



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 2018/19 is based on the former Council Tax Benefit Scheme with the exception that all working age claimants could only claim a discount for 65% 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 2019/20 must be agreed by the 31st January 2019.

This consultation took place from 17 September 2018 to 11 November 2018.

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
- 31,694 email invitations were issued to email addresses held on the Benefit and Council Tax database. To comply with GDPR this linked to a slightly different on-line survey that first gained consent before proceeding with the survey proper.

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**

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:
 - ✓ Thursday 20 September 2018 (1pm to 4pm)
 - ✓ Thursday 4 October 2018 (9am to 12pm)
 - ✓ Tuesday 16 October 2018 (9am to 12pm)
 - ✓ Tuesday 25 October 2018 (12:30pm to 15:30pm)
 - ✓ Tuesday 6 November 2018 (4:30pm to 6:30pm)
 - ✓ 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 1,421 times during the consultation period, by 1,271 people.

Posts made on Twitter on 19/9/18, 17/10/18, and 5/11/18 were seen by 4,827 people, with 58 people clicking on the link attached.

Posts on Facebook on 18/9/18, 4/10/18 and 29/10/18 were viewed by 6,839 people, with 126 people clicking on the link attached.

This demonstrates that media coverage of the consultation was active.

A total of 2,800 people completed the on-line survey, though not everyone completed every question.

159 people expressed an interest in attending the drop-in information sessions but only 4 people attended.

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

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

In total 2,800 people completed at least one question of the on-line survey and the 3 key questions all have over 2,700 responses. There were also 920 comments made which are summarised below. The full detail of the comments have retained within the Revenues & Benefits service should they be required at a future date.

KEY RESULTS:

Question 1 was included to comply with GDPR and gain consent for surveys, and will therefore not be included in this report.

Questions 2 to 4 focused on the 3 specific options being considered. To each question the respondent was asked to what extent they did or did not support the proposal. As well as the option to add further comments there were 5 possible responses to each of these questions:

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

Responses are summarized below.

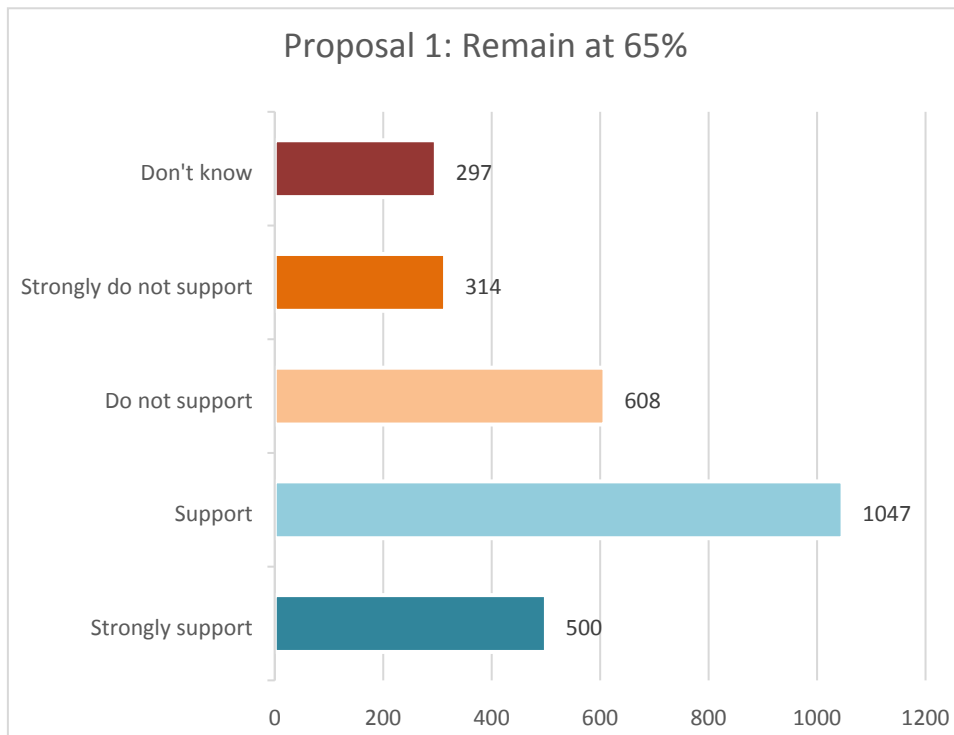
Question 2:

Proposal 1: No change. Maximum amount of CTRS remains at 65%.

This is where the Council continues with the same scheme as 2018/19 and makes no further changes. This means the Council Tax contribution rate for those in receipt of CTR will remain at 35%. However, the council may need to find additional funding for 2019/20 due to funding reductions in the local government finance settlement. To see further details of how this might affect you, please see our website

To what extent do you support this proposal?

2,766 responses were made, with 306 further comments.



The key comments received were as follows:

- 56 respondents stated that the level of support should be reduced. 44 of these confirmed that they were not in receipt of CTRS. 0 stated they were in receipt, and 12 did not say.
- 47 respondents commented that those in receipt of CTRS are already struggling to meet the current liability. There was an even split between those in receipt of CTRS and those not.
- 38 respondents agreed with this proposal. 9 were in receipt of CTRS and 23 were not.
- 27 respondents thought that the level of support should be increased. 7 of these were in receipt of CTRS and 18 were not.
- 24 respondents thought that the council had mismanaged funds in the past.
- 13 respondents wanted more information to be able to make a decision.
- 13 respondents felt that they received poor value for money from the council tax that they paid.
- 12 respondents seem to have misunderstood the proposal as their comment relates to council tax rates rather than CTRS.
- There were 73 other responses to this question that covered a wide range of subjects including tackling fraud, increasing efficiency, and raising or lowering tax.

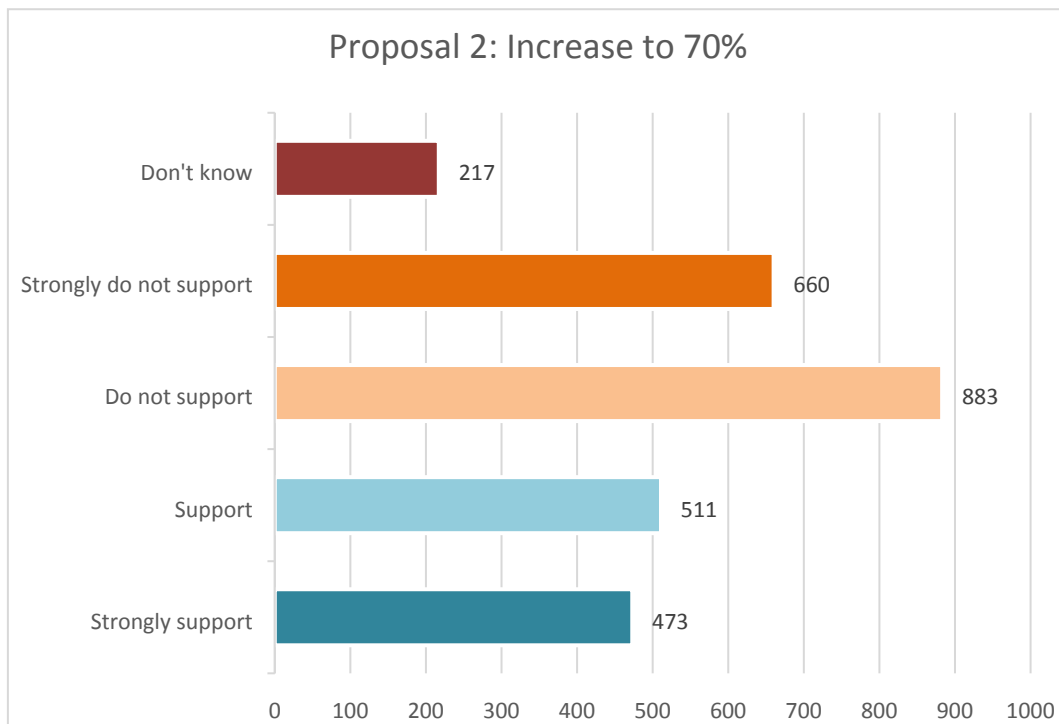
Question 3:

Proposal 2: Increase the maximum amount of CTRS from 65% to 70%.

This is where the Council changes the approach of previous years, to reduce financial pressures on customers. This would result in the recipients of a reduction needing to pay less Council Tax, however the Council would need to find additional funding for 2019/20 due to funding reductions in the local government finance settlement. To see further details of how this might affect you, please see our website.

To what extent do you support this proposal?

2,744 responses were made, with 338 further comments.



The key comments received were as follows:

- 81 respondents disagreed with this proposal. 15 of these were in receipt of CTRS, 56 were not, and 10 did not specify.
- 45 respondents agreed with this proposal. 17 of these were in receipt of CTRS, 19 were not, and 9 did not specify.
- 24 respondents stated that they were struggling financially with an even split between those in receipt of CTRS and those not.
- 20 respondents thought that the council had mismanaged funds in the past.
- 13 respondents felt that more support should be provided through CTRS. 4 of these were in receipt of CTRS, 4 were not, and 5 did not specify.
- 13 respondents felt that less support should be provided through CTRS. 0 of these were in receipt of CTRS. 8 were not, and 5 did not specify.
- 10 respondents wanted more information about how this proposal would be funded.

- There were 132 other responses to this question that covered a wide range of subjects including increasing efficiency, raising or lowering tax, and providing poor value for money.

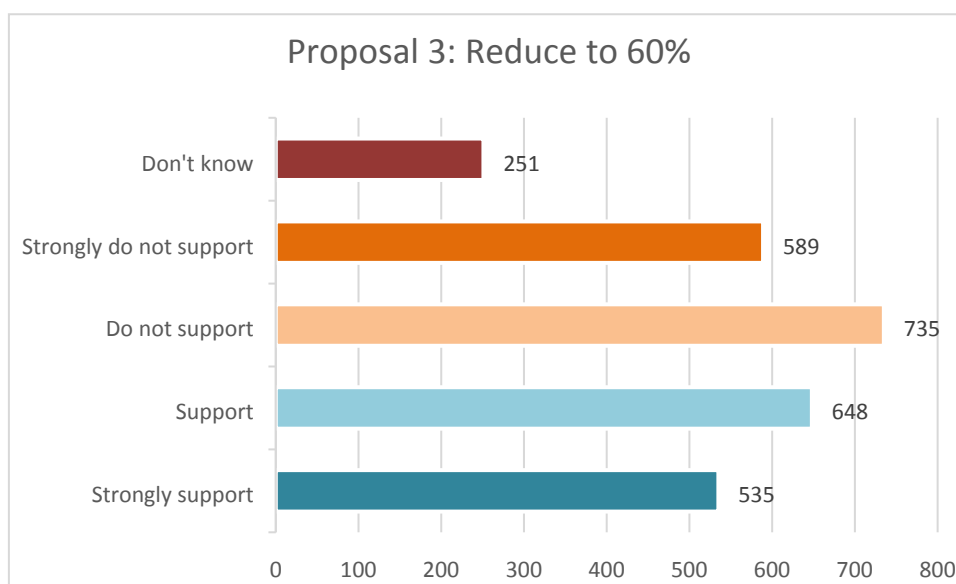
Question 4:

Proposal 3: Reduce the maximum amount of CTRS from 65% to 60%.

This is where the Council continues with the existing policy to increase the % that each taxpayer has to pay in line with national changes. This would result in the recipients of a reduction needing to pay more Council Tax, as the Council would need to find additional funding for 2019/20 due to funding reductions in the local government finance settlement. To see further details of how this might affect you, please see our website.

To what extent do you support this proposal?

2,758 responses were made, with 276 further comments.



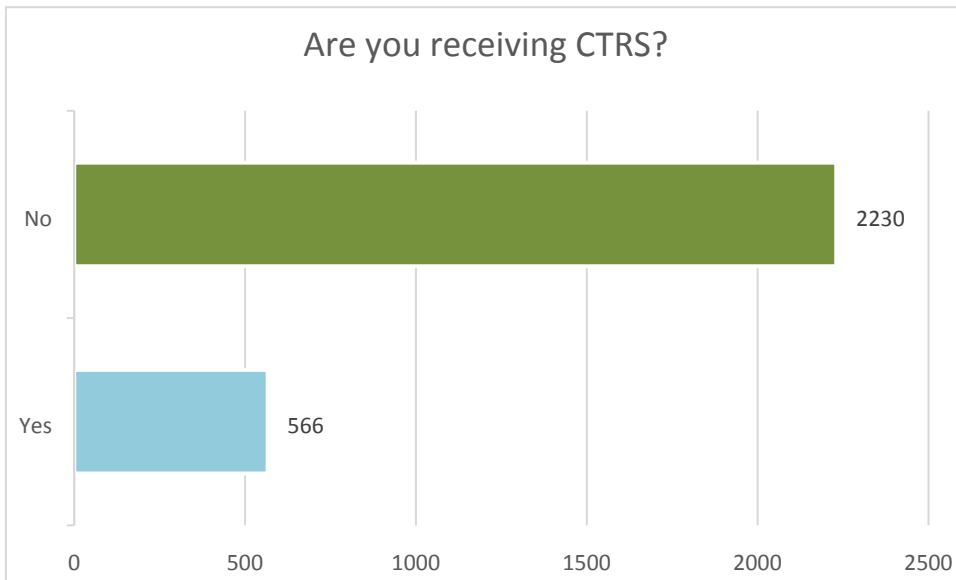
The key comments received were as follows:

- 80 respondents stated that they disagreed with this proposal. 27 were in receipt of CTRS, 38 were not, and 15 did not specify.
- 45 respondents stated that they agreed with this proposal. 3 were in receipt of CTRS, 33 were not, and 9 did not specify.
- 25 respondents indicated that they were currently struggling financially. 13 were in receipt of CTRS, 9 were not, and 3 did not specify.
- 20 respondents felt that less support should be provided. 2 were in receipt of CTRS, 16 were not, and 2 did not specify.
- 14 respondents thought that the council had mismanaged funds in the past.
- There were 88 further responses to this question that covered a wide range of subjects including increasing efficiency, increase tax, and supporting more.

Question 5

Are you currently receiving support through the Council Tax Reduction scheme?

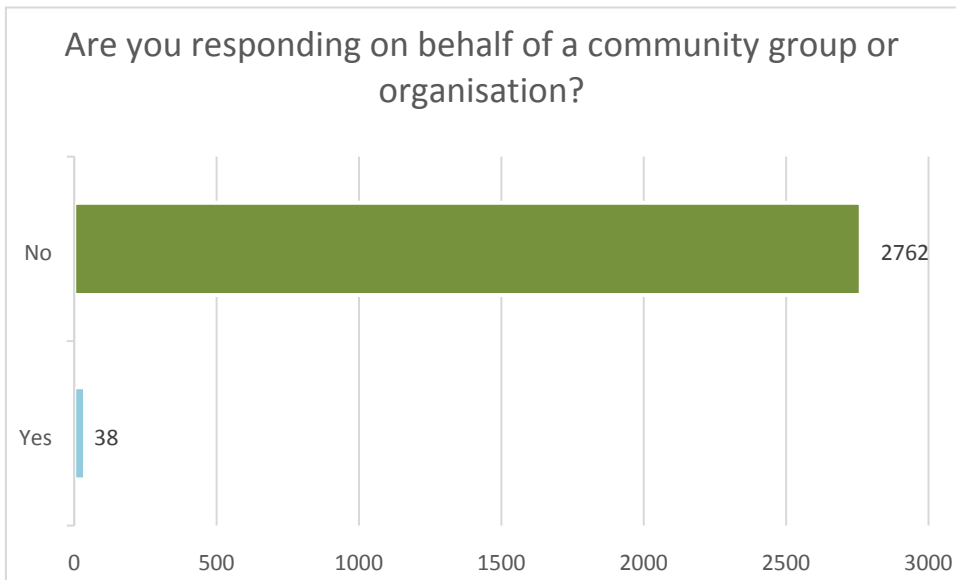
2,230 responses were made.



Question 6

Are you responding on behalf of a community group or organisation?

2,762 responses were made.



The following groups and organisations were listed in the comments for this question:

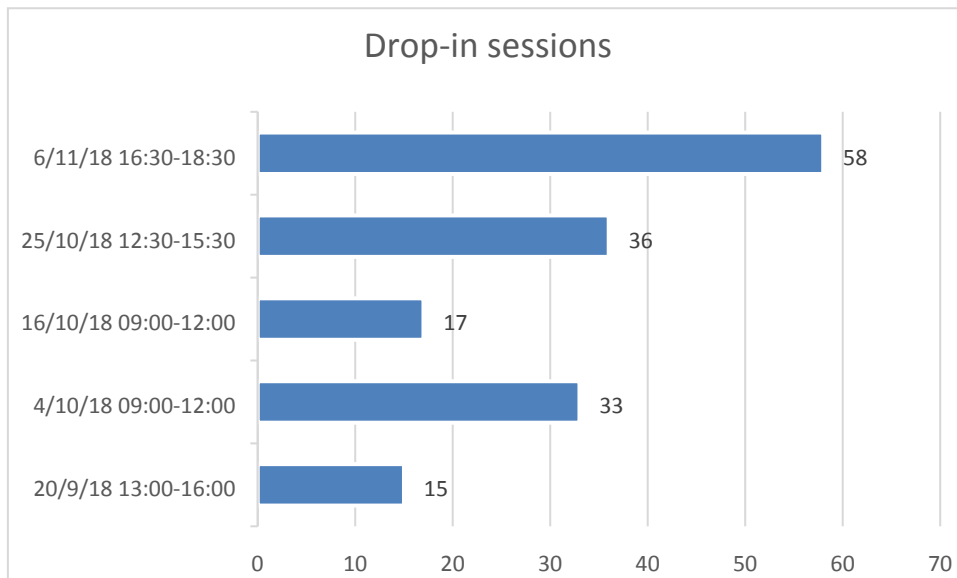
- Afghan Community Northampton
- Northampton House
- Methodist Homestead Charity
- Moving On Up (Northampton) Ltd

- Association of British Commuters Eastern Region
- Bridge Program
- Northampton Sea Cadets.

Question 7

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:

159 people expressed an interest in attending one of the drop-in sessions. Only 4 people did actually attend. Improving attendance will be a focus for next year.



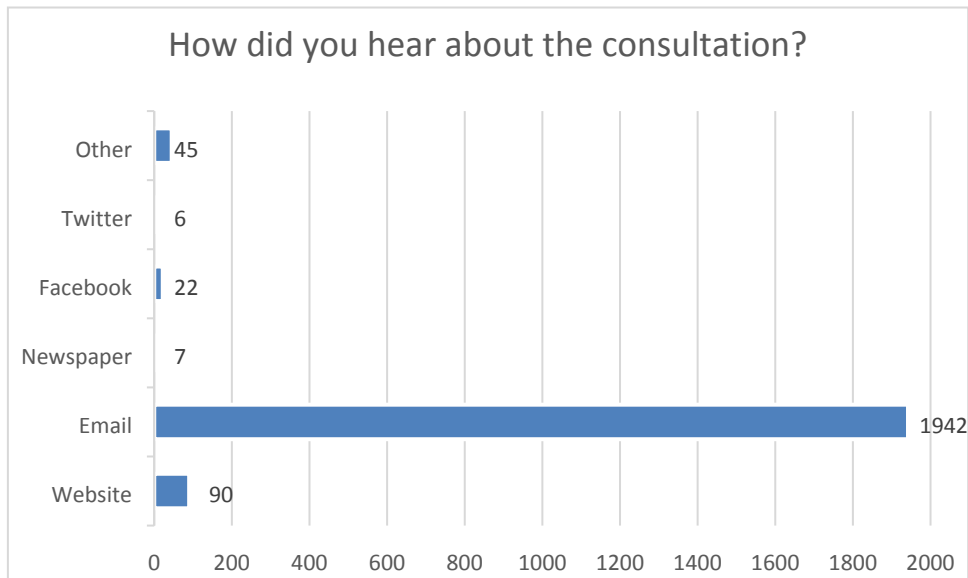
Question 8

This question was concerned with contact details, and the results do not form part of this report.

Question 9

How did you hear about this consultation?

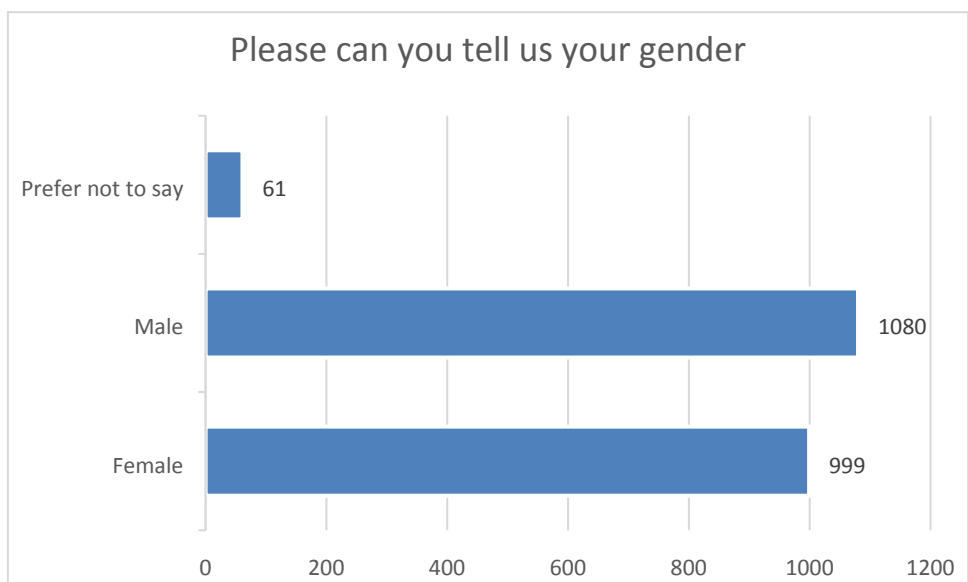
2,112 responses were made.



Question 10

Please can you tell us your gender.

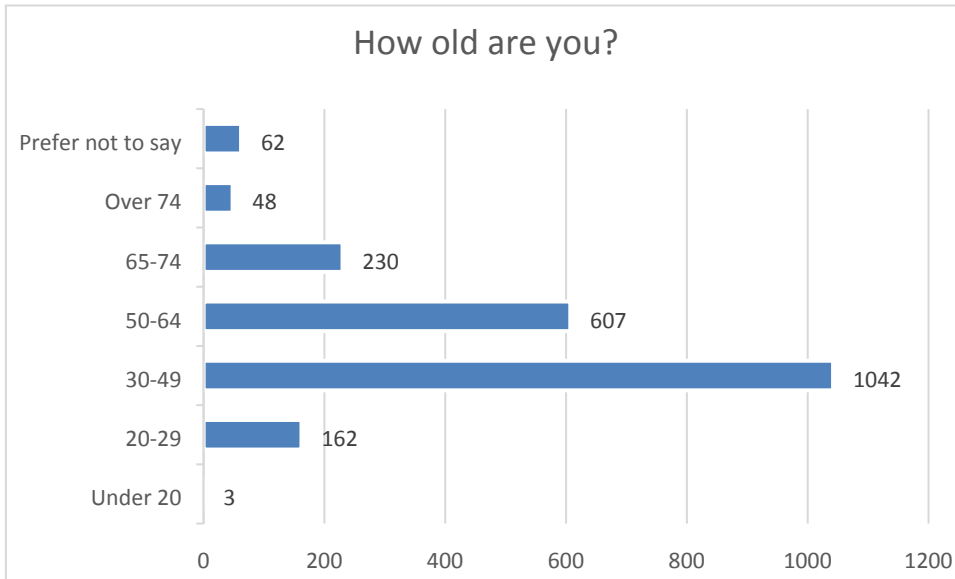
2,140 responses were made with a close to even split between male and female.



Question 11

How old are you?

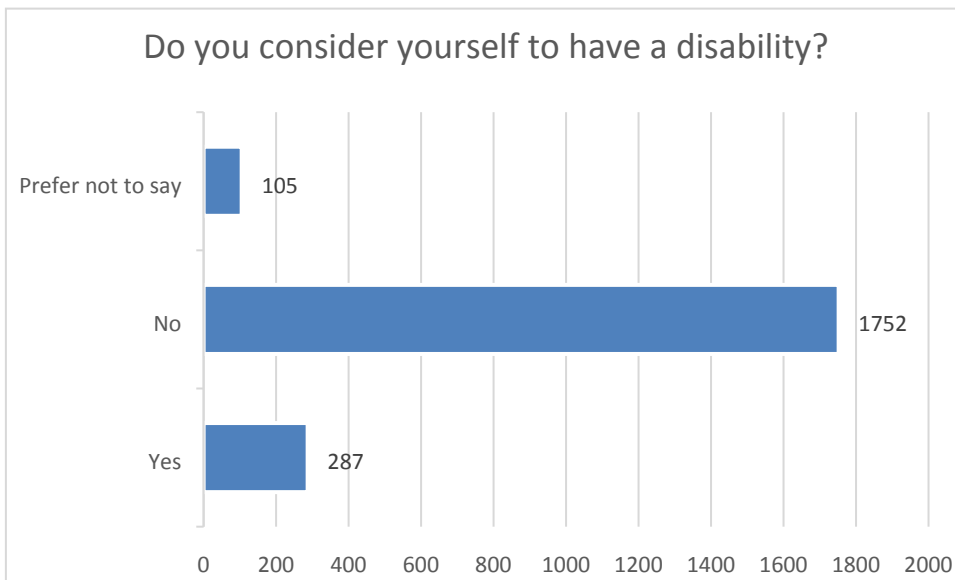
2,154 responses were made.



Question 12

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

2,144 responses were made.



FURTHER ANALYSIS:

The following charts give some further breakdown of the results of the consultation and are included without any further comment.

