

Lancaster City Council

Council Tax Support Scheme Consultation 2016



in:fusion

**LANCASTER
CITY COUNCIL**

Promoting City, Coast & Countryside

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Authors:	Adam Pearson
Comments To:	adam.pearson@blackpool.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

Between 17 October and 13 November 2016, **246 responses were received to a public consultation** on proposals relating to Lancaster City Council’s Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme. 213 postal surveys were returned from a random household mail out as well as 33 online submissions.

These responses were received from residents across the borough, with a broadly even split of males and females. A range of age groups were represented, although there were more responses from those residents aged 45 or over compared to younger age groups. Nearly half of responses were from residents with a limiting long-term health condition or disability.

The views of both residents in receipt of Council Tax Support and those residents not in receipt have been captured through this consultation.

Proposed changes to Council Tax Support

- Overall, more consultation respondents agree than disagree with all proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme
- However, those respondents receiving support had lower levels of agreement than those people not in receipt

Figure 1.1: Percentage of respondents who agree with the different consultation proposals

Consultation Proposal	All respondents	In receipt of CTS	Not in receipt of CTS	Don't know if in receipt of CTS
Reduce the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Support to four weeks	73%	67%	85%	46%
Remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants	55%	38%	71%	54%
Limit the number of dependent children within the calculation for Council Tax Support to a maximum of two	68%	56%	80%	62%
Remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them	48%	35%	64%	23%

2. Background and Methodology

Background

In April 2013 Council Tax Benefit was abolished by the Government. Local councils had to introduce their own “Council Tax Support” (‘CTS’) schemes to help working age people on low incomes pay their Council Tax. At the same time, instead of funding the full level of Council Tax Benefit that councils paid out, support for the new scheme was reduced.

As part of its welfare reform agenda the Government announced a number of measures affecting Housing Benefit and Universal Credit, to encourage work and reduce the levels of benefit available. The Council is considering matching these measures in the CTS scheme so that from 1 April 2017 it is more aligned with the Housing Benefit Scheme and Universal Credit, to ensure consistency and save additional confusion for claimants. This formed part of the consultation process.

The scheme for pensioners is set by government and they were not affected by this consultation.

Methodology

The Council Tax Support consultation survey was sent out to a random sample of 1,000 Support claimants and 1,000 general tax payers on Monday 24 October 2016. The survey questions and samples were provided by the Council.

Moreover, an online survey was designed and hosted on the Council website from Monday 17 October 2016, giving anyone an opportunity to take part in the consultation. The online survey was promoted via the Council website homepage and social media accounts. The consultation closed on Sunday 13 November 2016.

In total, 246 responses were received to the Council Tax Support consultation. Of these, 213 were postal returns and 33 were online submissions. The findings within this report are based on the combined total.

All respondents to the consultation were provided with background information on the Council Tax Support Scheme and details on what the various proposed changes mean for residents. 217 of the 246 respondents confirmed that they had read the background information before completing the survey. Moreover, 235 of the 246 respondents indicated that their name appears on the Council Tax Bill for their household.

Please note that where total percentages are above 100%, this is due to rounding. Additionally, it is important to note that the findings within this report are analysed using the ‘base’ total. This is the total number of responses to each individual question and ensures that any non-responses are excluded from the analysis.

3. Who responded?

The map below indicates where respondents to the consultation live based on valid postcodes received. Some respondents either provided a partial postcode or chose not to provide one altogether. Responses have been received from residents of Lancaster, Morecambe and Carnforth, as well as a spread of rural areas in the borough.

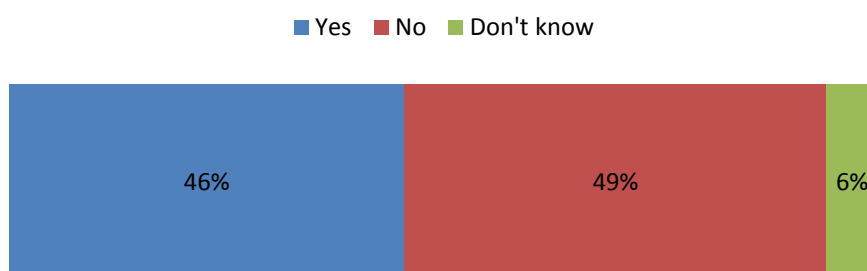
Figure 3.1: Map of postcode responses to consultation (base – 206)



Map accessed from BatchGeo on 23 November 2016

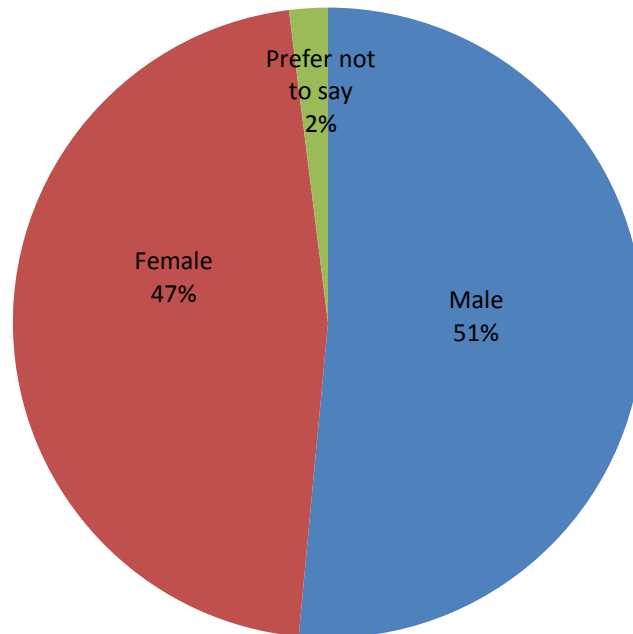
There was a broadly even split of responses from residents who do and do not receive Council Tax Support. 15 of 125 respondents (12%) who do not currently receive Council Tax Support have received it in the past.

Figure 3.2: Households in receipt of Council Tax Support (base – 233)



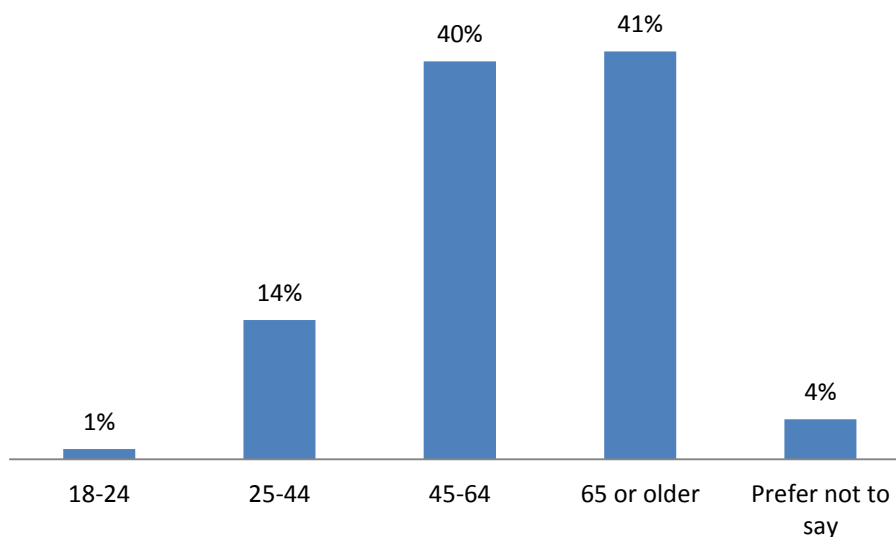
More males than females responded to the consultation, whilst a small proportion (2%) preferred not to indicate their gender.

Figure 3.3: Gender of respondents (base – 237)



Two in five (40%) of responses to the survey came from people aged 45 to 64, and a further two in five (41%) from those aged 65 or older.

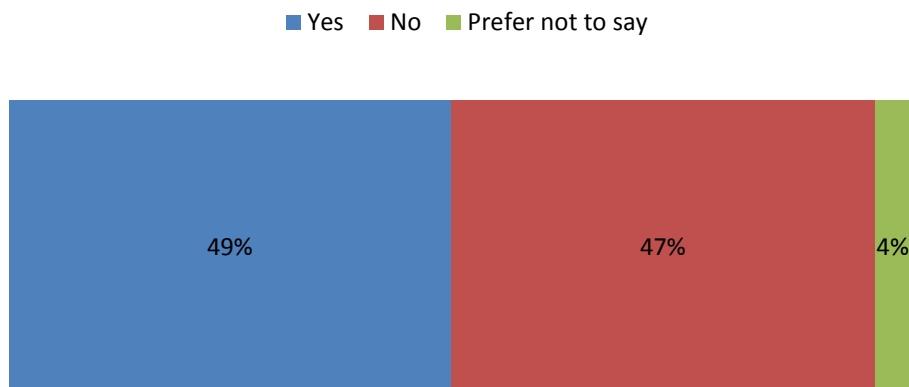
Figure 3.4: Age of respondents (base – 242)



The majority of responses (92%) were from residents of White British ethnicity, with a further 5% preferring not to say.

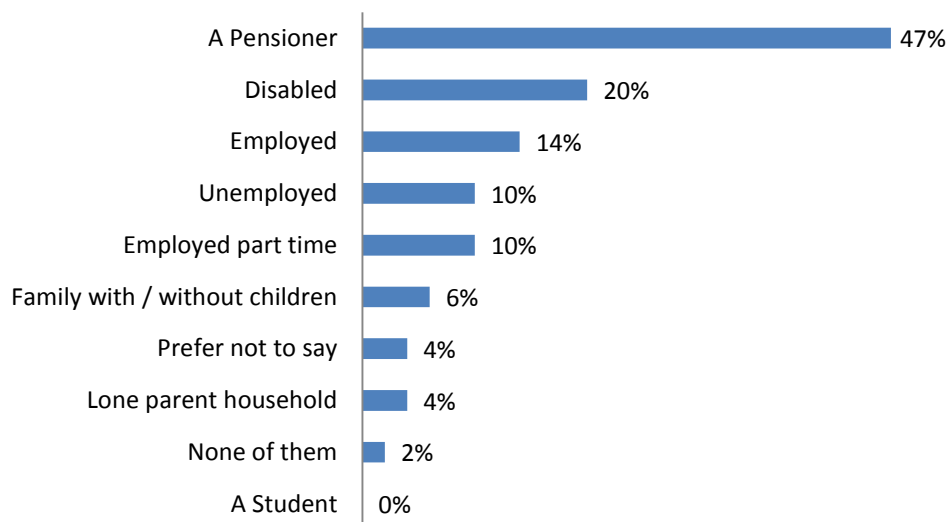
49% of respondents indicated that they have a long term physical, mental health or health condition or disability.

Figure 3.5: Long term physical, mental health or health condition or disability (base – 233)



When asked what best describes them, 47% indicated that they are a Pensioner whilst 14% are employed and a further 10% employed part time. 10% are unemployed.

Figure 3.6: How respondents would describe themselves (base – 241)

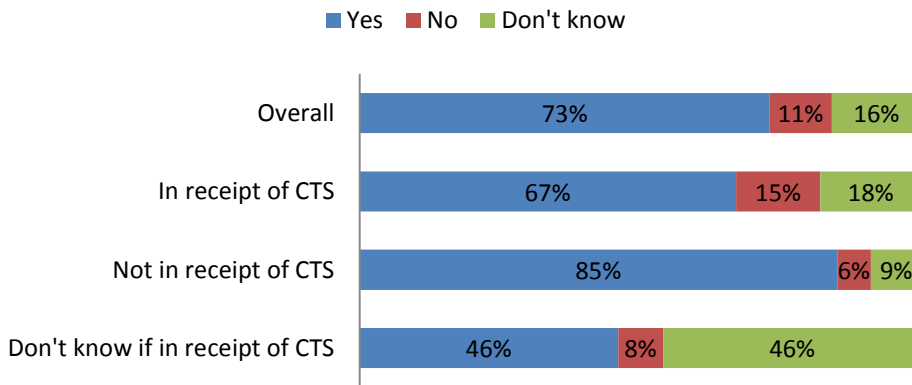


4. Findings

Reducing the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Support to four weeks

Housing Benefit has been changed so that if a person is absent from Great Britain for a period of more than four weeks, their benefit will cease. The Council is proposing to amend the Council Tax Support Scheme to reflect this change. More than seven in ten (73%) consultation respondents agree that the temporary absence rule should be limited to four weeks, rising to 85% of those people not in receipt of Council Tax Support.

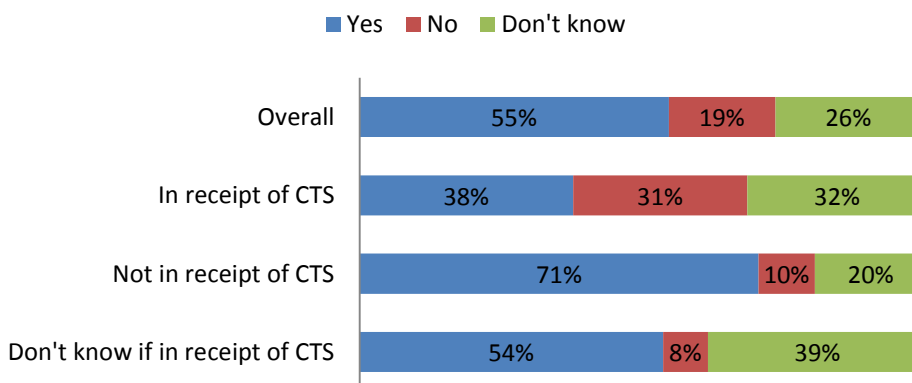
Figure 4.1: Do you agree that the temporary absence rule should be limited to four weeks? By whether or not the household receives Support (base – 239)



To remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants

From April 2017, all new applicants of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) who fall within the Work Related Activity Group will no longer receive the work related activity payment in their ESA. The Council is proposing that the Council Tax Support Scheme is amended to reflect the changes. 55% of respondents agree with the proposal, with 19% disagreeing. 26% do not know.

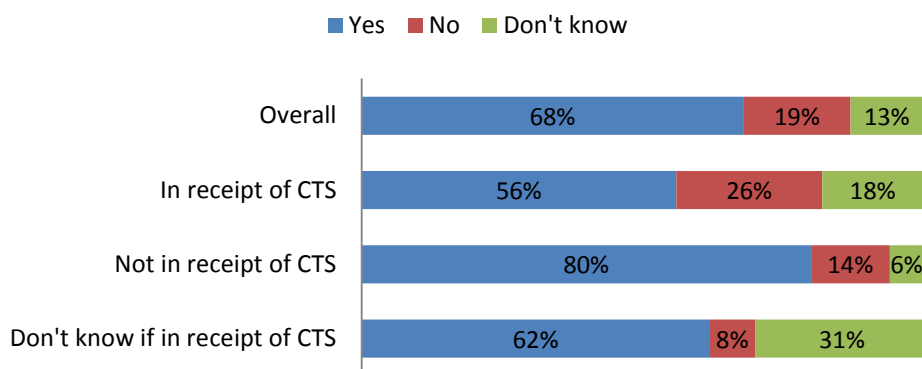
Figure 4.2: Do you agree that the elements of a Work Related Activity Component should be removed from the scheme for new Employment Support Allowance applicants? By whether or not the household receives Support (base – 237)



To limit the number of dependent children within the calculation for Council Tax Support to a maximum of two

From April 2017 Central Government will be limiting the number of dependant additions in Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and Tax Credits to a maximum of two, affecting households who have a third or subsequent child on or after 1 April 2017. The Council is proposing that the Council Tax Support Scheme is amended to reflect these changes. 68% of respondents agree with the proposed changes, rising to 80% amongst non-claimants.

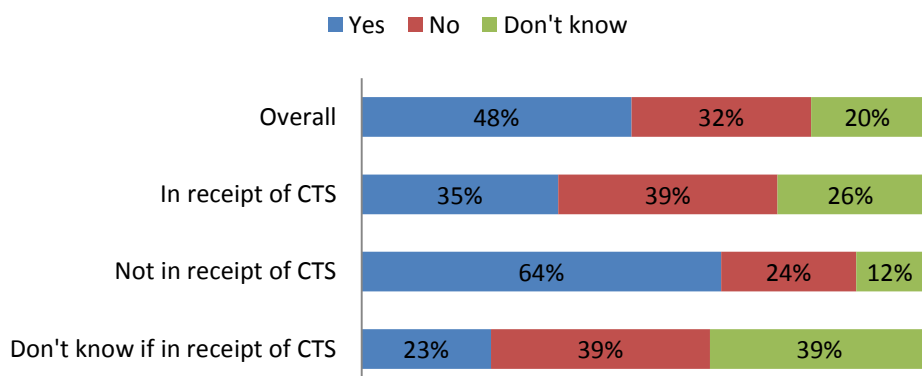
Figure 4.3: Do you agree that the number of dependent children should be limited to a maximum of two, within the calculation for Council Tax Support? By whether or not the household receives Support (base – 234)



To remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them

The Council is proposing to treat persons who receive Universal Credit (Carers Element) in the same way as anyone receiving Carers Allowance which would align the Council Tax Support Scheme with Housing Benefit. 48% of respondents agree with the proposal, whilst 32% disagree and a further 20% do not know. Like other proposals, people not in receipt of Council Tax Support have higher levels of agreement than those receiving Support.

Figure 4.4: Do you agree that the entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium should be removed from the calculation where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them? By whether or not the household receives Support (base – 232)



Finally, the survey gave respondents the opportunity to make any comments about the consultation, including anything else the Council should consider in reviewing its Council Tax Support Scheme.

40 comments were received with topics and suggestions including:

- Specific suggestions relating to individual proposals, including means testing and the circumstances which any calculations must be based on
- Some comments referred to the impact that any changes could have on families and other households who may already be vulnerable
- A couple of comments about how the scheme should consider individual circumstances such as employment situation or health/ disabilities which could impact on some proposals
- Some comments supporting any changes which are perceived to make the system fairer for residents who work and do not receive support
- A few general comments about support for a system which is fair and efficient