



Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation (CTRS)

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Status Report

INTRODUCTION:

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme replaced Council Tax Benefits (CTB) in April 2013, when local authorities were required to set up their own discount.

Northampton's scheme for 2016/17 is based on the former Council Tax Benefit Scheme with the exception that all working age claimants could only claim a discount for 71% of the amount they would have received under the old CTB scheme. The council has to carry out an annual review of its CTRS scheme.

The findings from this consultation will help inform any changes that may be required. The scheme for 2017/18 must be agreed by the 31st January 2017.

This consultation took place from 10 October 2016 to 06 November 2016.

METHODOLOGY

Our approach included the following:

- [On-line survey](#)
- [News release\(s\)](#)
- Social media ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), etc.)
- Northampton Borough Council's [internet](#) pages
- All e-mail communication from the Benefit, Council Tax and Customer Services mailboxes included an invitation link to take-part in the consultation
- Display screens in the One Stop Shop
- Details of the consultation were emailed to the Multi Agency Forum and our welfare partners, including registered social landlords.
- Invitations to participate was sent to key stakeholders, including Precepting Authorities, parishes, local Councillors and Members of Parliament
- Engagement with housing associations and voluntary and community sectors via their various networks
- Northampton Borough Council's Community Forum members were invited to take part
- 2,159 email invitations were issued to email addresses held on the Benefit and Council Tax database

The following companion documents were made available:

- **CTRS Option being considered** giving details of options considered and recommended
- **A Brief Guide to CTB**
- **Overview for finance of the proposed changes**
- **How much the proposed changes will cost the council**
- **Breakdown of Collection Rates for CTRS cases**
- **Equality impact assessment**
- **Examples of the effect of the proposed changes on Banding Charges**
- **Examples of the effect of the proposed changes**

To help support the public the following were made available and advertised in-line with the above:

- Dedicated email address for enquiries
- Our Customer Service teams were made available to help the public complete the on-line form to mitigate any accessibility issues.
- Five drop in-sessions were made available to provide a personal illustration on what the proposed changes would mean – to enable people to provide a fully informed response. Sessions were offered as follows:
 - ✓ Wednesday 12 October 2016 (9am to 12pm)
 - ✓ Monday 17 October 2016 (5pm to 7pm)
 - ✓ Wednesday 19 October 2016 (1pm to 4pm)
 - ✓ Tuesday 25 October 2016 (9am to 12pm)
 - ✓ Thursday 3 November 2016 (1pm to 4pm)
 - ✓ Those who could not attend were invited to contact us to discuss their situation and how the potential proposals might affect them.

RESULTS:

The website was viewed 329 times during the consultation period. This demonstrates that media coverage of the consultation was active, however members of the public, did not complete the form to air their views.

A total of 35 people completed the on-line survey.

3 people expressed an interest in attending the drop-in information sessions and 3 people attended.

32 individual comments were received in response to the consultation questions.

5 people emailed for further information

1 person attended the drop-in sessions and gave their feedback verbally

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

Due to the type of questions asked in the on-line survey, and in-line with the number of responses received, the results are mainly qualitative. The data has provided an in-depth look at what the proposed changes mean to the respondents and how it will impact them.

KEY RESULTS:

Question 1 focused on collecting personal data and will therefore not be included in this report.

Question 2 established whether the respondent was currently receiving a CTRS discount and whether they were responding on behalf of an organization.

- 8 respondents are currently receiving a CTRS discount
- 16 respondents responded on behalf of an organization:
 - Stonewater Housing
 - Northamptonshire British Polio Fellowship
 - Residents of Trinity Ward and communities served by CSN community center's
 - Community Law Service (7)
 - Collingtree Parish Council member
 - Great Houghton Playing Fields Association
 - Eve
 - A Borough Councillor
 - Intermediate Social Care Support contract
 - Housing Association

The remaining questions focused on the 3 specific options being considered. To each question the customer was asked to what extent they did or did not support the proposal and given the option of 5 responses with the option to add further comments. These were:

- Strongly support
- Support
- Do not support
- Strongly do not support
- Don't know

Question 3:

Proposal 1 would be not to make any changes and keep the scheme as it was during 2016/17. This would mean that the council would need to raise £252,000 from other sources. Previously the Council has decided to adopt CTR schemes that have sought to balance the significant cuts to the council's resource for CTR and, the council's wider budget challenges, but also needing to support the most vulnerable members of our community. Any decision to keep the scheme at current levels will result in difficult

decisions having to be taken elsewhere. To see further details of how this might affect you, please check our website To what extent do you support this proposal?

34 responses were made and 1 respondent skipped the question.

The key comments received were as follows:

- 26 respondents confirmed that they preferred this option
- 5 respondents commented that those in receipt of CTR are already struggling to meet the current liability
- 1 respondent confirmed that as a registered charity they felt that any increase in their outlays would have a detrimental effect on their ability to manage and maintain facilities.

Question 4:

Proposal 2 would see working age council taxpayers liable to pay approximately 37% of their council tax bill subject to other support changes. Currently those working age council taxpayers eligible for CTR pay at least 29% of their council tax charge, receiving a discount of up to 71%. This option proposes a lower level of financial support of approximately 63% from April 2017, therefore claimants would become liable for the payment of a higher percentage of their council tax charge (37%). This would mean that the council would need to raise £156,000 from other sources. The existing additional income disregard afforded to recipients of War Disablement Pension will continue as part of the 2017-18 CTR Scheme. In addition disability premiums, which increase the level of support for individuals in this claim group will continue, alongside a four week run on period for those moving into work. Under this proposal, a working age claimant or family on income support has a council tax liability on a band A, unparished, property a net increase of £1.58 per week and for a Band D, unparished, a net increase of £2.37 per week. To see further details of how this might affect you, please check our website. To what extent do you support this proposal?

31 responses were made and 4 respondents skipped the question.

The key comments received were as follows:

- 10 respondents confirmed that they preferred this option
- 20 respondents confirmed that they did not support this option
- 5 Respondents commented that those already in receipt of CTR are struggling to pay the current liability and this option would increase further hardship
- 1 respondent commented specific concerns regarding those aged below 25 in receipt of benefits.
- 1 respondent suggested alternative ways of funding the shortfall by reducing Community grants and charitable donations
- 1 respondent indicated that this was the best option in favor of the claimant
- 1 respondent at a drop in session was disappointed that a councilor was not available to discuss concerns

Question 5:

Proposal 3 would see working age council taxpayers liable to pay approximately 55% of their council tax bill subject to other support changes. Currently those working age council taxpayers eligible for CTR pay at least 29% of their council tax charge, receiving a discount of up to 71%. This option proposes a lower level of financial support of approximately 55% from April 2017, therefore claimants would become liable for the payment of a higher percentage of their council tax charge (45%) unless their discount is protected. Individuals with protected discount would be those in receipt of war widows pension, war disablement pension, disability premium and the four week extended payment to incentivise work. This would mean that the council would need to raise £59,000 from other sources. Under this proposal, a working age claimant or family on income support has a council tax liability on a band A, unparished, property a net increase of £3.16 per week and for a Band D, unparished, a net increase of £4.56 per week. To see further details of how this might affect you, please check our website. To what extent do you support this proposal?

31 responses were made and 4 respondents skipped the question.

The key comments received were as follows:

- 25 respondents confirmed that they did not support this option
- 1 respondent commented that this option would increase poverty for low income families
- 1 respondent indicated that the long term sick and disabled require support here
- 1 respondent at a drop in session believed that only those currently in receipt of CTR should be eligible to respond to the survey and that a residents panel would be beneficial

Question 6

We are running a number of drop-in sessions at the One Stop Shop over the next few weeks to give people a chance to discuss the proposed changes and how they may impact on people-particularly for those receiving or likely to receive CTR discount. If you are interested in coming along, please select your preferred option below to give us an idea of numbers:

- 3 people indicated that they would like to attend
- 8 indicated that they could not attend
- 3 people did attend one of the sessions offered

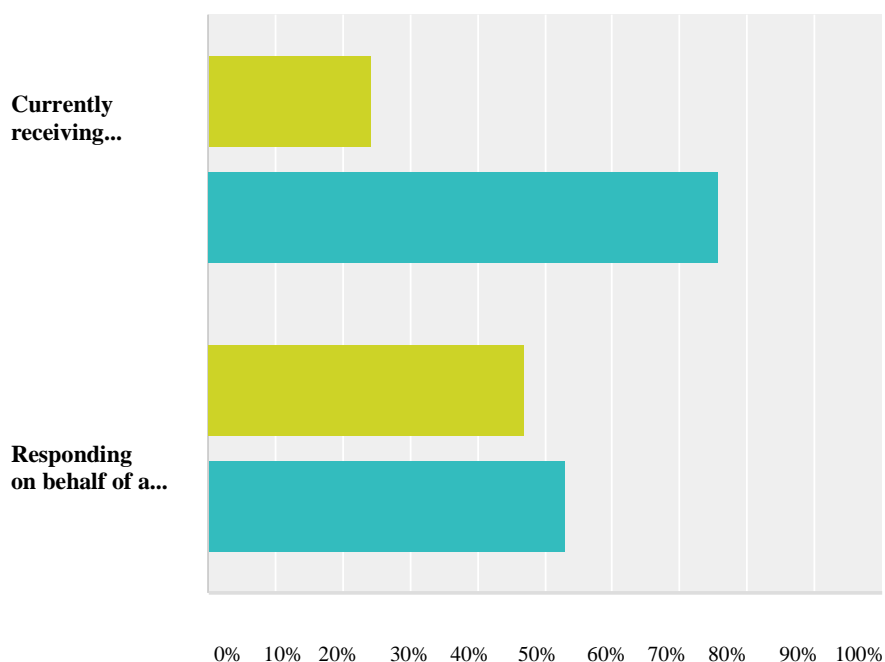
Question 7

How did you hear about this consultation?

- 8 people heard about the consultation from the website
- 19 people heard about the consultation by email
- 2 people heard about the consultation through the newspaper
- 4 people heard about the consultation from other sources
- 5 people heard about the consultation from social media

Full responses

Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation for 2016/17



Yes No ■ ■

	Yes	No	Total
Currently receiving support through the Council Tax Reduction scheme	24.24 %	75.76 %	3
Responding on behalf of a community group or organisation (please provide details about the organisation in the box below)	47.06 %	52.94 %	3

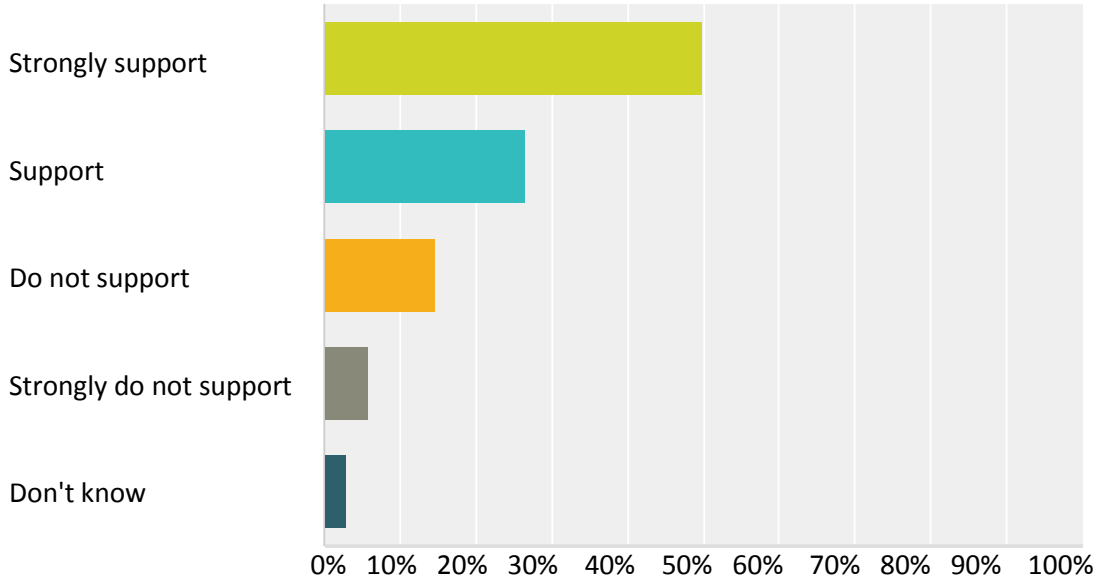
Question

Proposal 1 would be not to make any changes and keep the scheme as it was during 2016/17. This would mean that the council would need to raise £252,000 from other sources. Previously the Council has decided to adopt CTR schemes that have sought to balance the significant cuts to the council's resource for CTR and, the council's wider budget challenges, but also needing to support the most vulnerable members of our community. Any decision to keep the scheme at current levels will result in difficult

decisions having to be taken elsewhere. To see further details of how this might affect you, please check our website. To what extent do you support this proposal?

Answer

Answered: 34 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Strongly support	50.00%	17
Support	26.47%	9
Do not support	14.71%	5
Strongly do not support	5.88%	2
Don't know	2.94%	1
Total		34

1. The amount I began receiving from the CTRS in 2015 is a real benefit to my finances as I am not in receipt of any other government benefits. As living costs rise it is more difficult to meet them with the pension I'm on.
2. Many of those on the lowest incomes struggle to meet the payments as they are and any increase would result in them being less able to pay, less likely to pay and put further into debt. With the benefits being held at the current level, LHA rates for rent instead of full HB increasing the amount they have to pay towards the council tax is only going to make their standard of living decrease further. They will not be able to make ends meet which will most likely result in debt to the council, unpaid council tax, debt to the housing provider in unpaid rent and quite probably lead to eviction meaning more debt.
3. Budget savings should not be made from the pockets of the most vulnerable residents in our town. Families and disabled, elderly people have not had benefits increased. The cost of utilities and food is increasing and a shortfall in the council revenue should not be subsidised by money which should be spent on fuel and food for these

vulnerable families. Many people in HIMO's with cooking facilities in their room and shared other facilities now are forced to pay council tax. An increase would be unsustainable for them.

4. We already have clients who are struggling to meet the current liability and subsequently suffering hardship. A further increase will obviously create further difficulties and debt to those already trying to survive on a low income.
5. As a registered charity any financial increase on our outlays would have a detrimental effect on our ability to manage and maintain the facilities we have to offer.
6. The savings required should be made by scrapping the Members Allowances Scheme. There are too many freeloaders on the council.
7. I think it is too much to pay as it is now for people on a very low income there should be more support for council tax, I'm really struggling to pay it now, as I am on a low income.
8. Not raising Council Tax for all is a party political decision rather than one intended to benefit the people of Northampton. It appears that picking on the poorest and most vulnerable in society is more politically expedient than a small increase, after all there is a local authority election next Spring!
9. The clients on low income that this would affect are already struggling to keep up with their council tax payments. I fail to see how you can think this is a viable idea for people already experiencing severe financial difficulty.
10. The customers we support struggle to meet the payments now, and regularly receive notice of arrears and court dates, this would worsen if increased.
11. Working in debt advice I see the negative impact of increases in priority expenditure on clients, meaning I strongly oppose any increases due to the difficulties the people who are eligible for CTS already have in trying to pay their council tax. If you were to increase it you would simply see more people failing to pay, and you would most likely contribute to causing further poverty in lower income families.
12. Working age tax payers in receipt of benefit will struggle to pay anything towards CTRS.
13. Residents on job seekers allowance are already struggling to buy food for their families without having this support reduced

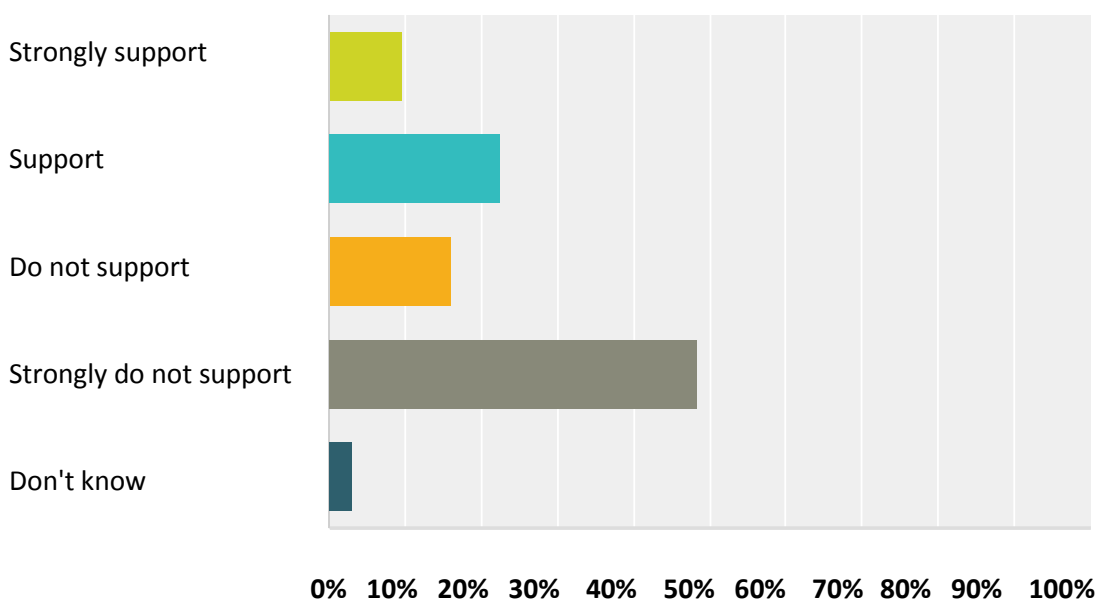
Question

Proposal 2 would see working age council taxpayers liable to pay approximately 37% of their council tax bill subject to other support changes. Currently those working age council taxpayers eligible for CTR pay at least 29% of their council tax charge, receiving a discount of up to 71%. This option proposes a lower level of financial support of approximately 63% from April 2017, therefore claimants would become liable for the

payment of a higher percentage of their council tax charge (37%). This would mean that the council would need to raise £156,000 from other sources. The existing additional income disregard afforded to recipients of War Disablement Pension will continue as part of the 2017-18 CTR Scheme. In addition disability premiums, which increase the level of support for individuals in this claim group will continue, alongside a four week run on period for those moving into work. Under this proposal, a working age claimant or family on income support has a council tax liability on a band A, unparished, property a net increase of £1.58 per week and for a Band D, unparished, a net increase of £2.37 per week. To see further details of how this might affect you, please check our website To what extent do you support this proposal?

Answer

Answered: 31 Skipped: 4



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Strongly support	9.68%	3
Support	22.58%	7
Do not support	16.13%	5
Strongly do not support	48.39%	15
Don't know	3.23%	1
Total		31

1. I apologise but this is all too complicated for me to make sense of it.
2. I was a strong supporter of the poll tax which would have meant everyone paying something and would have increased a sense of community responsibility and possibly avoided pointless damage to community assets. I therefore support this slight increase but would not want to see folk on lower incomes being asked to pay any more than this sort of share. The Council could easily fund this by cutting down on all community grants and charitable donations. It is the job of Councils to collect funds for services and nothing else. Charity giving is best left to individuals.

3. Why should benefits be cut, at a time when Members Allowances are not being cut, or better still abolished.
4. at this rate of support ,people on a low income would not be able to pay it
5. 29% = over £200 that has to come out of maintenance benefits already squeezed by rising prices - 37% would be even worse. That's £200 I don't have to spend on food or heating just to make councillors feel more electable – I don't suppose any borough councillors have to choose between heating or eating!
6. Low income families are already struggling to maintain normal monthly expenditure and would cause further poverty.
7. The customers that we see won't be able to afford the 37% rate - although I appreciate there is a lack of funding and the resources need to come from somewhere. The debt of our customers would increase, possibly leading to more court cases and more debt due to those costs.
8. Working in debt advice I see the negative impact of increases in priority expenditure on clients, meaning I strongly oppose any increases due to the difficulties the people who are eligible for CTS already have in trying to pay their council tax. If you were to increase it you would simply see more people failing to pay, and you would most likely contribute to causing further poverty in lower income families.
9. I have grave concerns concerning working age tax payers below the age of 25 in receipt of benefits being hit with additional costs. We are fully aware of section 13A (1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 which gives power to each local council to reduce individuals council tax bill by any amount but in reality this very rarely happens.
10. Option 2 and 3 will put struggling families into more debt and they will not be able to pay any council tax or they will fall short and that will lead to debt, they are already struggling.

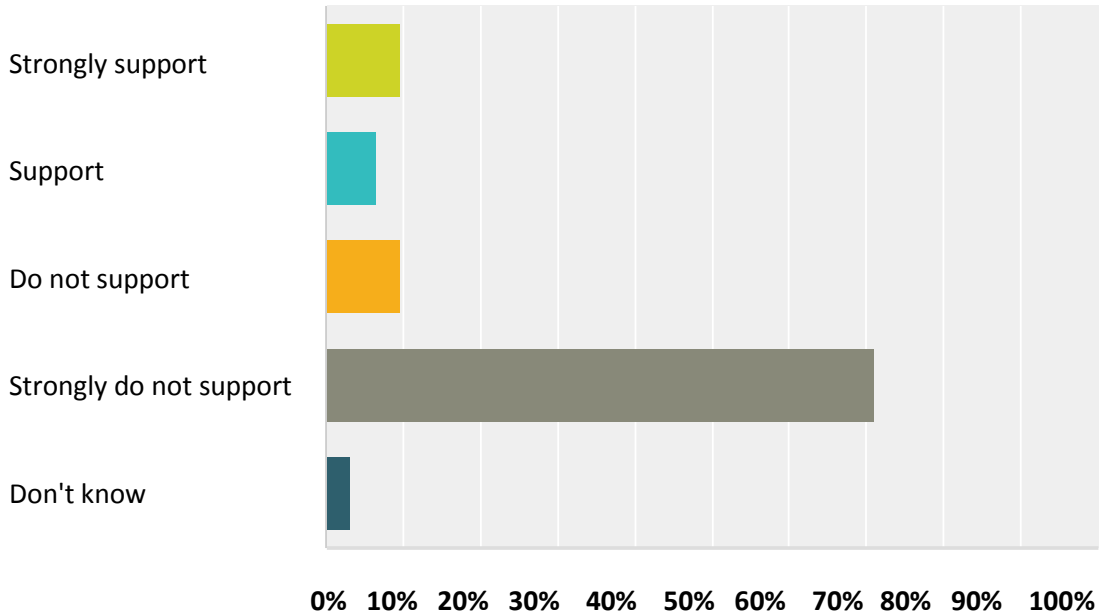
Question

Proposal 3 would see working age council taxpayers liable to pay approximately 55% of their council tax bill subject to other support changes. Currently those working age council taxpayers eligible for CTR pay at least 29% of their council tax charge, receiving a discount of up to 71%. This option proposes a lower level of financial support of approximately 55% from April 2017, therefore claimants would become liable for the payment of a higher percentage of their council tax charge (45%) unless their discount is protected. Individuals with protected discount would be those in receipt of war widows pension, war disablement pension, disability premium and the four week extended payment to incentivise work. This would mean that the council would need to raise £59,000 from other sources. Under this proposal, a working age claimant or family on income support has a council tax liability on a band A, unparished, property a net increase of £3.16 per week and for a Band D, unparished, a net increase of £4.56

per week. To see further details of how this might affect you, please check our website
 To what extent do you support this proposal?

Answer

Answered: 31 Skipped: 4



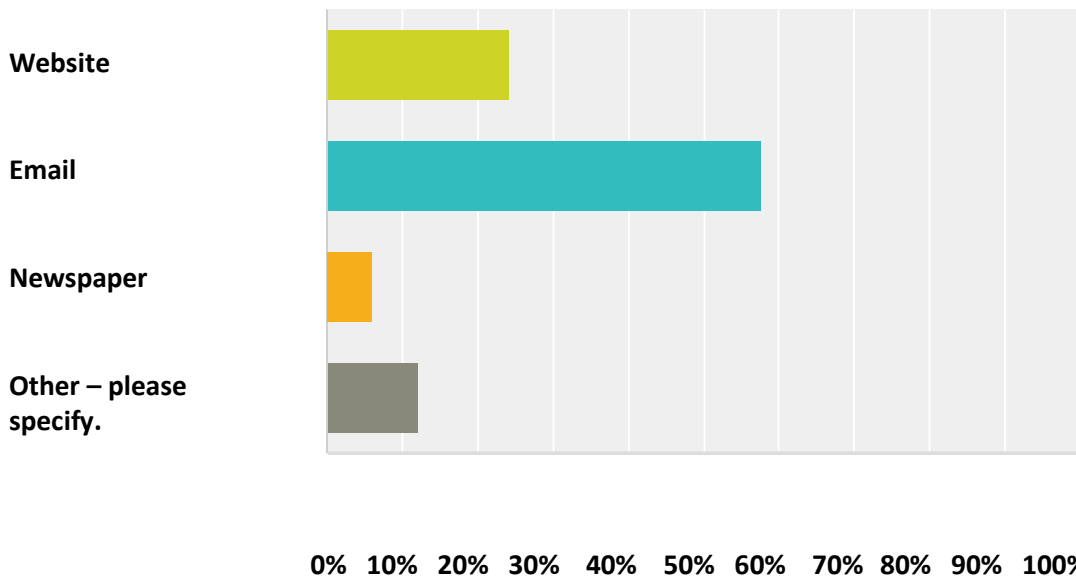
Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly support	9.68%	3
Support	6.45%	2
Do not support	9.68%	3
Strongly do not support	70.97%	22
Don't know	3.23%	1
Total		31

1. I feel that the long term sick and disabled require support here.
2. This would be achievable.
3. Why should benefits be cut, at a time when Members Allowances are not being cut, or better still abolished.
4. This is the fairest idea. People who fall in to this category should get the income needed through other benefits to make up the costs to them. And we protect other services from further cuts to raise the money needed if we didn't do this option. It's a win-win situation
5. This is not enough support to help people on a low income and would not be able to pay.
6. 29% = over £200 that has to come out of maintenance benefits already squeezed by rising prices - 37% would be worse, 45% worse still.

7. Low income families are already struggling to maintain normal monthly expenditure and would cause further poverty.
8. Working in debt advice I see the negative impact of increases in priority expenditure on clients, meaning I strongly oppose any increases due to the difficulties the people who are eligible for CTS already have in trying to pay their council tax. If you were to increase it you would simply see more people failing to pay, and you would most likely contribute to causing further poverty in lower income families.
9. You will exacerbate an already precarious dilemma people are already facing when trying to survive on benefits. In looking at your proposed model you have not taken into account those under the age of 25 who are already on reduced benefits. Using the Wednesbury principles of reasonableness there must be a fairer method of raising local taxes

How did you hear about this consultation?

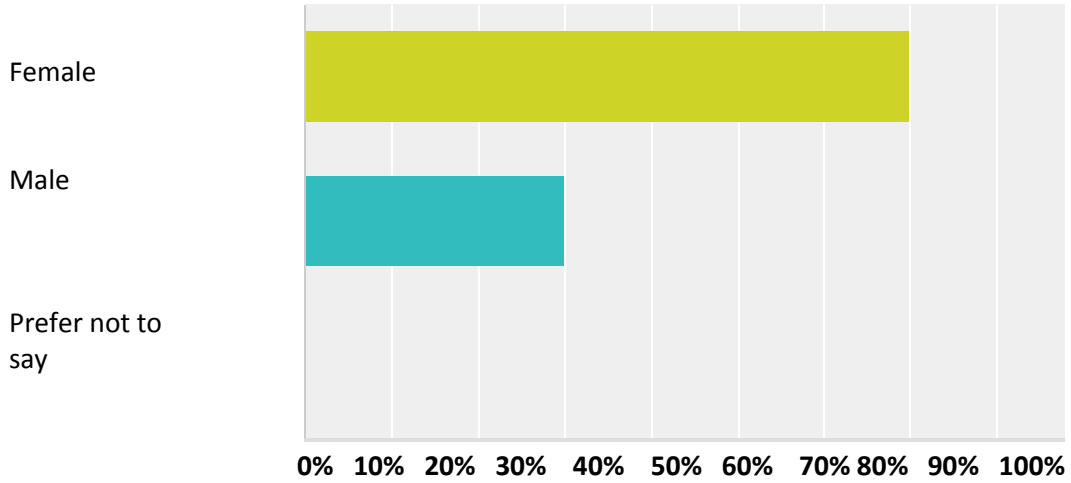
Answered: 33 Skipped: 2



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Website	24.24%	8
Email	57.58%	19
Newspaper	6.06%	2
Other – please specify.	12.12%	4
Total		33

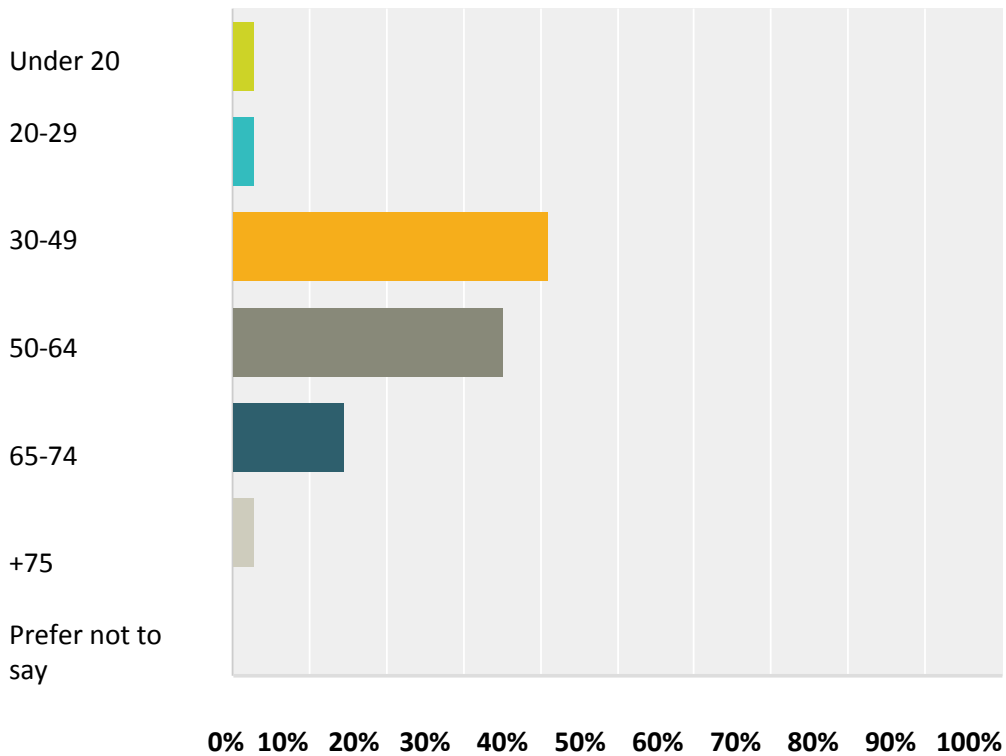
Please can you tell us your gender?

Answered: 33 Skipped: 2



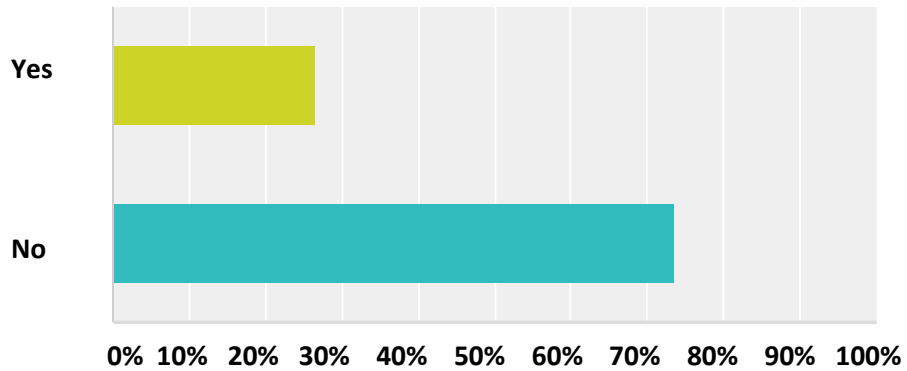
How old are you?

Answered: 34 Skipped: 1



Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Answered: 34 Skipped: 1



EQUALITIES:

Of the respondents who completed the equalities questions, relating to gender, age, and disability or ethnic origin.

- 69.70% of respondents were female, 30.30% were male.
- In terms of age:
 - 2.94% were aged under 20
 - 2.94% were aged 20-29
 - 41.18% were aged 30-49
 - 35.29% were aged 50-64
 - 14.71% were aged 65-74
 - 2.94% were aged over 75
- 26.47% of respondents stated they considered themselves to have a disability.