option about improving funding models so there are less restrictions on how funding can be used.
- People want to see more providers, and more support when it is needed or at times where there is currently a shortfall, such as at weekends, evenings, or rurally.
- We also heard that the processes for accessing support should be more streamlined, and that support needs to be flexible and responsive to need, allowing for spontaneity.

“ Been difficult since 2024. Made life more challenging. Having flexibility without rigid rules is a lifesaver. Circumstances during the week can change. It makes a difference between having a good week and a bad week

Workshop

“ Flexible funding is great, however, if you don't have the time or energy to be an employer and take on all that it requires, it leaves you stuck

Survey

“ Establish multiple services to find effective care for a person, ensure people are not being sent to the wrong services just because funding providers want them put somewhere (this happens in my workplace frequently). If the service does not exist, fund an existing support service to make it happen

Survey

“ Why do supports stop when you go on holiday?

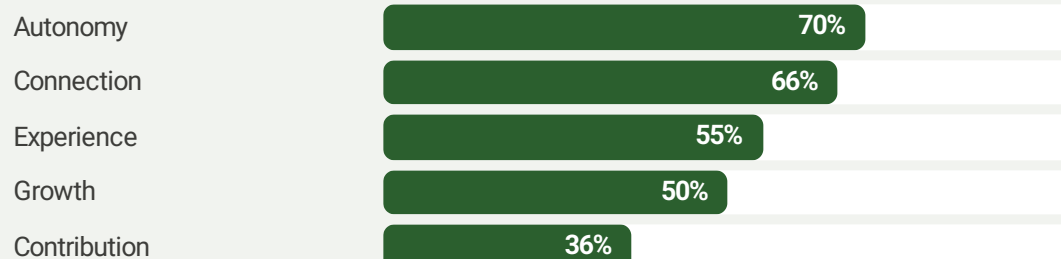
Workshop

Choice and control important for young people, particularly in transitions

- Milestones and transition points such as adolescence, moving in and out of school/education, and into housing or flatting situations were pointed to as important things to consider for young disabled people, all requiring proactive support and attention.
- Social and community connectedness were considered important aspects for young people, as was feeling a sense of belonging and being supported in education.

Autonomy and connection selected as most important aspects of support

- The importance of autonomy (having control over who, when, why, and how people get and use supports) came up throughout all areas of the consultation, in workshops, submissions, and in survey responses.
- Survey respondents were asked to select the three wider benefits most important to them. More people selected **Autonomy** (enabling people to grow, maintain, or regain autonomy in everyday life) than any other aspect. **Connection** was also chosen by many.



“ Social participation opportunities and supports to engage in out of school activities such as sport or leisure

Submission

“ Flexibility is the ability for young people to try out things - where they want to live, who they want to support them, what they want to do and who they want to do it with. And being able to do those things simply, and change and adapt easily if we need to

Workshop

“ The ability to be included and the opportunity to have a choice of what supports best suit my needs rather than be dictated to...Need more holistic options, as everyone has individual needs and values

Survey

“ These benefits are interconnected and flow from one another. For example, autonomy enables disabled people to choose what connections they would like to make and the ability to connect disabled people to social and community networks is also vital to supporting personal growth and acquiring skills

Submission



What good looks like

Effective support services are:



Person-directed

Disabled people are actively involved in deciding what supports are right for them, but are guided to understand the options available, identify needs, access support, and develop future plans.

“ Worked with a man who found communication difficult. During visits, we used our Good Life cards to explore what mattered most to him. Through these conversations, he shared that he owned his own home, which he had inherited, and that he had never chosen to move into residential care; he had been living there for nine years. He is now being supported to better understand what happened, explore his options, and consider returning to live in his own home

Submission [Peer visiting service]



Connected

A system that acknowledges the intersecting nature of support needs by providing a single contact to help navigate supports, having a central source of information, and coordinating between services.

“ Assistance with navigating MOE [Ministry of Education] ...Child unable to attend school fulltime but unless very high needs, MOE isn't involved. We need advocacy and support to understand and work within and around the system

Survey



Trusted

A system that takes responsibility for fulfilling both basic needs as well as for achieving broader quality-of-life outcomes. People feel safe to provide feedback and know that their concerns will be taken seriously.

“ The return to flexibility was good, but people are losing trust that what they are saying is being used for the right reasons.

Workshop

Effective support services are: continued



Proactive

A system that provides support early to pre-empt issues and helps people to plan for when their needs might change in the future.

“ With all the upheaval that’s going on, nobody is getting reassessed. We need more accessibility and availability to anticipate and keep things up to date as we go and apply for things as we go. We need a proper reassessment process

Workshop



Inclusive

A system that removes or helps disabled people overcome barriers to participate, contribute, and develop meaningful relationships with their communities and wider society.

“ Inclusion and Belonging: supports enabling disabled people to participate equally in society, including access to education, employment, recreation, and culture, rather than just meeting basic needs

Survey



Sustainable

People know their support is stable, at the right level for them, and isn’t at threat of being reduced or taken away in future. There is consistency in accessing supports.

“ Certainty. Right now, there is a huge what-if out there in the community and it’s not good. Reliability, that services can be relied upon, and not leave disabled ones waiting

Survey



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Global Research is an independent New Zealand research consultancy specialising in public consultation analysis – the collection, analysis and reporting of community feedback and submissions for government organisations. Every response in this consultation was read and analysed by our researchers, and the findings reflect the community's feedback.

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Consultation ran 8 June – 31 July 2026.

