



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 2019/20 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 2020/21 must be agreed by the 31st January 2020.

This consultation took place from 14th October 2019 to 10th November 2019.

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
- 5,415 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 24th October 2019 (9am to 12pm)
 - Thursday 24th October 2019 (1pm to 4pm)
 - Tuesday 5th November 2019 (9am to 12pm)
 - Tuesday 5th November 2019 (1pm to 4pm)
 - Wednesday 6 November 2019 (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 20,468 times during the consultation period, by 15,702 people. This led to 206 customers completing the on-line survey. Most customers accessed the survey through the direct link supplied to potentially interest parties via additional media coverage.

Posts made on Twitter on 17/9/19, 21/10/19, 25/10/19, 30/10/19, 5/11/19, and 10/11/19 were seen by 6,609 people, with 54 people clicking on the link attached.

Posts on Facebook on 14/10/19, 17/10/19, 18/10/19, and 24/10/19 were viewed by 4,707 people, with 50 people clicking on the link attached.

This demonstrates that media coverage of the consultation was active.

A total of 1,337 people completed the on-line survey, though not everyone completed every question.

32 people expressed an interest in attending the drop-in information sessions but none actually attended.

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

One paper response was received from Central and East Northants Citizens Advice. This has been attached separately, and proposes a commitment to a 100% reduction in 5 years.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

In total 1,337 people completed at least one question of the on-line survey and the 3 key questions all have over 1,300 responses. There were also 398 comments made which are both summarised and reproduced in full below.

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.

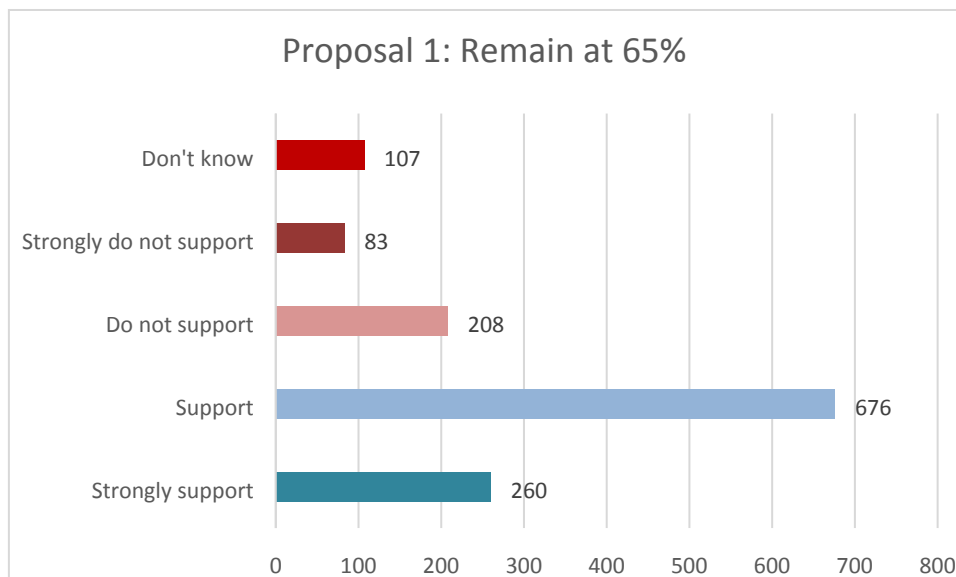
Question 2:

This is where the Council continues with the same scheme as 2019/20 and makes no further changes. This means the Council Tax contribution rate for those in receipt of CTRS will remain at 35%.

To see further details of how this might affect you, please see our website

To what extent do you support this proposal?

1,334 responses were made, with 120 further comments.



The key comments received were as follows:

- 18 respondents stated that the level of support should be reduced. 17 of these confirmed that they were not in receipt of CTRS. 1 stated they were in receipt.
- 13 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.
- 26 respondents agreed with this proposal. 3 were in receipt of CTRS and 23 were not.
- 25 respondents thought that the level of support should be increased. 8 of these were in receipt of CTRS and 17 were not.
- There were 32 other responses to this question that covered a wide range of subjects including wanting more information, improving services, and raising or lowering tax.

Question 3:

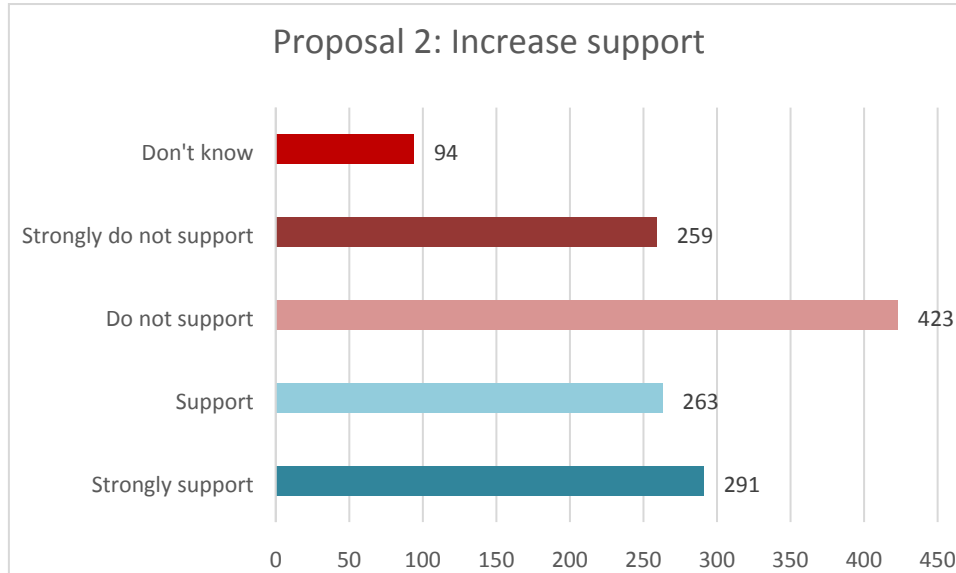
Proposal 2: Increase the maximum amount of CTRS.

This is where the council increases the support for recipients of CTRS, and means that they would have to pay less Council Tax.

To see further details of how this might affect you, please see our website.

To what extent do you support this proposal?

1,330 responses were made, with 164 further comments.



The key comments received were as follows:

- 28 respondents disagreed with this proposal. 5 of these were in receipt of CTRS, 23 were not.
- 25 respondents agreed with this proposal. 7 of these were in receipt of CTRS, 18 were not.
- 14 respondents stated that they were struggling financially with an even split between those in receipt of CTRS and those not.

- 28 respondents felt that more support should be provided through CTRS. 11 of these were in receipt of CTRS, 17 were not.
- 12 respondents felt that less support should be provided through CTRS. None of these 12 were in receipt of CTRS.
- There were 48 other responses to this question that covered a wide range of subjects including needing more information, raising tax, and the mismanagement of funds.

Question 4:

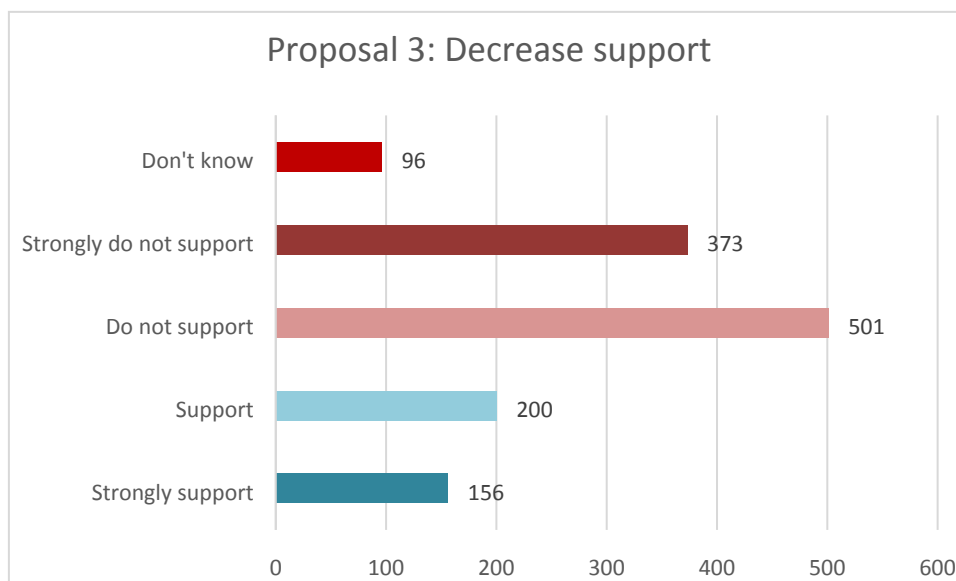
Proposal 3: Reduce the maximum amount of CTRS.

This is where the council decreases the support for recipients of CTRS, and means that they would have to pay more Council Tax.

To see further details of how this might affect you, please see our website.

To what extent do you support this proposal?

1,326 responses were made, with 114 further comments.



The key comments received were as follows:

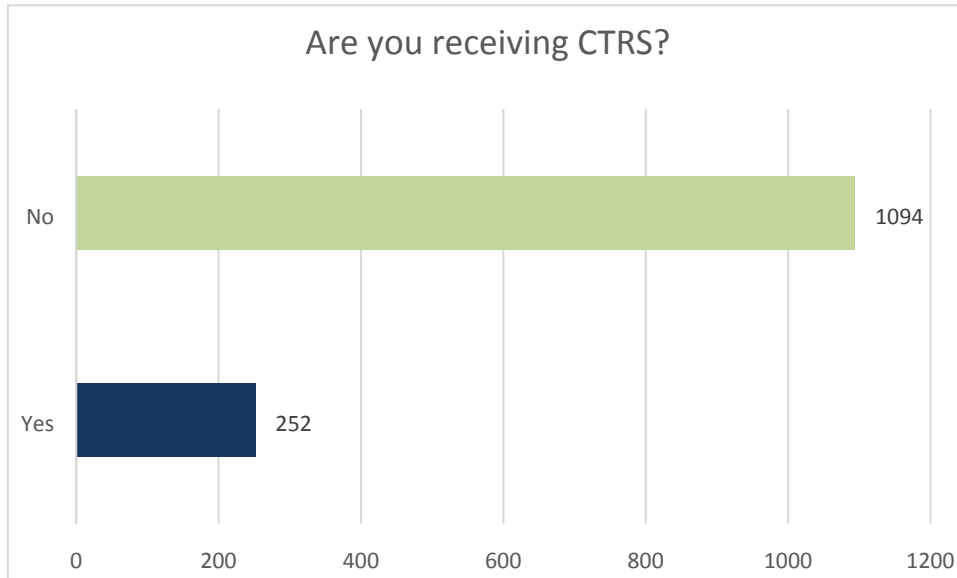
- 42 respondents stated that they disagreed with this proposal. 16 were in receipt of CTRS, 26 were not.
- 9 respondents stated that they agreed with this proposal. 1 was in receipt of CTRS, 8 were not.
- 8 respondents indicated that they were currently struggling financially. 2 were in receipt of CTRS, 6 were not.
- 12 respondents felt that less support should be provided. None of these were in receipt of CTRS.
- 9 respondents felt that more support should be provided. 4 of these were in receipt of CTRS, 5 were not.

- There were 21 further responses to this question, including 5 people that wanted more information, 3 that thought money was mismanaged, and 2 that thought services should improve.

Question 5

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

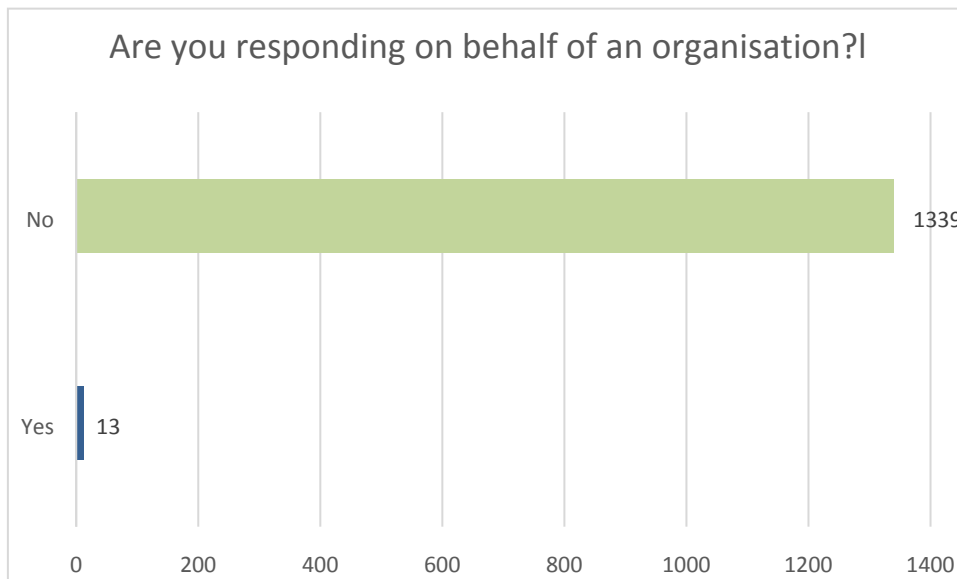
1,346 responses were made.



Question 6

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

1,352 responses were made.



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

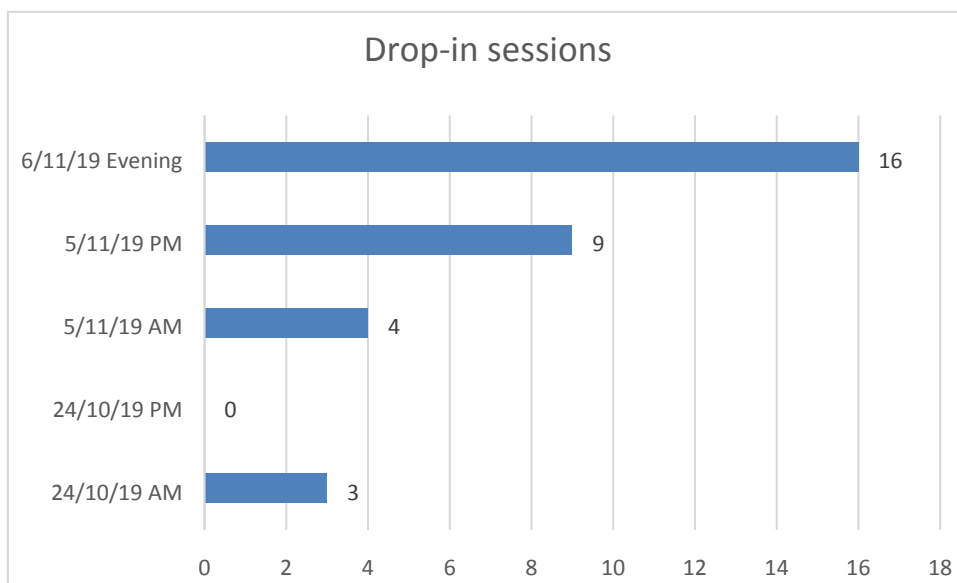
- Falcon Housing Association

- Northants British Polio Fellowship
- Central and East Northamptonshire Citizens Advice

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:

32 people expressed an interest in attending one of the drop-in sessions, but none did attend.



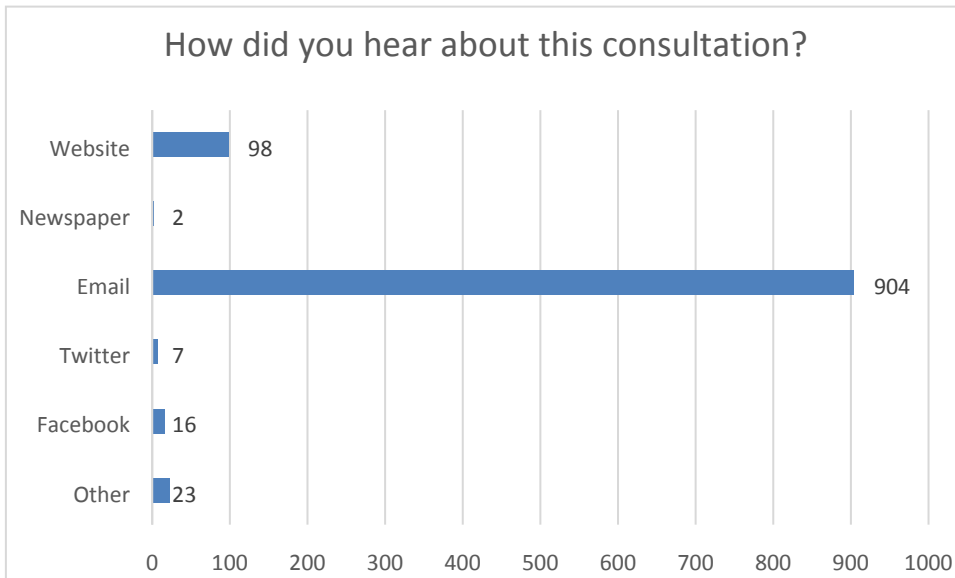
Question 8

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?

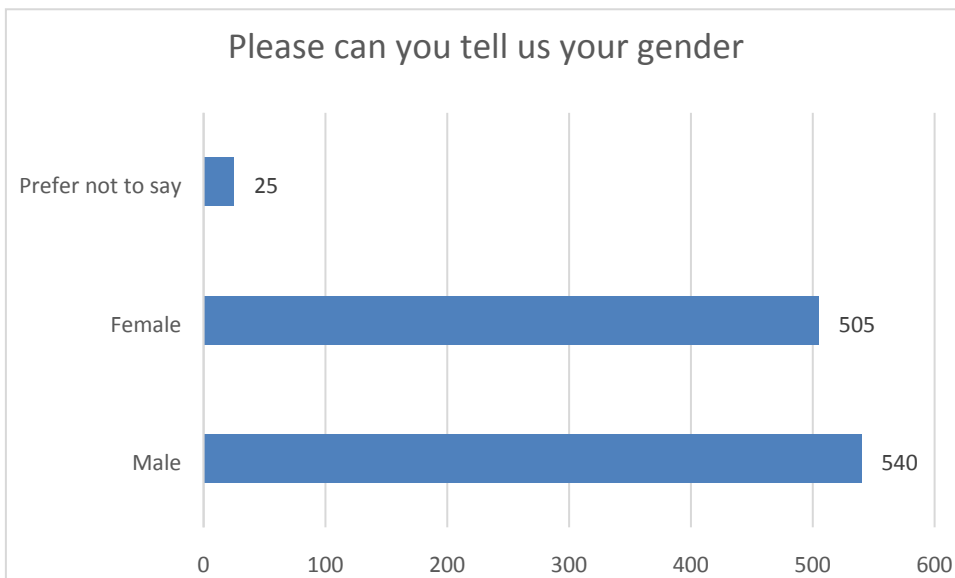
1,050 responses were made.



Question 10

Please can you tell us your gender.

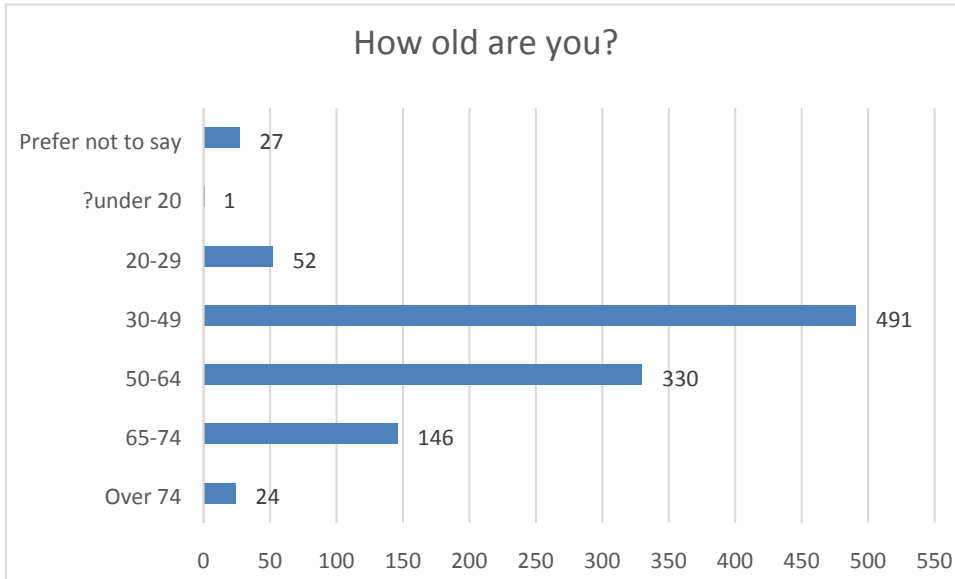
1,070 responses were made with a close to even split between male and female.



Question 11

How old are you?

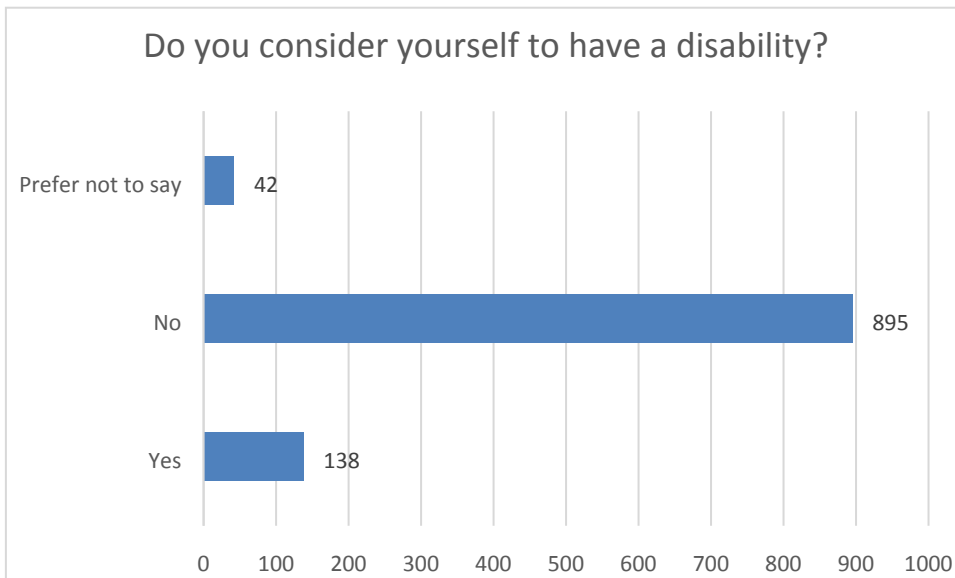
1,071 responses were made.



Question 12

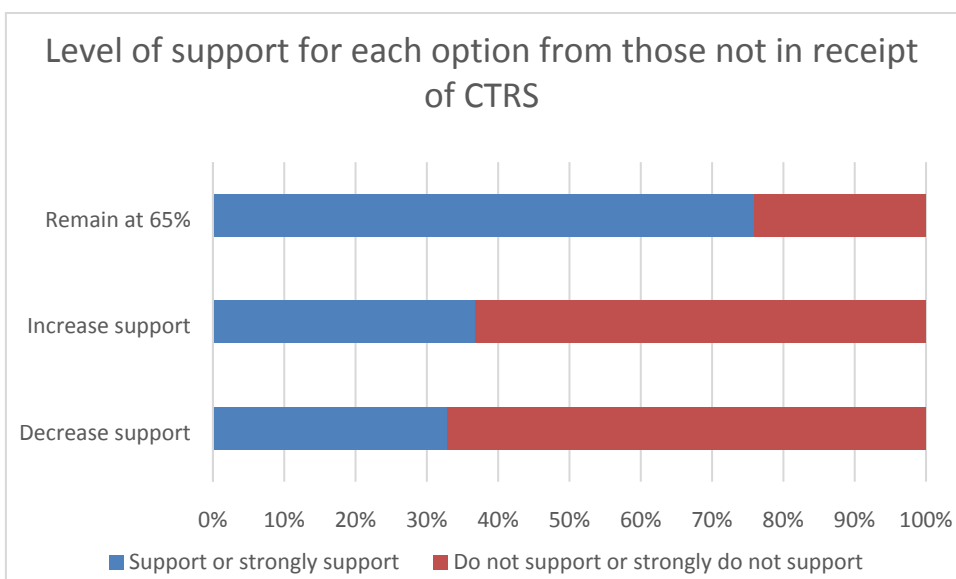
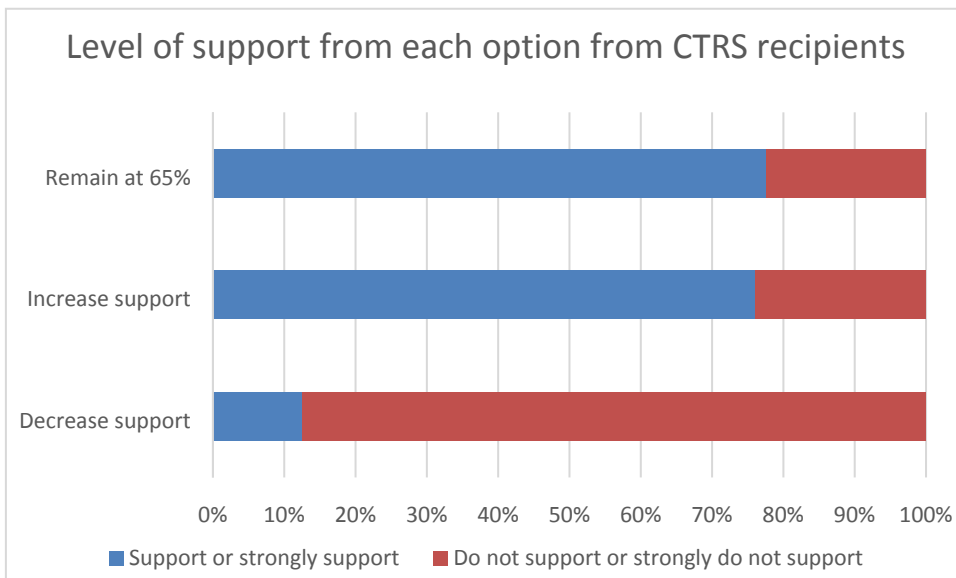
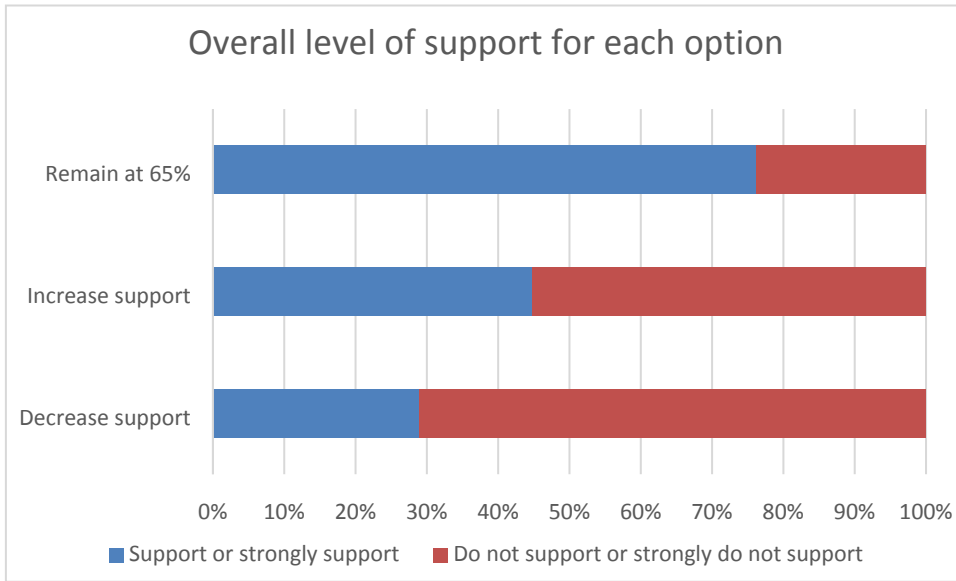
Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

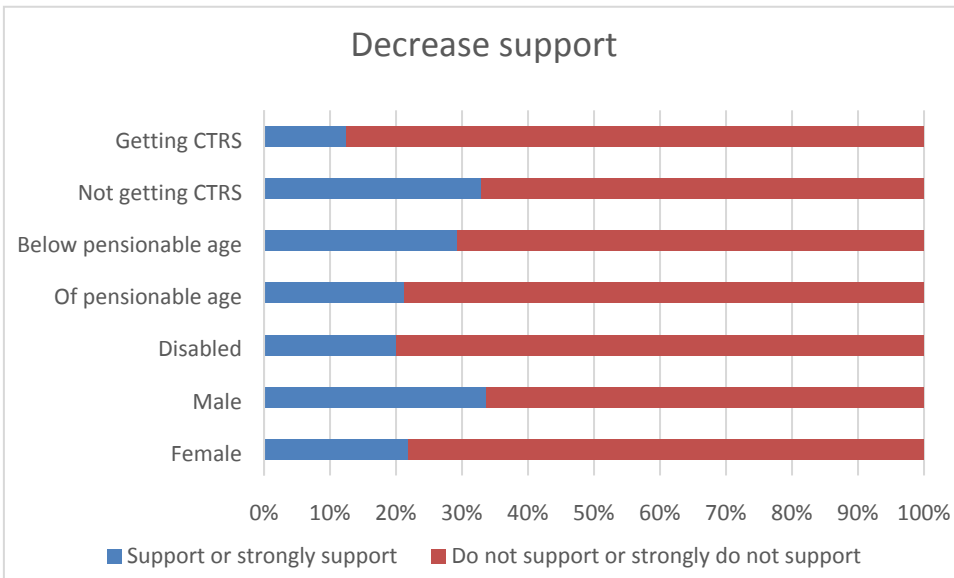
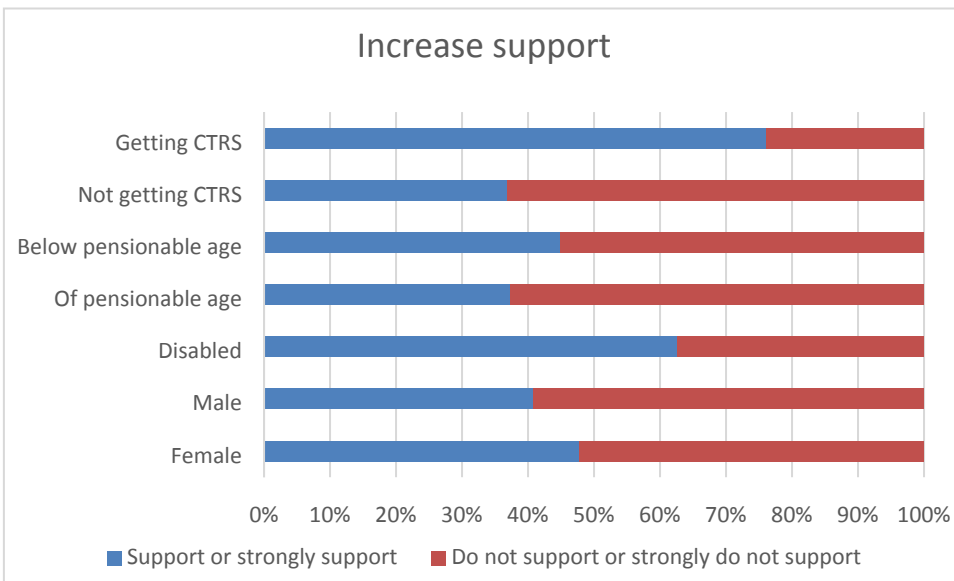
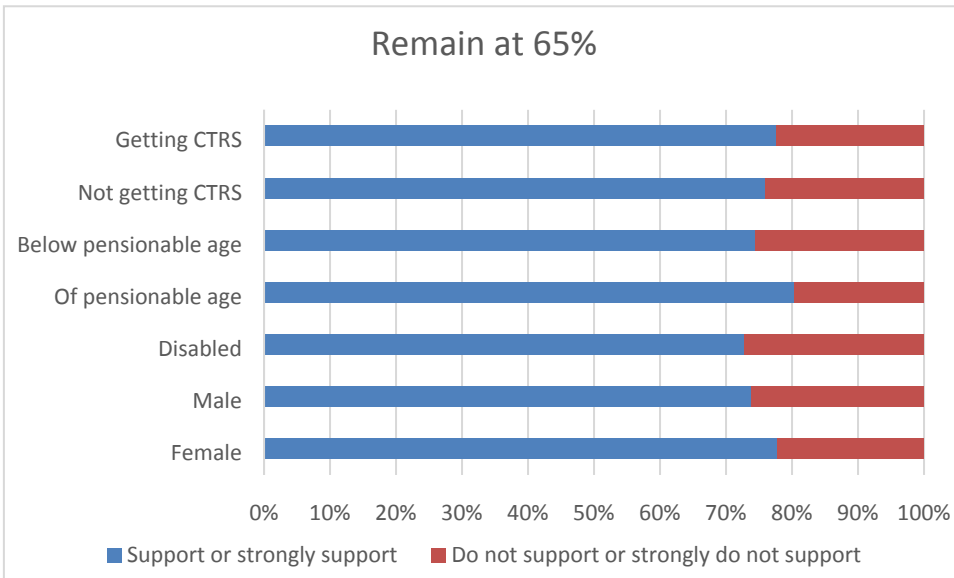
1,075 responses were made.



FURTHER ANALYSIS:

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





INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES:

The following responses are a sample of those that were received to the 3 options presented in the consultation. I have not edited or censored any of these responses, although any identifying information has been removed.

Proposal 1: Remain at 65%

If the current level can be supported within budget then I would support keeping it

These are the poorest in society and shouldn't be penalised further

Although it would be good to help out those on limited budgets I think for the time being the Council cannot afford to increase their support.

I think it is fair for people to contribute a certain amount however, 35% is still a lot of money for people who are genuinely struggling financially

Should not be lower than 35%. Given the additional administration required for such a scheme it should be considered to increase such contributions to 40%.

Proposal 2: Increase support

Everyone is under financial pressure these days and some more than most. Any help in keeping a roof over people's heads and out of poverty etc. should be applauded.

If additional support can be provided within budget then I would support the reduction of tax collected

I don't think the Council can afford to increase support this year. Hopefully in twelve months' time it might be a more feasible option.

It should be withdrawn as it's making people lazy

The greatness of a nation can be judged by how it treats its weakest members

Proposal 3: Decrease support.

Some people are on such low incomes they hardly have any money left even for basic food shopping

If the current level must be changed in order to remain within budget then I would support decreasing support

Those on limited budgets do not need any increasing costs put upon them. They struggle as it is.

It's not fair on those who really need extra support

Reduce CRT to nil. Council tax should be a flat per capita charge that is collected equally from residents to fund the local services from which we all benefit.