

London Borough of Bromley

Council Tax Reduction – Consultation Report

27 October 2017

1. Consultation

A public consultation exercise was undertaken for the 18/19 Council Tax Reduction Scheme during a period from 14th August 2017 until 6th October 2017.

The survey was available through a variety of channels:

- A link was available on the Bromley website
- An e-mail alert was issued to all Portal users advising them of the survey
- A paper copy was issued to 2,000 households comprising of a mix of CTR recipients and non CTR recipients (1,000 households not in receipt of CTR, 500 recipients of working age and 500 recipients of pensionable age)
- A paper flyer enclosed with all Council Tax Bills issued during this period advising of the link on the website.

In total there were 1,125 responses received with the majority, 762, being via the website and 363 by post.

Supplementary questions were asked, for monitoring purposes, to determine whether respondents were currently in receipt of Council Tax Reduction or were completing the consultation on behalf of a representative body.

Of those who chose to respond to these questions, 70% stated that they were not currently in receipt of CTR.

Responses were received from only 3 representative bodies, these were:

- Age UK
- St Christopher's Bromley (Hospice)
- Zacchaeus 2000 Trust

The consultation exercise was based on 7 simple questions to residents of the Borough, 4 of which required specific responses with the remaining 3 being less direct and allowing a degree of free text response.

Of those that were specific, they sought responses in respect of:

Q1: Whether it was agreeable to maintain the level of assistance at 75%

Q2: If LBB were to increase the level of support, how should this be funded?

Q3: Whether there should be a hardship fund available and whether the sum of £100,000 was reasonable.

Q4: To align the Council Tax Support Scheme with changes made to Housing Benefit rules:

- **Whether entitlement to Council Tax Support to customers who leave Great Britain temporarily should be reduced to 4 weeks?**
- **Whether Council Tax Support only covers the costs of 2 children in families rather than unlimited numbers of children?**
- **Whether customers in receipt of Employment Support Allowance should only receive additional assistance if they are in the Support Group?**

Standard Equality and Diversity questions were also asked but it was made clear that providing this information was voluntary.

2. Outcomes.

Details of the full consultation question and analysis responses, both overall and broken down, are detailed below.

Question 1.

Q1 The Council is recommending for 2017/18 the retention of the current maximum level of support for working-age claimants. The maximum level of support being 75% of the households Council Tax liability after any discounts or exemptions have been applied. This would require working age claimants to pay a minimum of 25% of their liability.

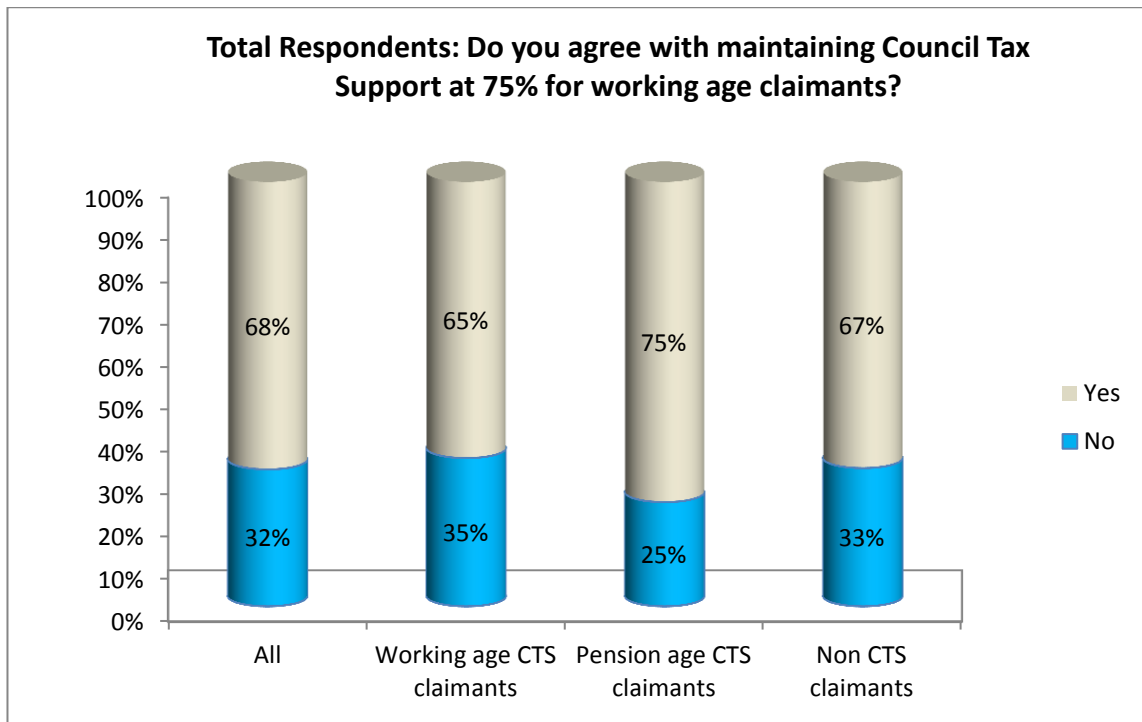
	Yes	No
Please confirm whether you:		
a. Agree with maintaining the assistance at 75%	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. If <i>NO</i> do you think Council Tax Support claimants should;		
<i>Pay more Council Tax</i> e.g. receive less support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Pay less Council Tax</i> e.g. receive more support to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you disagree with maintaining assistance for working-age claimants at 75%, please state why:

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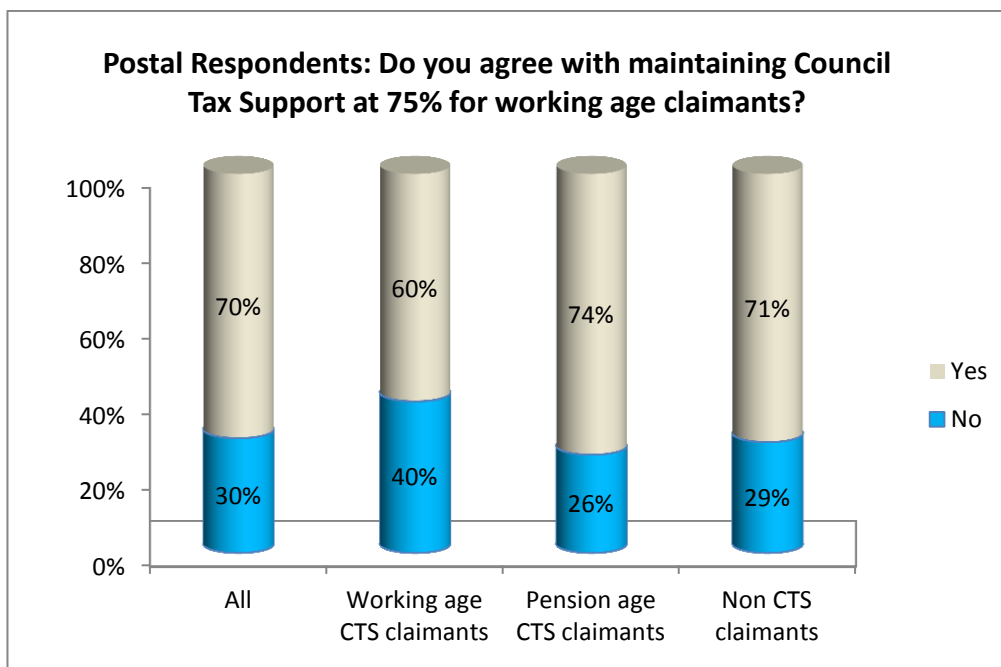
Overall response.

Of those who responded the *overall* outcome was that they wished to keep the scheme the same with 68% confirming this to be their preference. This was the same percentage when this question was asked last year. The responses were weighted in favour of keeping support at this level irrespective of whether the respondent was in receipt of Council Tax Reduction or not.

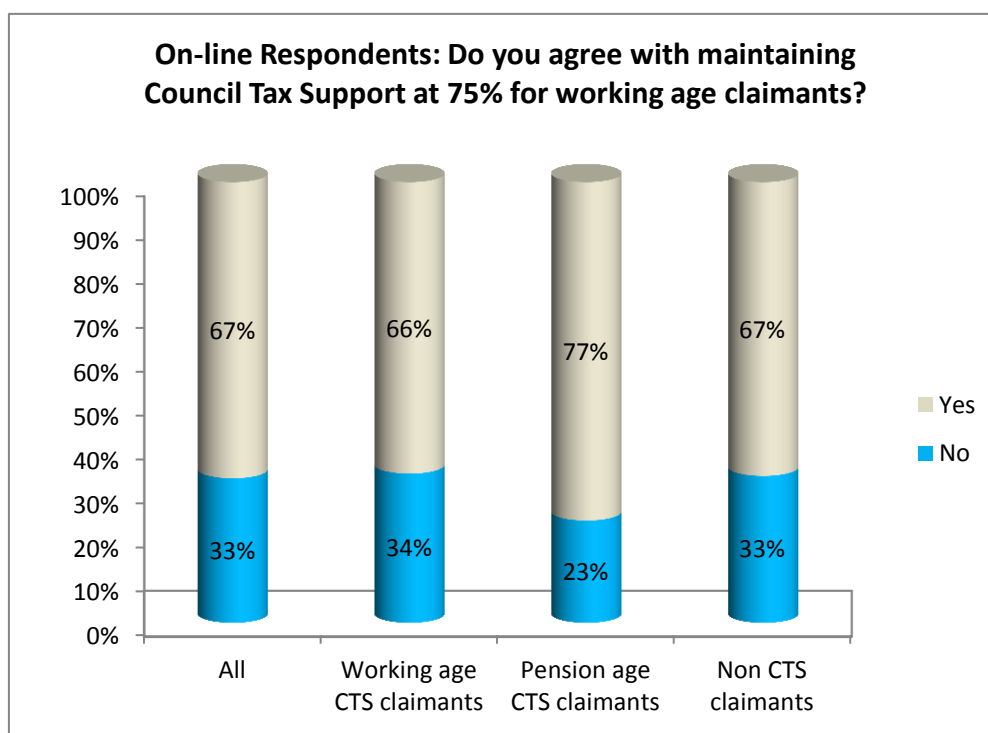


Analysis of Respondents by Survey Type.

Of the postal responses received, overall 70% were in favour of retaining the level of support at a maximum of 75%. Again the result was irrespective of whether they were in receipt of Council Tax Reduction or not.



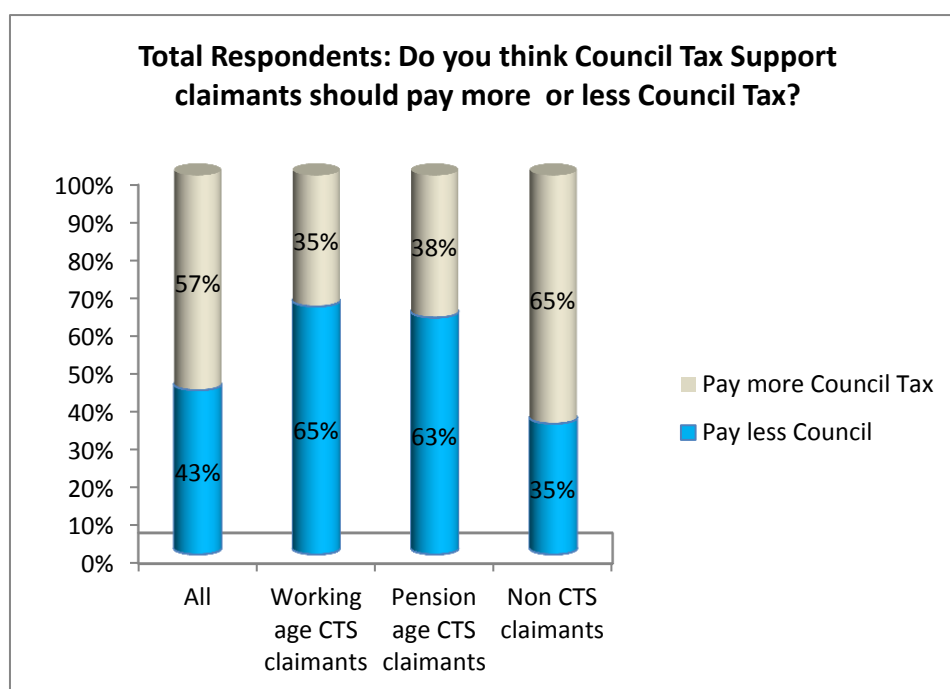
A similar situation was recorded with those who completed the survey on-line despite significantly higher numbers of respondents confirming that they were not in fact in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.



Question 1b.

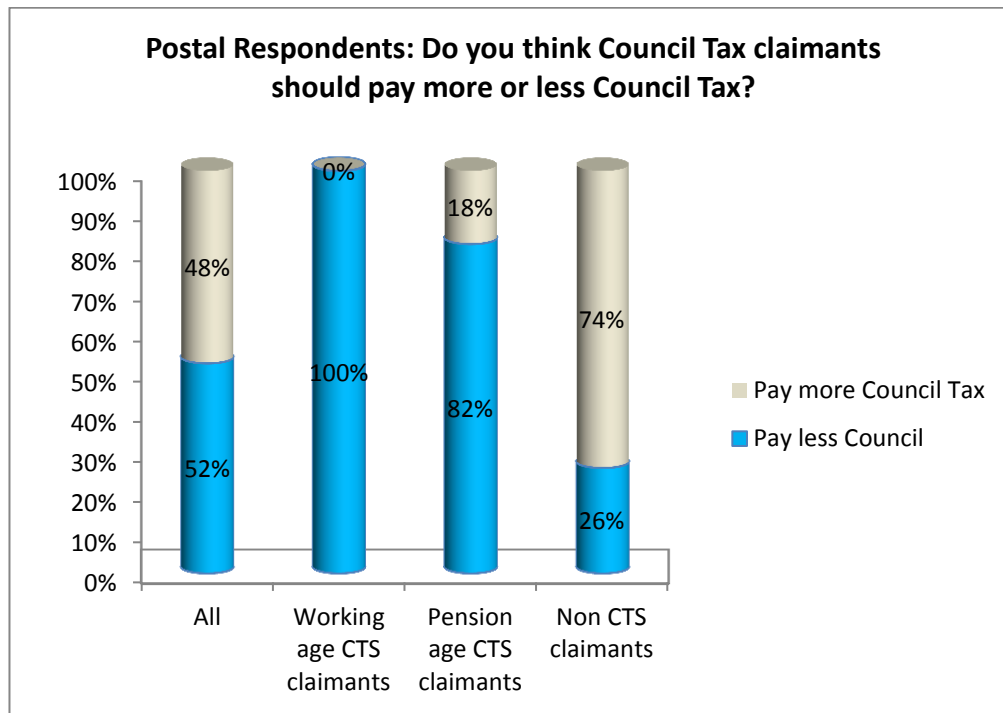
Overall response.

Of those who responded to state that they believe assistance should not be maintained at 75%, the *overall* outcome was that they wished to decrease the level of support thereby increasing the levels of Council Tax which recipients would need to pay.

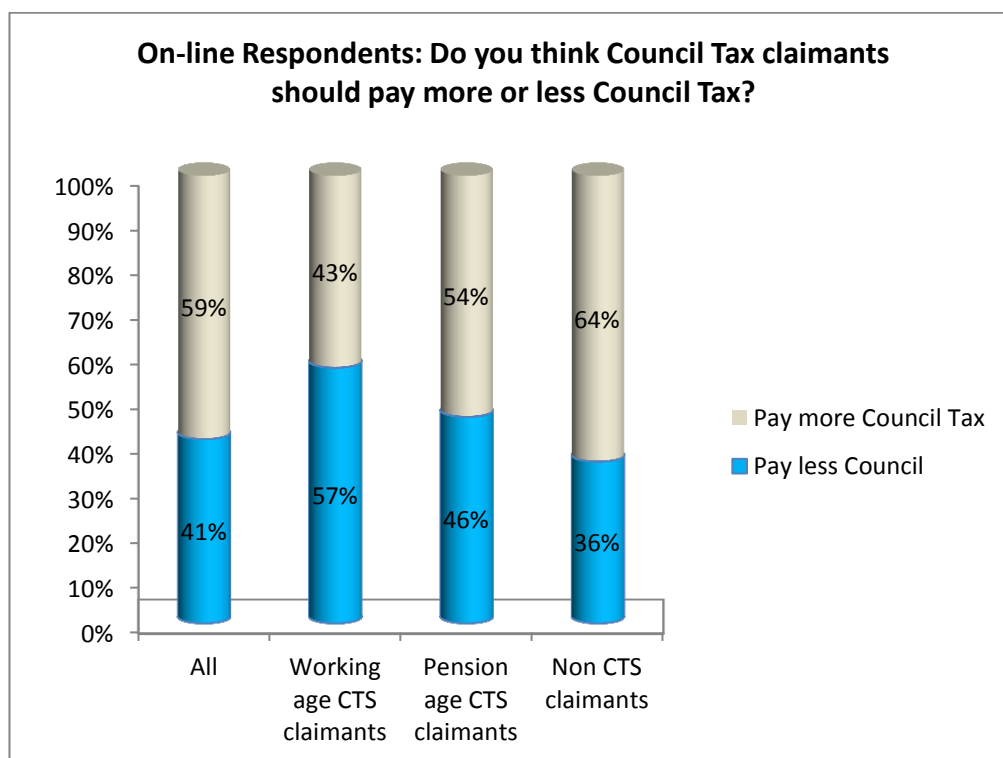


Analysis of Respondents by Survey Type.

Of the postal responses received, overall 52% were in favour of Council Tax Reduction claimants receiving more support and paying less Council Tax. However, this was not supported by the majority of respondents not currently in receipt of support.



Of the on-line responses received, overall 59% were in favour of Council Tax Reduction claimants receiving less support and paying more Council Tax.



Question 2.

Q2 If you think that Council should increase the level of assistance for working-age people from 75%, how do you think this should be funded? In particular, should the Council increase Council Tax or cut other Council services or use the Council reserves, or all three?

Please choose any of these that apply:

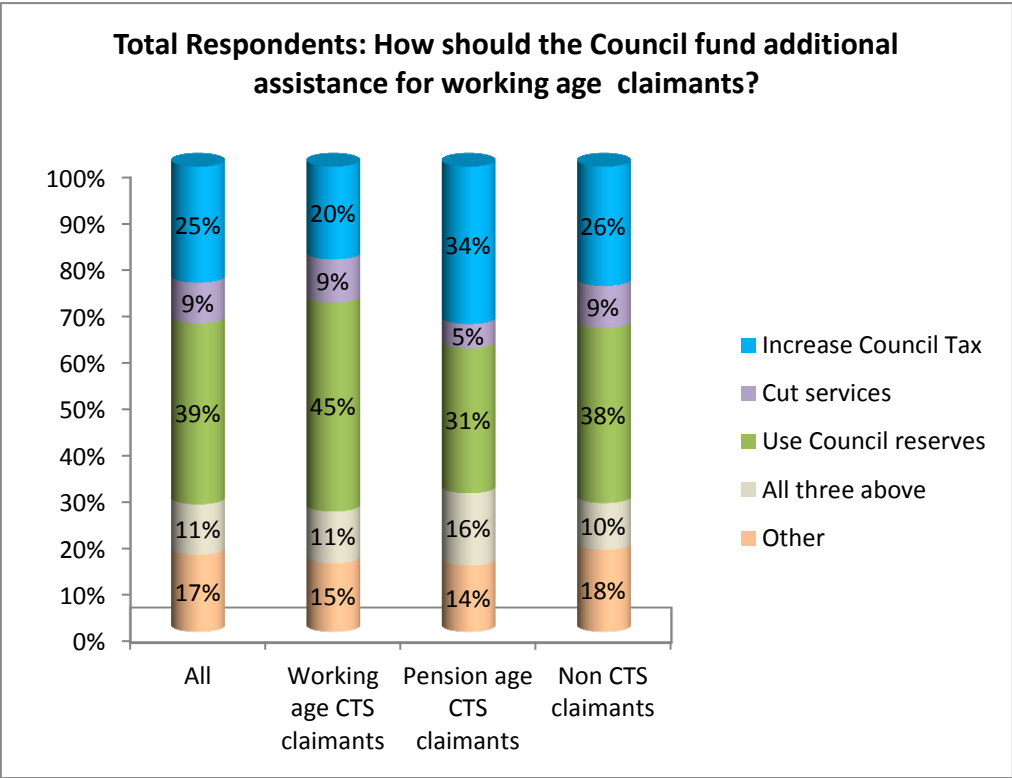
- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Increase Council Tax | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Cut services | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Use Council reserves | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. All three above | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you think services should be cut or have another suggestion, please write your answer here:

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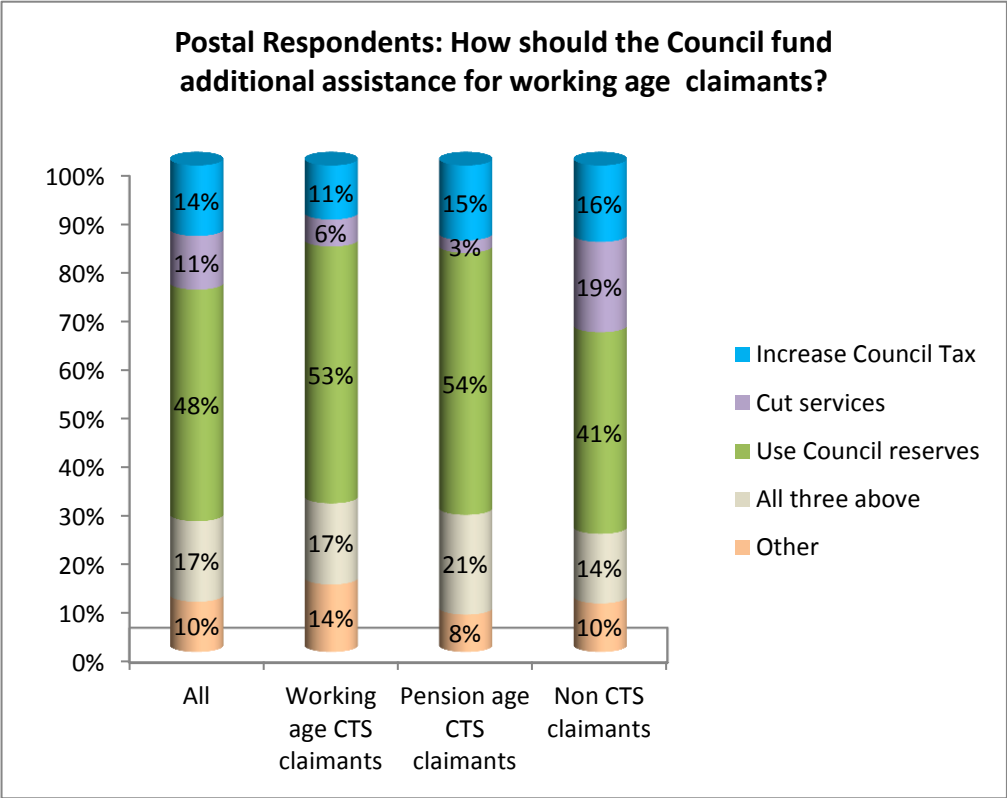
Overall response

The overall response to this question was that the Council should use its reserves to fund any additional contribution to the Council Tax Reduction scheme with 39% stating this to be their preference. The next highest preference at 25% was to increase Council Tax; this was the view of both Council Tax claimants and non-claimants.

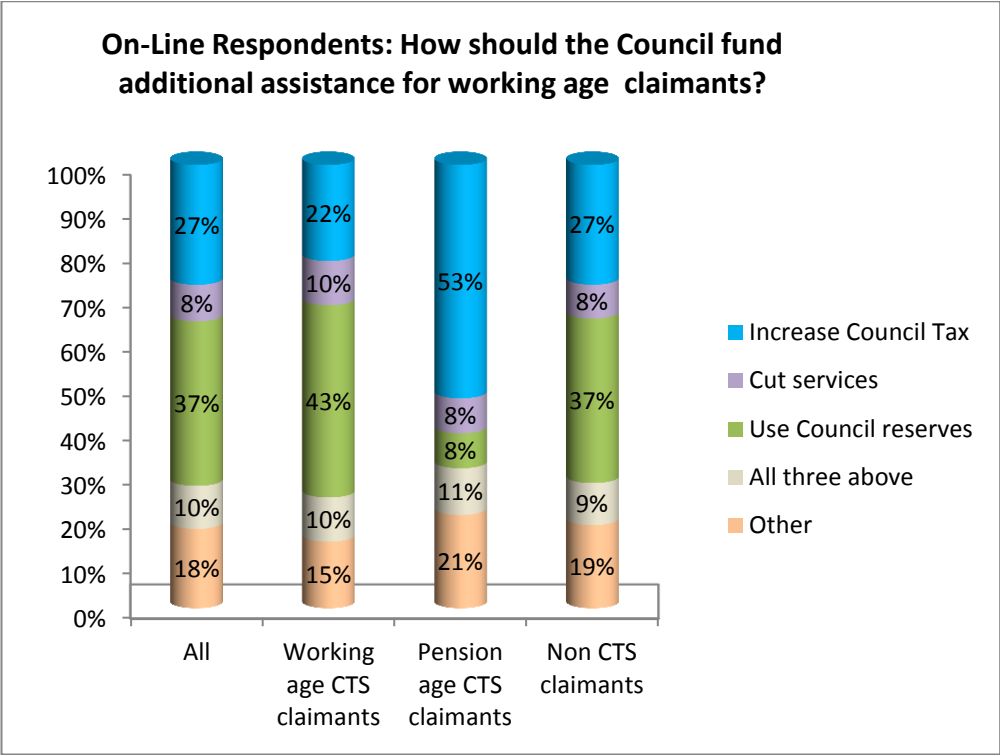


Analysis of Respondents by Survey Type.

Of those who completed the postal survey, 48% confirmed the use of Council's reserves to be their preferred option with the higher percentages from those receiving Council Tax Reduction.



Of those who completed the on-line survey 37% confirmed this to be their preferred option with the highest percentage of respondents choosing this option being those of working age who are currently in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.



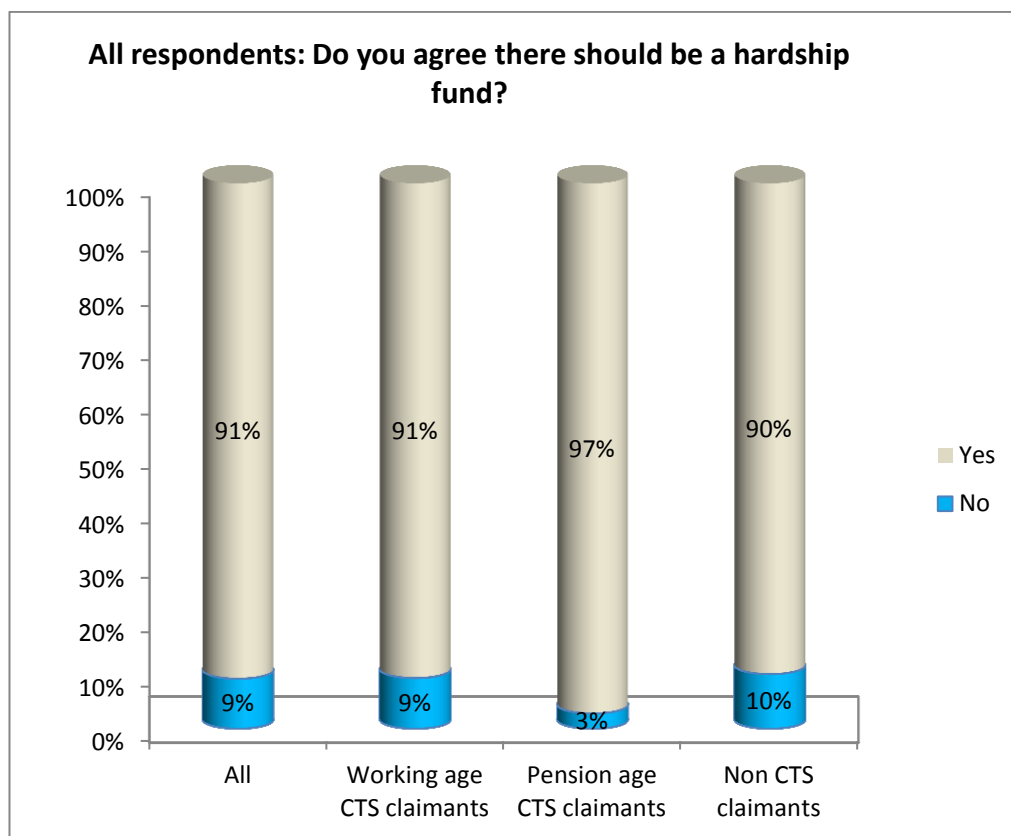
Question 3.

Q3 The Council has a hardship fund of £100,000 to protect the most vulnerable. This is to provide extra help to residents who are experiencing exceptional financial hardship and are unable to pay their Council Tax.

	Yes	No
a. Do you agree that there should be a hardship fund?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Do you agree the level of funding at £100,000 is correct?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you disagree please write your answer here:		

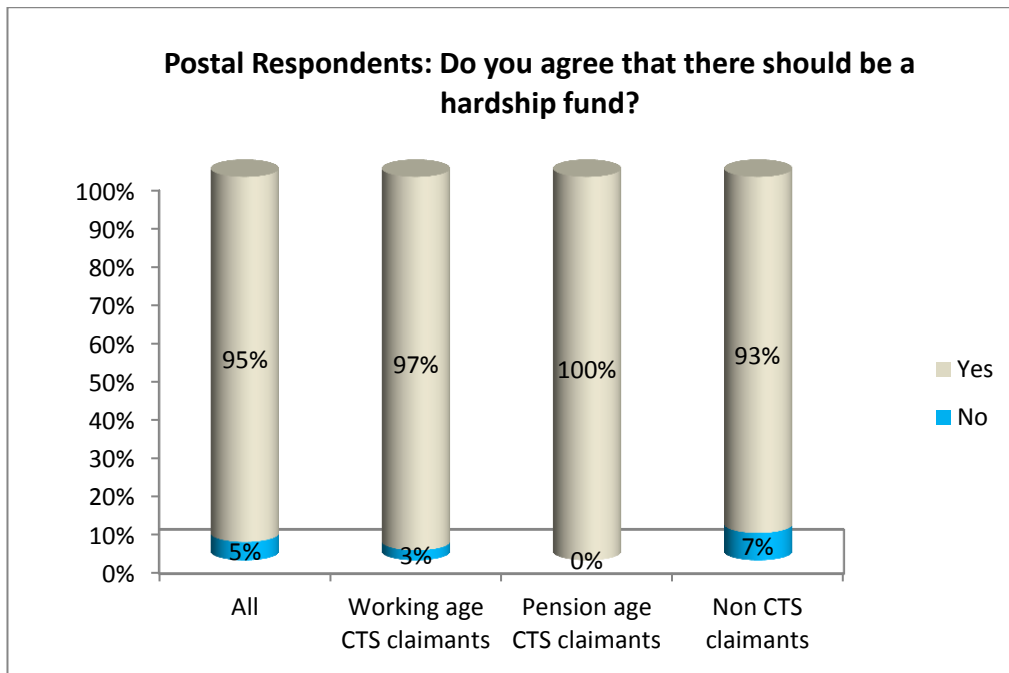
Overall response – part a.

The overall response to part (a) of this question was that, yes, the Council should have a hardship fund with 91% agreeing with this statement.

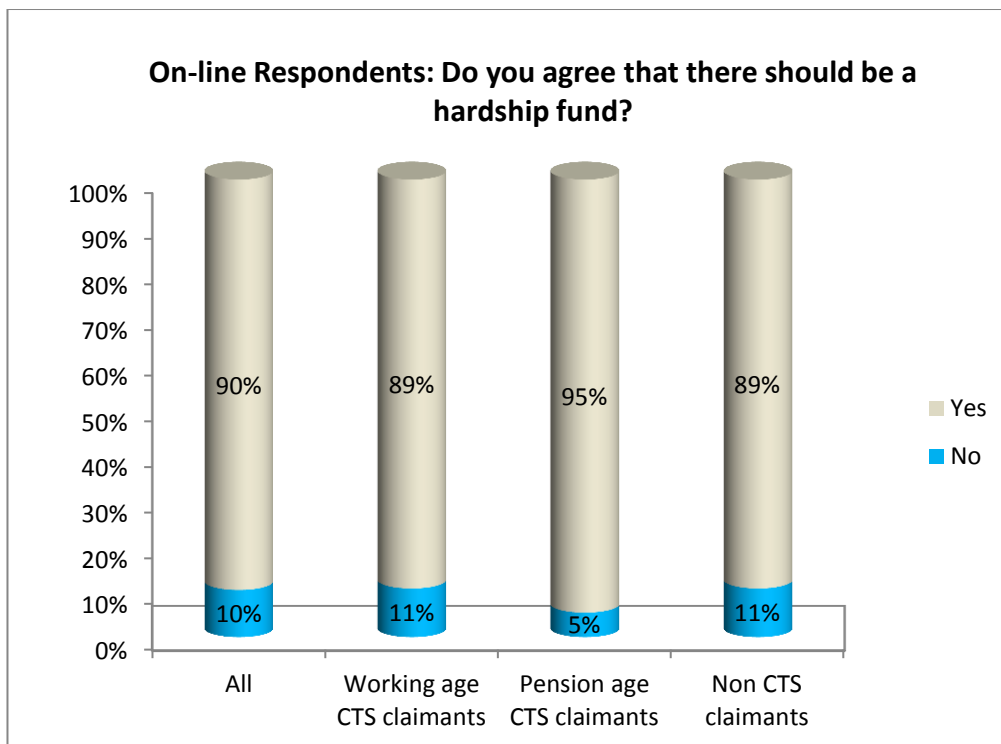


Analysis of Respondents by Survey Type.

Of those who completed the postal survey 95% confirmed that there should be a hardship fund with a 100% of those in receipt of CTR who were pension age agreeing with this statement.



Of those who completed the on-line survey 90% confirmed that there should be a hardship fund with a continued high support at 95% of those at Pensionable Age in receipt of CTR agreeing with this statement. Interestingly, only 89% of those in receipt of CTR who were of working age and therefore most likely to benefit from a hardship fund agreed with the statement, this was a decrease of 4% from this group when the same question was asked last year.



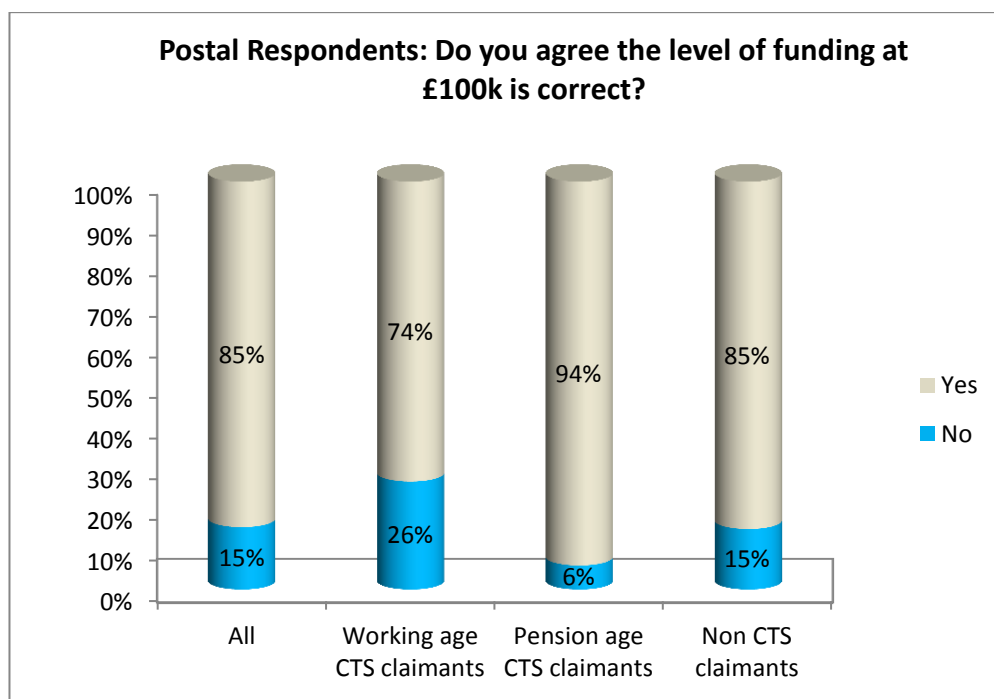
Overall response – part b.

The overall response to part (b) of this question was that, yes, the level of £100,000 for a hardship funding was correct with 67% agreeing with this statement.

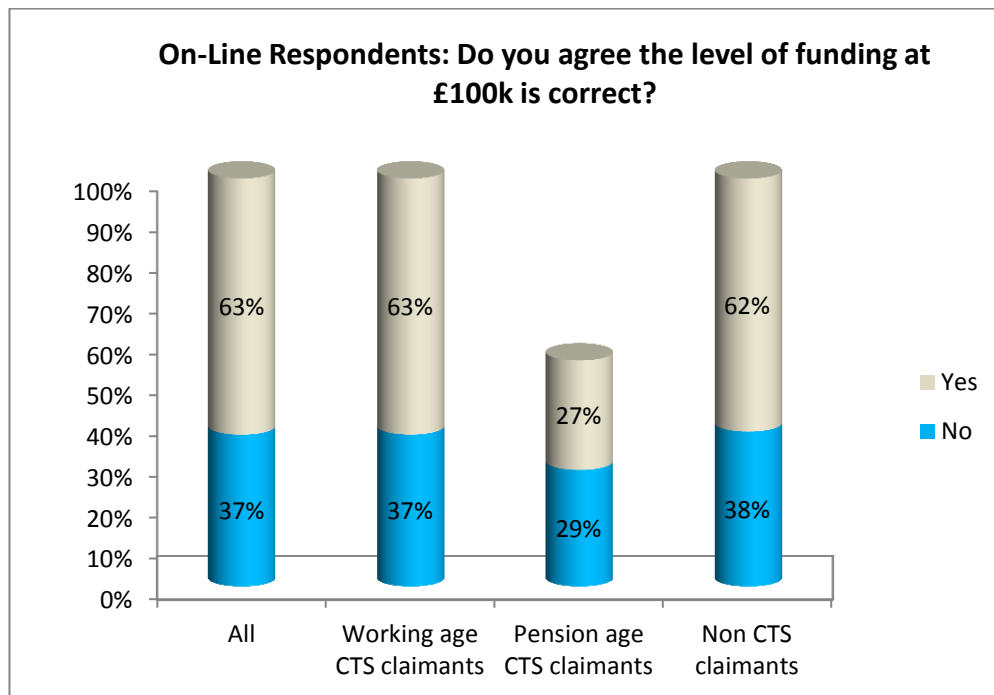
Of those who provided further commentary 38% believed that the sum should be increased and 16% that it should be decreased. Many of the other respondents felt that they were unable to comment without any further facts and figures being provided regarding the potential spend, numbers affected and the criteria qualifying for this fund.

Analysis of Respondents by Survey Type.

Of those who completed the postal survey 85% confirmed that the sum of £100,000 was correct.



Of those who completed the on line survey only 63% confirmed that the sum of £100,000 in respect of a hardship fund was correct.



Question 4.

Q4 The following amendments are proposed in order to align the Council Tax Support Scheme with changes made to Housing Benefit rules.

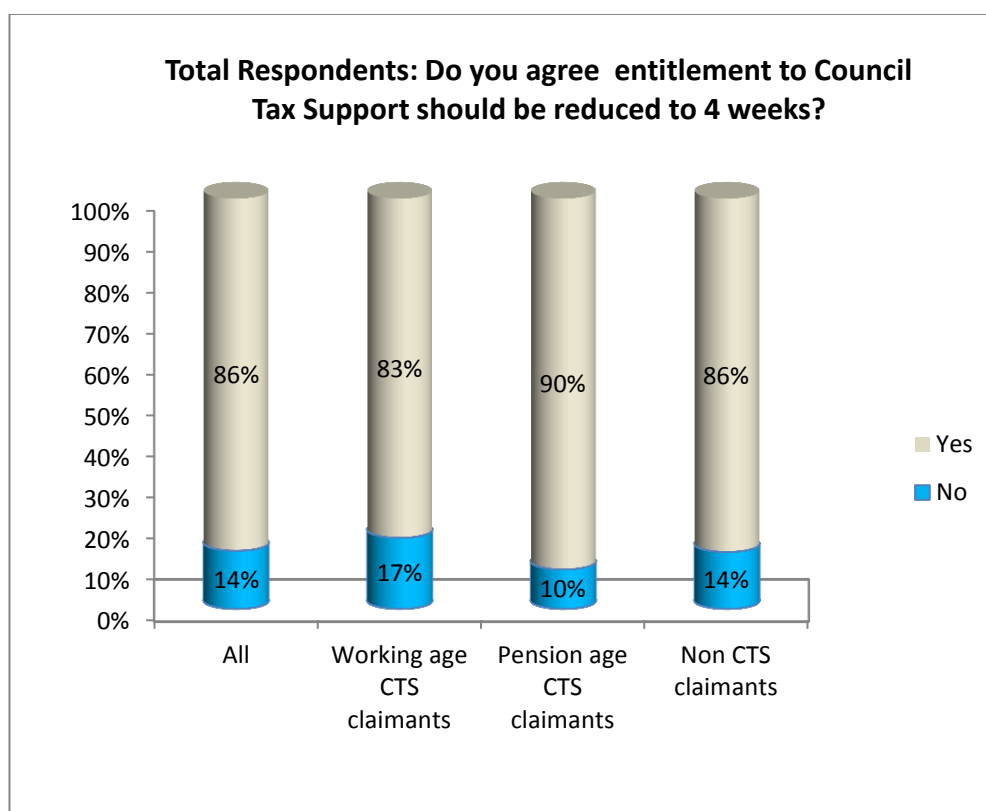
	Yes	No
<p>a. Currently, customers who leave Great Britain temporarily may still get Council Tax Support for 13 weeks or, in some cases, 52 weeks. Do you agree that this should be reduced to 4 weeks ordinarily? In exceptional cases this could be 8 or 26 weeks.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>b. Do you agree that Council Tax Support should only cover the costs of 2 children in families rather than unlimited numbers of children? Exceptions would apply where Tax Credits are paid for more than 2 children.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Yes	No
<p>c. Do you agree that customers in receipt of Employment Support Allowance should only receive additional assistance if they are in the Support Group?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you disagree please write your answer here:

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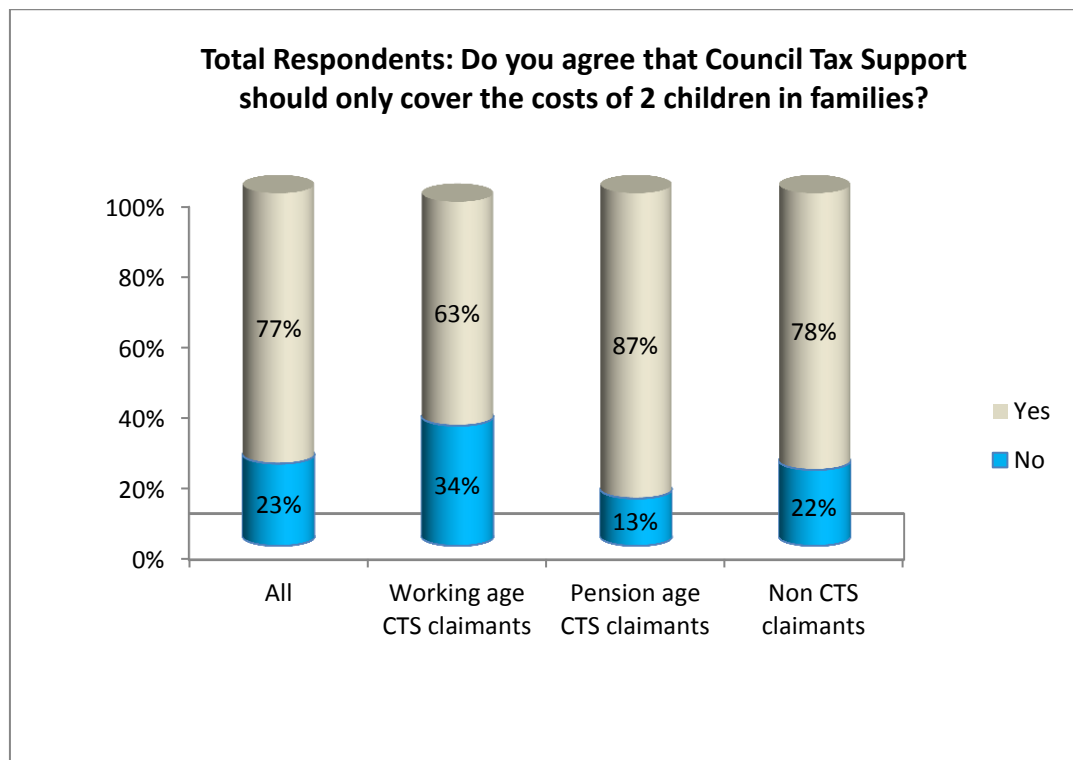
Overall response – part a.

The overall response to part (a) of this question was 86% agreed that claimants who leave Great Britain temporarily that their entitlement to Council Tax Support should be reduced to 4 weeks. Of those who completed the postal survey 87% were in agreement that the entitlement should be limited to 4 weeks and of the on-line responses received, 85% were agreeing to the same reduction.



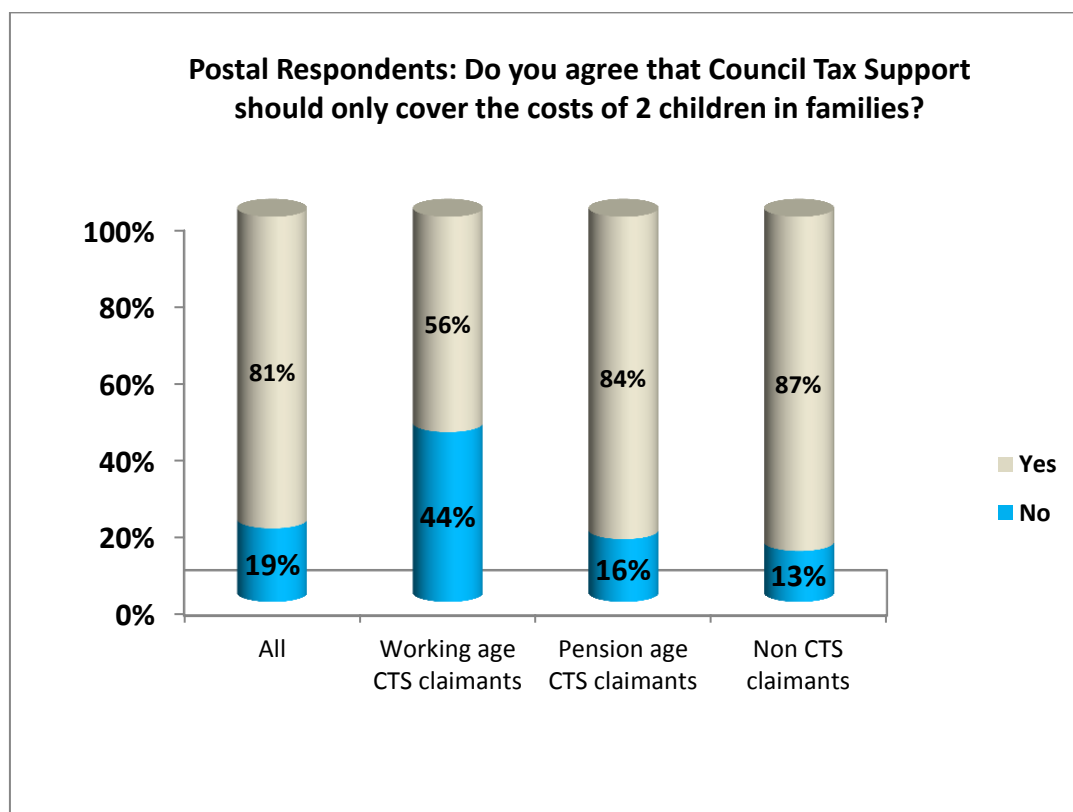
Overall response – part b.

The overall response to part (b) of this question was 77% agreed to a two child limit for personal allowance for claimants with dependent children. This means households with more than 2 children, each additional child's allowance will not be deducted from the household's income in assessing eligibility for Council Tax Support. These households would therefore be receiving less support and paying more Council Tax.

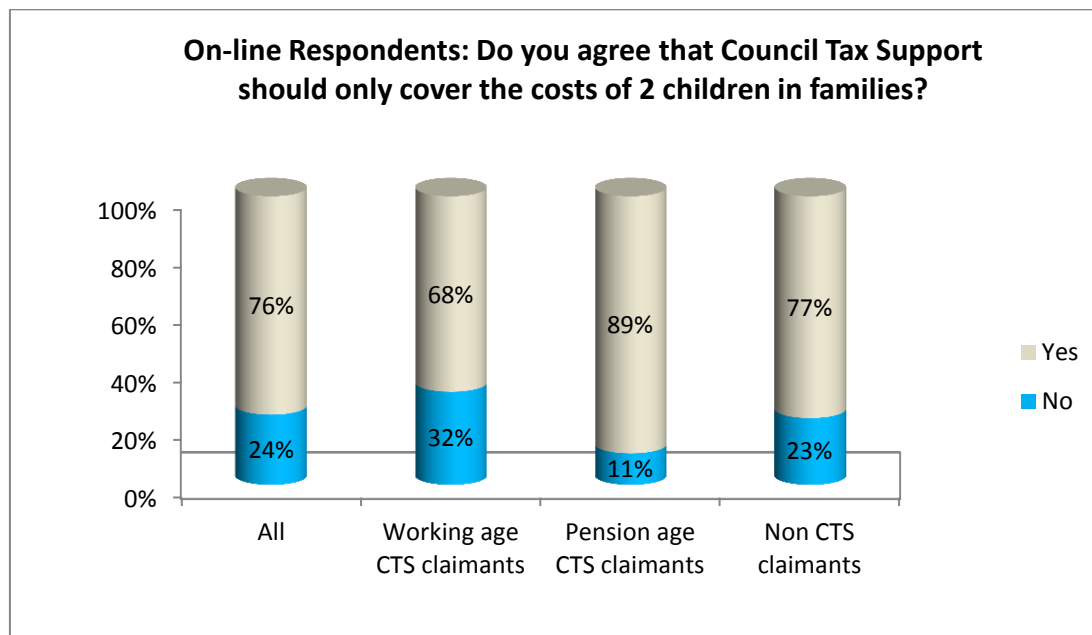


Analysis of Respondents by Survey Type.

Of the postal responses received, overall 81% were in favour of Council Tax Support should be limited to cover the costs of 2 children in families, however the group that would most likely be affected by this change, Working Age claimants, only 56% supported this limit.

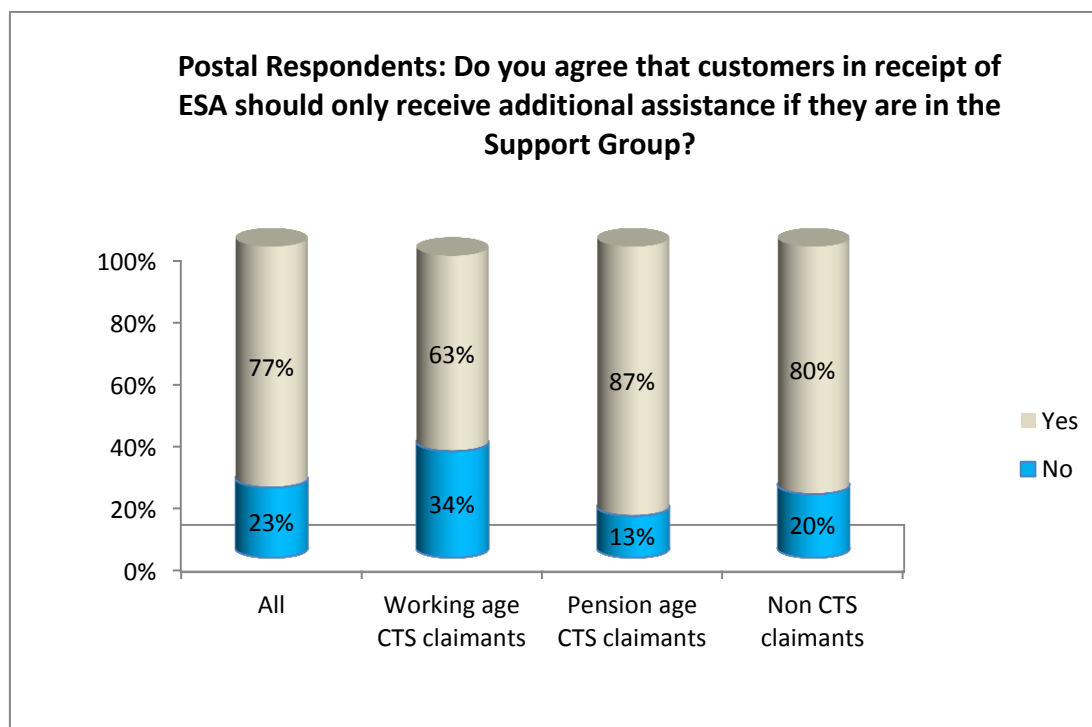


Of the on-line responses received, overall 76% were in favour of only covering the costs of 2 children in families. Again the least support received for this restriction was from Working Age respondents in receipt of Council Tax Support.



Overall response – part c.

The overall response to part (c) of this question, was, yes, claimants on Employment Support Allowance (ESA) should receive additional support if they are in the Support Group with 77% agreeing to this statement. Of those who provided further commentary, a number of respondents felt they were unable to answer the question, as they do not know enough about ESA or the requirements to be in a Support Group.



Question 5 provided the respondents with the opportunity to raise anything else which they believed should alter in respect of the CTR scheme.

Q5 Are there any other changes you would like to see to the Council Tax Support scheme 2018/19 or any further comments you would like to make regarding the scheme?

Please write your answer here:

Where respondents did suggest changes, responses here fell into a number of broad categories with many suggesting the following:

- Undertaking better checks into those receiving CTR
- Increased protection for certain categories of people such as the disabled or single parents
- Employing a sliding scale of assistance
- Limiting the support further e.g. to those living in the lowest CTAX band
- Helping citizens to help themselves through employment opportunities

Q6	Please choose any of these that apply:	Yes	No
a.	Are you currently in receipt of Council Tax Support?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you answered yes to (6a) please tick one of the following:			
bi.	Are you a pensioner?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
bii.	Are you of working age?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Overall response

Of those who completed the survey, overall 70% were from respondents not in receipt of Council Tax assistance, and 30% confirmed they were either pension age or working age currently receiving Council Tax Support.

