

Council Tax Support Consultation

Introduction

The information set out at **Annex 1** below was provided to Overview and Scrutiny when it reviewed this matter. Subsequently, as mentioned in paragraph 4.7 of the report, the steps taken in relation to consultation were reviewed and a letter was sent to all current benefit recipients (approximately 17,000). The letter included information on how they could get help in responding to the Council. The consultation deadline was extended to 12 October. The report at **Annex 2** deals with the responses received for the whole of the consultation period from 16 July to 12 October.

Annex 1 – Supplied to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel

The council has attempted to engage and provide an opportunity for views to be heard as widely as possible during the draft scheme consultation.

Consultation on the draft Low Income Discount Scheme for Brighton & Hove took place in two distinct stages. In June 2012 work was carried out with the assistance of the Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (CVSF) to obtain guidance from those in the city with experience of working with benefit claimants or advising on welfare rights. The full membership of the CVSF were invited to a pre-consultation event on 13 June, this was followed by the council presenting options and seeking views at the Children & Young People's Network on 20 June. CVSF members were also sent an online survey.

At the same time consultation commenced with major pre-cepting authorities including Sussex Police and East Sussex Fire and Rescue. Responses to this initial consultation were provided as an appendix to the P&R report dated 12 July 2012.

As a result of this early engagement the council published a draft scheme on 13 July and consultation opened via the council's portal and by questionnaire on the 16 July. Consultation on this second stage will be carried out until 7 September 2012. In addition to consultation being publicised with posters around the city and on the council's website, specific organisations and partners were contacted to alert them to the consultation.

The following is a full list of the organisations and partners contacted during this process.

Appendix 5

Pre-Consultation

13th June

Guinness Partnership
Knoll Community Association
RISE (Refuge, Information, Support and Education)
BHT - Advice Centre
Welfare Rights Project (Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project)
B&H CAB
Brighton Housing Trust (BHT)
Sussex Deaf Association
Community & Voluntary Sector Forum (CVSF)
Money Advice and Community Support Service
Advice Strategy Project
Hanover Community Association
Brighton Women's Centre
The Fed: Centre for Independent Living
Southern Housing Group

20th June

Trust for Developing Communities
Young People's Centre (Impact Initiatives)
MOSAIC
Brighton Unemployed Centre's Families Project
The Young Carers Project (The Carers Centre)
BHIP
Allsorts
MIND B&H
Hangleton & Knoll Project
Brighton Oasis Project
Prince's Trust
Daybreak
Adventure Unlimited
Safety Net
Dialogue Therapeutic and Family Services
Fun in Action for Children
Trust for Developing Communities
The Bridge
Tarnerland Youth Project
Safety Net
Sussex Clubs for Young People

Consultation Information and online consultation links e-mailed to:

Equalities and Liaison Team Mailing List

Brighton University
All four health trusts covering the city

Appendix 5

Sussex Police
Carers' Centre
Environment Agency
The Fed: Centre for Independent Living
Jobcentre Plus
Sussex University
Brighton Housing Trust
CVSF
LGBT Health Inclusion Project
City College
East Sussex Fire & Rescue
Pensions Regulation Service
Surrey & Sussex Probation Trust
South East Coast Ambulance Service
Black & Minority Ethnic Community Partnership (BMECP)

BHSP and Partnerships

The members of The Brighton & Hove Strategic Partnership and of all thematic partnerships in the city were e-mailed information and on-line consultation links.

CVSF

Information and on-line consultation links were sent via the CVSF to their e-mail contact list of over 500 individuals (staff and volunteers) from member organisations.

Housing Groups and Landlords

Sanctuary Housing
Hyde Martlet Housing
Orbit
Saxon Weald
Affinity Sutton
Places for People
Southern Housing Group
Guinness
BHT
Moat
Amicus Horizon

Additional

A link to the on-line consultation and information about the draft scheme was provided on the WAVE, the council internal intranet. Officers who were either residents or worked with residents claiming Council Tax Benefit were encouraged to participate.

Appendix 5

Additionally emails were sent to:

SPIN (Single Parent Information Network)
Friends, Families and Travellers
Rottingdean Parish Council
City Welfare Group

Publicity materials including posters and/ or paper questionnaires were sent to the following:

CVSF

350 CVSF member organisations were sent posters to display in their offices. In addition publicity was sent to the following voluntary advice organisations as requested by the Advice Services Network.

BHT Legal Advice Centre
CAB
MACS (Money Advice and Community Support)
Brighton Women's Centre
Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project
St Luke's Advice Centre
AMAZE
Sussex Deaf Association
Terrence Higgins Trust
BHCC Welfare Rights Team
Age UK Brighton & Hove
Youth Advice Centre
Brighton & Hove Unemployed Workers Centre
Sussex Student Union Advice
BHT Immigration Legal Service
RISE
Brighton and Hove LGBT Switchboard
MIND in Brighton and Hove
Young People's Centre
East Sussex Credit Union

Council Housing Offices

Lavender Street
Oxford Street
Whitehawk Hub
Selsfield Drive
Victoria Road

Public Places

Kings House reception
Hove Town Hall (external display boards and reception)
Brighton Town Hall reception

Appendix 5

Bartholomew House Customer Service Centre (including details on the electronic information screens)
All libraries in Brighton & Hove
All doctors surgeries in Brighton & Hove

Additional events

The council attended the Equalities Network on 9 August 2012 to seek views on work undertaken on the Low Income Discount Scheme Equalities Impact Assessment. Consultation materials were provided for attending organisations to take away with them.

Attendees:

Grace Eyre
Working 50 Plus
The Fed Centre for Independent Living
Metamorphosis Art Group
West Hove Forum
Sussex Central YMCA – Reed House
Moulsecomb Community Forum and Newsletter
Southern Housing Group
MOSAIC Black, Asian & Mixed Parentage Family Group
Safe & Sorted Youth Advice Centre (Sussex Central YMCA)
Brighton Unemployed Families Project

Apologies from:

Amaze
Brighton Women's Centre
Allsorts Youth Project
Black & Minority Ethnic Community Partnership
Friends Families and Travellers

Annex 2

**Consultation report: Brighton & Hove
Council Tax Low Income Discount Scheme**

July – October 2012

Contact

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CONTENTS

	Page
1. Executive Summary.....	3
2. Introduction.....	4
3. Methodology.....	4
4. Response & Respondent's Profile.....	5
5. Results & Findings.....	8
5.1 Scheme principles.....	9
5.2 Switching to a new system.....	10
5.3 Council tax discount.....	11
5.4 Council Tax support.....	12
5.5 Earning disregard.....	13
5.6 £3 a week limit.....	14
5.7 Discretionary fund.....	15

1. Executive Summary

In total 282 complete questionnaires were received

Half of people who responded had claimed, or a person in their household had claimed Council Tax Benefit in the last two years and as such people who will be directly affected by these changes have fed into this policy change.

Given the situation the council is in respondents tend to agree with the main proposals the council has put in place for the main scheme.

- Twice as many people agreed (66%) with the principles used to define the draft scheme than disagreed (33%).
- Three quarters of respondents (76%) agreed with the proposal for switching to the new scheme, three times more than disagreed (24%).
- There is a split between those who disagree (51%) with the proposal for a 90% discount scheme and those that agree (49%).
- More than four out of five respondents (84%) agreed that eligibility for council tax support should be based on a person's income and savings. This is five times more than those that disagreed (16%).
- More than four out of five respondents (82%) agree with the principle of an earning disregard, four and a half times more than disagree (18%). Less agreed that the disregard would support people into work and in low paid work, 62% agreeing, 39% disagreeing.
- Just under two thirds (64%) of respondents agreed with the proposal to limit the extra amount of council tax any households has to pay to £3. Just under twice as many as disagreed (36%).
- Four out of five respondents (81%) agree with the principle of having a discretionary fund for the most vulnerable, more than four times more than those that disagreed (19%).

Among respondents who made comments there is a recurring theme that with the changes certain groups of vulnerable people may find these changes hard to manage including disabled people, families with children, those with health problems, those affected by domestic violence and carers.

2. Introduction

From 1 April 2013, the government is abolishing the national Council Tax Benefit system and reducing the grants previously given to local authorities for Council Tax Benefit by 10%. Local councils have been asked to introduce a local Council Tax support system to replace the old benefit system.

After obtaining guidance from those in the city with experience of working with benefit claimants or advising on welfare rights including the full membership of the Community and Voluntary Sector Forum as well as the major pre-cepting authorities, the council proposed a preferred draft Low Income Discount Scheme. The purpose of this report is to report on the findings of the city wide consultation on this preferred scheme.

3. Methodology

A questionnaire was devised to both inform and give residents an opportunity to comment on the council preferred scheme. Information was provided about the different principles of the scheme, what this would mean and how it would work (including real life examples). Residents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the different principles and to make comment.

The questionnaire was made available on the Brighton & Hove Consultation Portal with links from the home page of the council's website and dedicated Draft Council Tax Low Income Discount Scheme web pages.

The consultation was open between 16 July and 12 October 2012. During the fieldwork, in order to advertise, encourage and signpost residents to the questionnaire communications were sent out via;

- social media
- through community and voluntary sector networks
- registered users of the Consultation Portal
- press releases to local media
- posters and leafleting
- a letter sent to every household currently in receipt of Council Tax Benefit.

In order to ensure that resident without access or the opportunity to use the Internet could become involved, paper versions of the questionnaire and pre-paid response envelopes were;

- available at the Council Tax Benefit office and other public council and community buildings
- a dedicated phone line was available for information and to request postal questionnaires.

4. Response and respondent's profile

4.1 Response

In total 282 complete questionnaires were received, given the methodology it is not possible to calculate an overall response rate.

4.2 Respondent's Profile

As part of the questionnaire respondents were asked to complete the council's standard equalities monitoring form and indicate

- if they are or have been in receipt of Council Tax Benefit in the past two years
- if they support or work with someone or people claiming Council Tax Benefit
- how many children and pensioners in their household
- provide their home postcode

4.2.1 Council Wards

Council Wards		
	Number	Percentage
Hanover and Elm Grove	24	13%
Queen's Park	18	9%
St. Peter's and North Laine	16	8%
Preston Park	14	7%
Goldsmid	13	7%
Regency	13	7%
Hollingdean and Stanmer	11	6%
Woodingdean	9	5%
Brunswick and Adelaide	8	4%
Central Hove	7	4%
South Portslade	7	4%
Withdean	7	4%
East Brighton	6	3%
Hangleton and Knoll	6	3%
Moulsecomb and Bevendean	6	3%
Wish	6	3%
Rottingdean Coastal	5	3%
Westbourne	5	3%
Hove Park	4	2%
North Portslade	3	2%
Patcham	3	2%
Total	191	100.0
Not known	91	
Total	282	

Appendix 5

Only two thirds of respondents provided full postcodes that could be matched to local wards. Among these, at least three responses (2%) were received from each ward with the most coming from Hanover & Elm Grove ward (24 responses, 13%).

4.2.2 Council Tax Benefit

- Half of all respondents (136 people, 50%) had or someone in their household had received Council Tax Benefit in the last 2 years.
- Just under a third of respondents (75 people, 31%) support or work with someone or people who claim Council Tax Benefit.

4.2.3 Children and Pensioner Households

- Thirty two respondents (13%) lived in a household with at least one pensioner
- Fifty five respondents (21%) lived in a household with at least one child.

4.2.4 Equalities

An unusually high number of respondents did not complete all or some of the equalities questions and given the low number of overall responses it is difficult to determine with accuracy if the respondents profile is representative of the wider city.

Using the tables below it can be shown that the respondents profile is likely to be;

- Representative by gender and those aged 35 to 44,
- Under represented of those aged under 35 and over 64 and BME groups
- Over represented by those of White British / Irish ethnicity, the LGBT community, those aged 45 to 64 and those with a health problem or disability.

Age		
	Number of people	Percentage
20 to 34	49	23%
35 to 44	41	19%
45 to 54	67	32%
55 to 64	48	23%
65 to 74	8	4%
Total	213	100%
Not known	69	
Total	282	

Gender		
	Number of people	Percentage

Appendix 5

Male	114	48%
Female	124	52%
Total	238	100%
Not known	44	
Total	282	

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual and transgender (LGBT)		
	Number of people	Percentage
Heterosexual	157	79%
LGBT	42	21%
Total	199	100%
Not known	83	
Total	282	

What is your religion or belief?		
	Number of people	Percentage
No religion	103	48%
Buddhist	5	2%
Christian	54	25%
Muslim	2	1%
Pagan	2	1%
Sikh	1	0.5%
Agnostic	7	3%
Atheist	27	12%
Other	3	1%
Other Philosophical belief	11	5%
Total	215	100%
Not known	67	
Total	282	

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?		
	Number of people	Percentage
Yes	88	36%
No	156	64%
Total	244	100%
Not known	38	
Total	282	

Are you a carer?		
	Number of people	Percentage

Appendix 5

Yes	35	14%
No	209	86%
Total	244	100%
Not known	38	
Total	282	

Ethnicity		
	Number of people	Percentage
White British / UK	151	66%
White Irish	5	2%
White 'other'	13	6%
White (no further info)	47	21%
BME	12	5%
Total	228	100%
Not known	54	
Total	282	

Are you a carer?		
	Number of people	Percentage
Yes	35	14%
No	209	86%
Total	244	100%
Not known	38	
Total	282	

There is insufficient detail to determine if the profile is representative or not by religion or if they are a carer.

5 Results and findings

There is no way accurately gauging whether respondents are representative of resident in the city therefore care should be taken when interpreting these results.

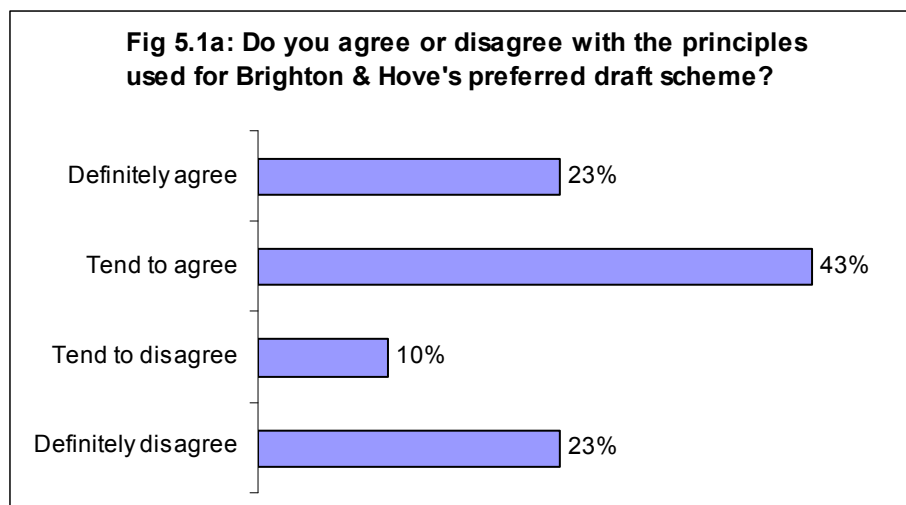
Responses to all questions from the survey have been analysed by the following demographics and equalities (fig 5 below). Relatively high number of respondents did not provide complete data, this combined with the small number of responses from some groups (section 4, above) makes equalities analysis difficult.

Where there is a significant different to the overall responses this will be highlighted within the report. Where there is no difference no mention will be made.

Fig 5: Demographics used for analysis		
Equalities Group	Provided data (n)	% of all respondents
Households with children	261	93%
Pensioner households	262	93%
In receipt of Council Tax benefit with in the past two years	271	96%
Work with or support people in receipt of Council tax benefit	241	85%
Age	213	76%
Gender	238	84%
Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB)	199	70%
With a health problem or disability	244	86%
Ethnicity	181	64%
Carer	244	86%

5.1 Scheme Principles

Respondents were provided with a summary of the principle of the draft scheme and asked if they agreed or disagreed with them, if there was anything that had not been considered and for any comments.



Base: All respondents who answered the question (n=256)

From fig 5.1a above, twice as many people agreed (66%) with the principles than disagreed (33%).

Equalities

Although not mutually exclusive, respondents with a health problem or disability (59%) and respondents in receipt of Council Tax Benefit (59%) were less likely to agree with the draft principles than those without a health problem or disability (77%) or not in receipt of Council Tax Benefit (78%).

Anything not considered and general comments

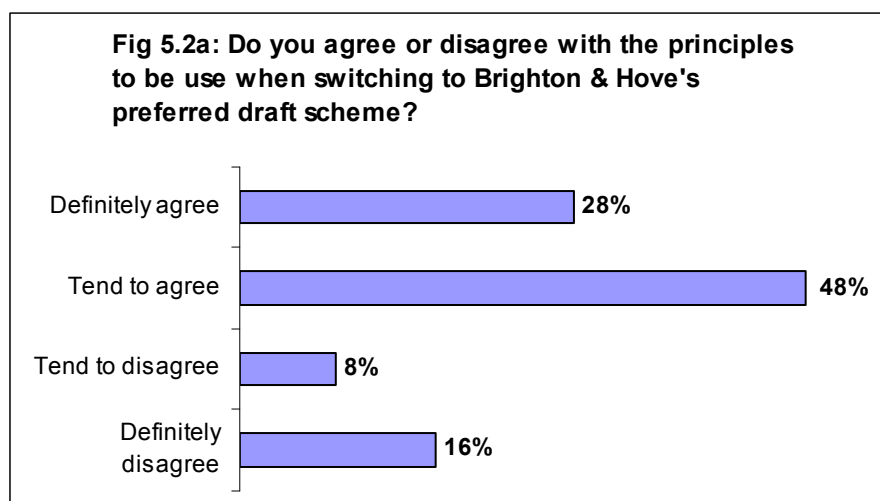
Just under a half of respondents made comments (137 people, 49%).

- One in four of both respondents who agreed and respondents who disagreed with the principles of the draft scheme (38 people, 28%) thought that there was a need to protect people on benefit (IB, ESA, disabled people, lone parents) and that people on benefits could not afford to pay Council Tax.
- Among respondents who agreed with the schemes principles, 14 respondents (26%) did not understand the draft scheme and or thought it unclear.
- Among respondents who disagreed with the schemes principles, 24 respondents (36%) were concerned that it would cost people more and or increase poverty.

5.2 Switching to a new system

Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposals for switching to the new scheme, if anything had not been considered and if they had any further comments.

From fig 5.2a below, three quarters of respondents (76%) agreed with the proposal for switching to the new scheme, three times more then disagreed (24%).



Base: All respondents who answered the question (n=261)

Anything not considered and general comments

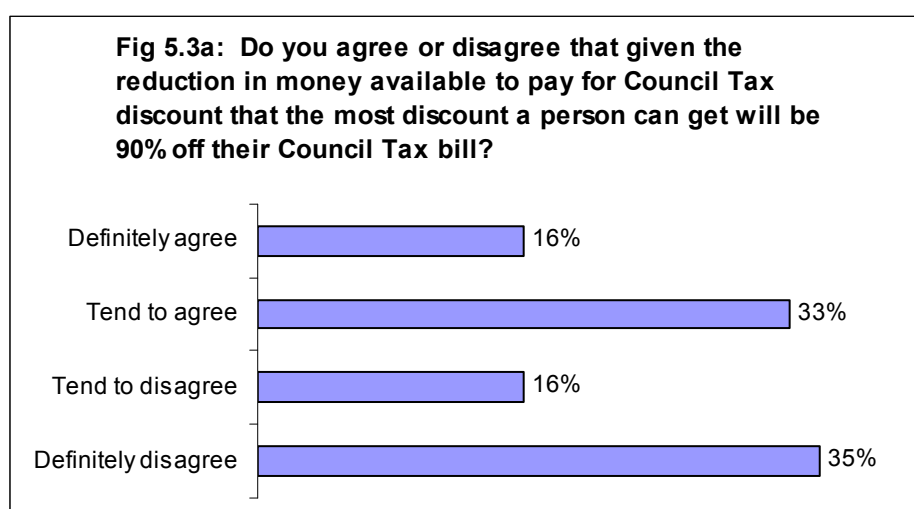
One in four respondents (73 people, 26%) made comments about switching to the new scheme. Regardless of whether respondents agreed or disagreed with the proposals for switching to the new scheme comments followed similar themes.

Appendix 5

- More than a third of respondents (30 people, 41%) thought there would need to be more / lots of resources for a more complicated scheme.
- A third of respondents (23 people, 32%) mentioned a concern / protect the vulnerable, those on benefits, sick, disabled people. single people, parents, the unemployed.

5.3 Council tax discount

It was explained that due to a reduction in funding from central government for Council Tax support that that for people of working age council tax discount will be assessed on the basis of 90% of full Council Tax. Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with this, if anything had not been considered and if they had any further comments.



Base: All respondents who answered the question (n=257)

From fig 5.3a above, there is a clear split between those who disagree (51%) with the proposal for a 90% discount and those that agree (49%). However, among those who were definite a third (35%) definitely disagreed compared to only 16% who defiantly agreed.

Equalities

Although not mutually exclusive, respondents with a health problem or disability (35%) and respondents in receipt of Council Tax Benefit (38%) are much less likely to agree that the most discount a person can get is 90% than are those without a health problem or disability (68%) or not in receipt of Council Tax Benefit (70%).

Anything not considered and general comments

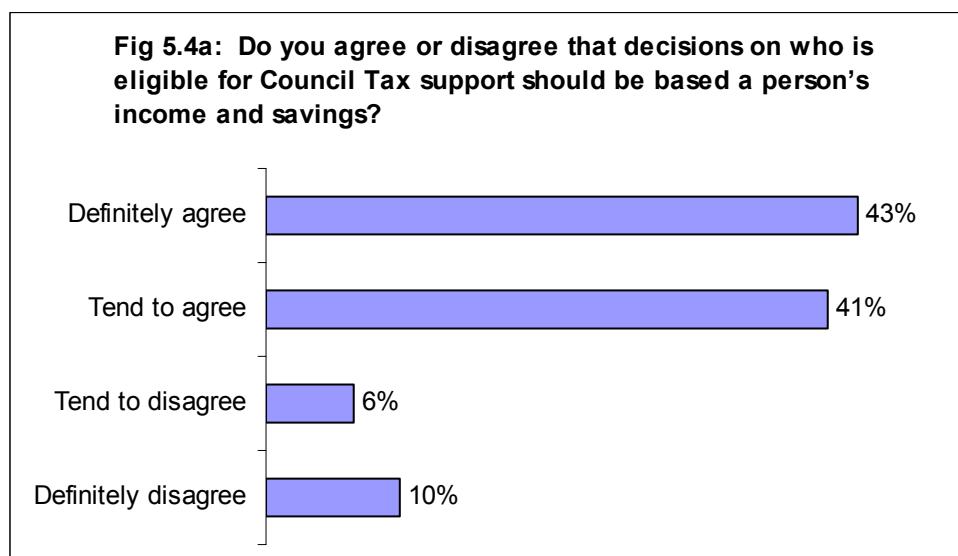
More than a third of respondents (109 people, 39%) made comments about the Council Tax discount. Four out of five respondents who made comments (91 people, 84%) made comments about their concerns that poor people on

Appendix 5

benefits / disabled people having to pay more, not be able to pay or should not have to pay.

5.4 Council Tax support

The decision on who is eligible to receive help paying their council tax will be based on a person's income and savings in the same way as Council Tax Benefit is worked out. Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with this method, if anything had not been considered and if they had any further comments.



Base: All respondents who answered the question (n=267)

From fig 5.4a above, more than four out of five respondents (84%) agreed that eligibility for council tax support should be based on a person's income and savings. This is five times more than those that disagreed (16%).

Equalities

All 22 respondents who are Carers agree that Council Tax support should be based on a person's income and savings.

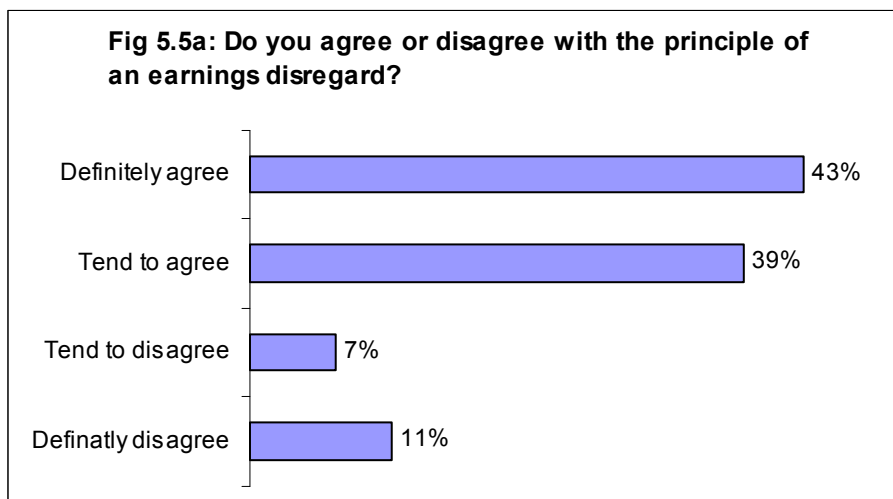
Anything not considered and general comments

A fifth of respondents (63 people, 22%) made comments about the proposals for council tax support being based on a means tested discount similar to the criteria used in the current benefit system. Most comments (24 people, 38%) concerned a need for a fairer system with more help for different groups of people with low income. The under 35s, single people on benefits, disabled people. Other comments included 'should rise level of saving allowed / disregard savings' (9 people, 13%) and the means testing process needs to be simple / easy to understand (9 people, 13%).

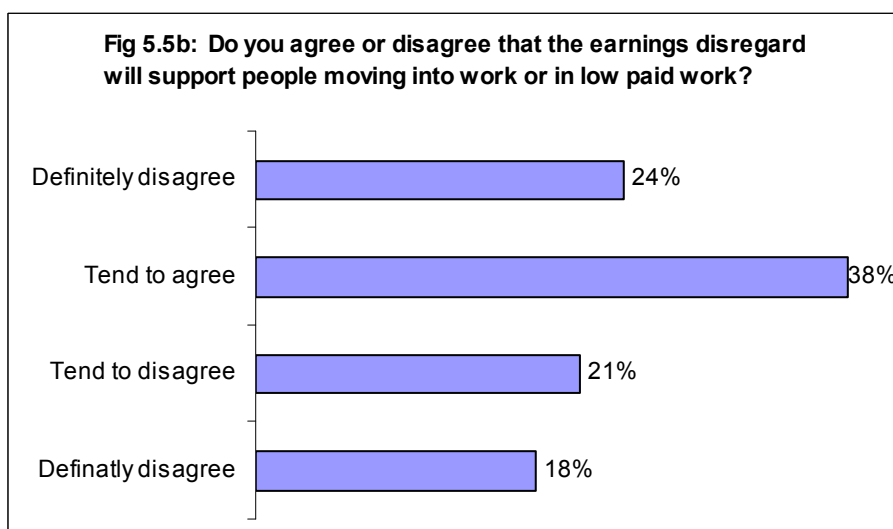
5.5 Earning disregard

Where a single person receives income from work, the first £10 will be ignored when Working out how much Council Tax discount they receive. This is double the current amount and is designed as support for the low waged and those returning to work from periods of unemployment. The earnings disregard for couples (£10) or single parent families (£25) will remain the same as under Council Tax Benefit.

Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the principle of an earning disregard, if the proposed level would support people back to work or those in low paid work, if anything had not been considered and if they had any further comments.



Base: All respondents who answered the question (n=253)



Base: All respondents who answered the question (n=246)

Appendix 5

From figs 5.5a & b above. More than four out of five respondents (82%) agree with the principle of an earning disregard, four and a half times more than disagree (18%). Less agreed that the disregard would support people into work and in low paid work, 62% agreeing, 39% disagreeing.

Equalities

Among LGBT respondents (30 out of 31, 97%) agreed in principle with the earnings disregard compared to 83% of heterosexual respondents.

Although not mutually exclusive, respondents with a health problem or disability (55%) and respondents in receipt of Council Tax Benefit (53%) are less likely to agree that the earning disregard will support people moving into work or in low paid work than are those without a health problem (70%) or not in receipt of Council Tax Benefit (73%).

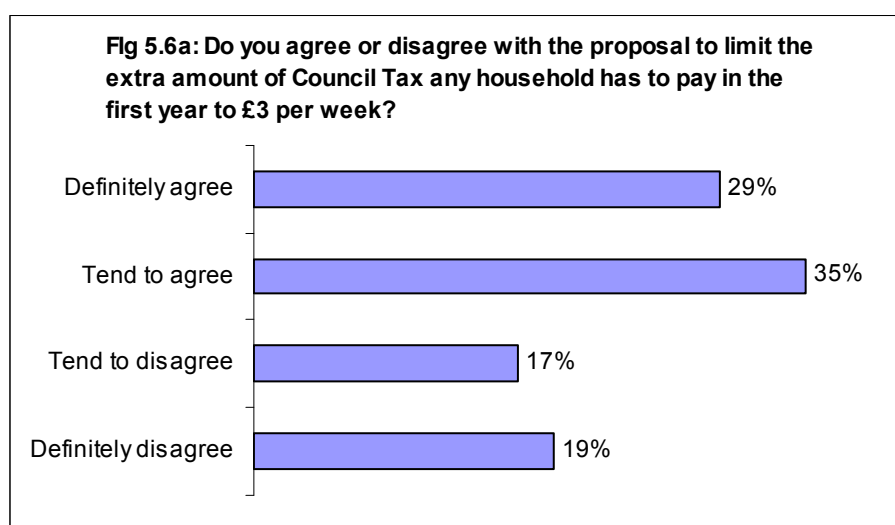
Anything not considered and general comments

A quarter of respondents (77 people, 27%) made comments about the earnings disregard.

- Nearly a half of respondents (36 people, 47%) thought that the disregard would only be a minor incentive and or a minor impact on people moving into work or on low pay.
- Most other comments were general comment about the disregard being too low, low for certain groups or should be at the same level for everyone.

5.6 £3 a week limit

As a result of the change to Council Tax support a limit on the extra amount any household has to pay of £3 per week will be in place for 2012/13 to 2013/14. Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with this proposal, if anything had not been considered and if they had any further comments.



Base: All respondents who answered the question (n=258)

Appendix 5

From fig 5.6a above, just under two thirds (64%) of respondents agreed with the proposal to limit the extra amount of council tax any households has to pay to £3. Just under twice as many as disagreed (36%).

Equalities

Four out of five (81%) of female respondents agree with the proposal to limit the extra amount of council tax any households pays compared to only 59% of male respondents

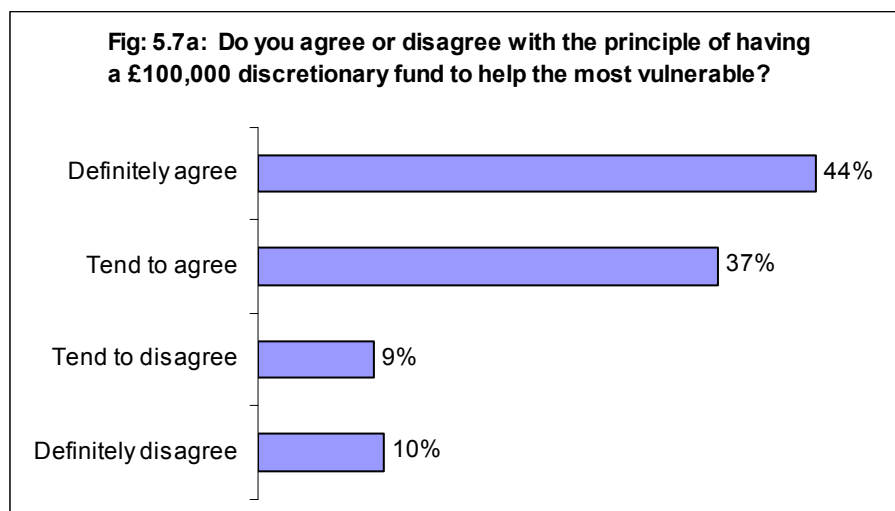
Anything not considered and general comments

A third of respondents (92 people, 36%) made comments about the £3 limit on the extra amount any household has to pay.

Nearly two thirds of respondents (58 people, 63%) mentioned £3 was too large an increase or too much for certain groups (single people, those on benefits, families). Sixteen respondents (17%) also thought that the cap should last for more than the one year.

5.7 Discretionary fund

As part of the proposals a £100,000 per annum discretionary fund will provide additional support in exceptional circumstances to the most vulnerable. Respondents were asked if they agree with this proposal and what type of exceptional circumstances the fund should be used for.



Base: All respondents who answered the question (n=260)

Four out of five respondents (81%) agree with the principle of having a discretionary fund for the most vulnerable, more than four times more than those that disagreed (19%).

Exceptional circumstances that the fund should be used for.

Appendix 5

Nearly a half of respondents (134 people, 48%) made comments about the exceptional circumstances that the discretionary fund should be used for. There were two clear themes;

- Where budget management is affected by disability / vulnerability (48 people, 36%). Those with health, mental health or substance misuse problems. Those affected by domestic violence, with a history of debt or where there is a carer involved.
- Exceptional circumstance / where a change in circumstance requires immediate financial assistance not ongoing assistance (43 people, 24%). Bereavement, serious illness/accident, redundancy, new single mothers.

Anything not considered and general comments

A quarter of respondents (76 people, 27%) made comments about the proposals for a discretionary fund. The majority of comments are around the fund not being enough, likely to be resource intensive, not helping/reaching those in need and a need for the fund to be transparent / fair / impartial.

