

Council Tax Reduction Scheme & Introduction of Universal Credit Consultation 2017

Prepared for Tunbridge Wells Borough
Council

METHODOLOGY

Tunbridge Wells Council undertook a consultation between 22nd August and 17th October 2017.

The survey was carried out online, with a direct email to approximately 1,866 Council Tax Reduction Scheme recipients where the email address was held and was promoted on the Council's website, social media and in the local press . Paper copies were available on request, however no requests were received.

The survey was open to all Tunbridge Wells residents aged 18 years and over.

It should be noted that respondents in the 18 to 34 years and the 65 years and over groups are under-represented at 15.6% and 14.8% respectively in the survey compared to 22.8% and 24.5%¹ in the local population.

A total of 150 people responded to the questionnaire, this report discusses unweighted results. Please note not every respondent answered every question therefore the total number of respondents refers to the number of respondents for the question being discussed not to the survey overall.

With a total of 150 responses to the survey, the overall results in this report are accurate to $\pm 6.7\%$ at the 90% confidence level. This means that we can be 90% certain that the results are between $\pm 6.7\%$ of the calculated response, so the 'true' response could be 6.7% above or below the figures reported (i.e. a 50% agreement rate could in reality lie within the range of 43.3% to 56.7%).

¹ 2016 ONS Mid-year Population Estimates

OPTION 1 – FIXED PERIOD ASSESSMENTS

Overall, 46.0% of respondents were in favour of option 1, introducing fixed period assessments. This was the most popular of the three options.

The data shows that women were more likely than men to say they were not sure about this option with 37.2% responding this way compared to 24.4% of male respondents.

There were some variations across the age groups with a gap of 24.8% between the age groups with the greatest proportion in favour of this option (55 to 64 years at 61.5%) and that with the lowest proportion in favour (45 to 54 years at 36.7%).

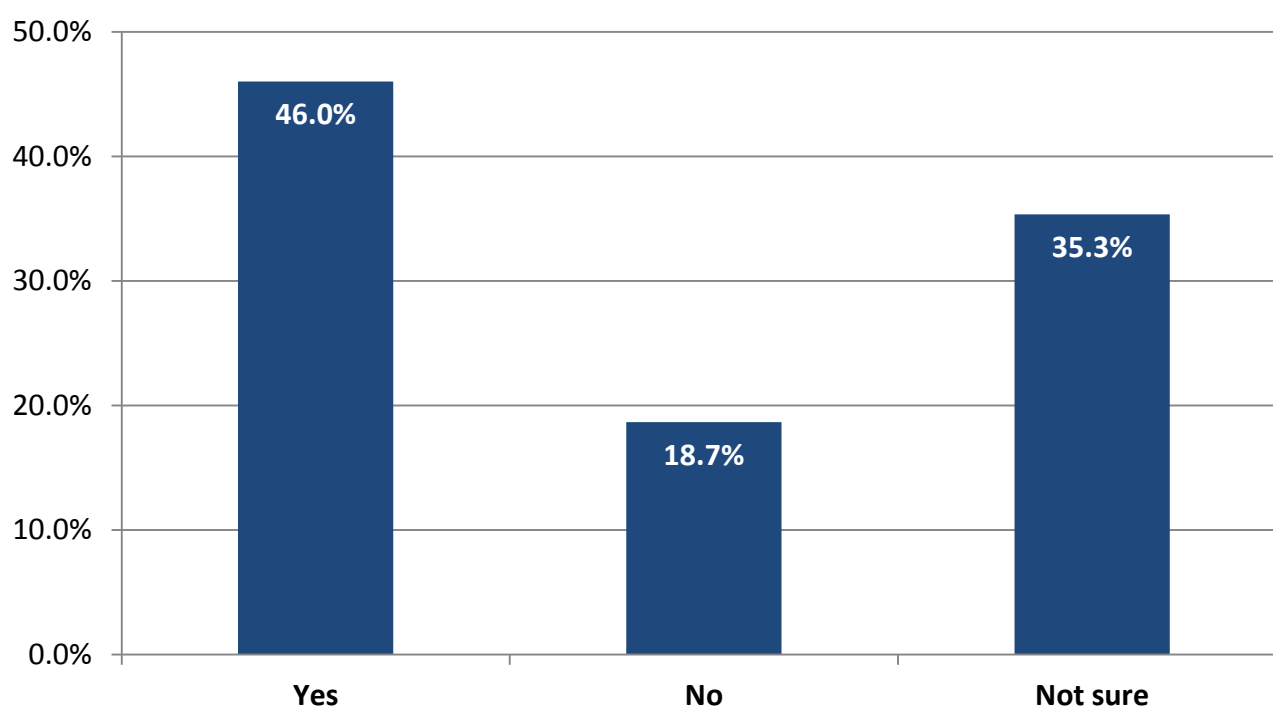
The data did not show any significant difference between respondent who said they have a disability and those who do not, for both those groups one in five respondents were not in favour of option 1 and the remaining variances are within the error rate.

There were 42 comments received in relation to option 1 that could be categorised.

Six respondents commented on the proposed frequency of fixed period assessments, all of these said that six months was too long with three saying it should be quarterly and the other three saying that it should only be a month in arrears or real time. Two people said that the current system should remain. While three were supportive of option 2 and four were supportive of option 1. There was one other negative comment where the respondent said it would take too long for the recipient to gain the benefit.

Five respondents were concerned about people getting in to financial difficulty, and two comments mentioned having a fund or additional support for extenuating circumstances. One was concerned about how these changes would be communicated to vulnerable people, while another was concerned a clarity in general but saw the changes as an opportunity to simplify the whole system.

Four were concerned about how the changes would impact them personally.



OPTION 2 – TOLERANCES

Overall, 40.5% of respondents agreed with the proposed change to use tolerances any only recalculate entitlement if it would result in a change greater than £3.00 either way. When compared to the other options consulted this option had the greatest proportion of people say they were not sure at 35.9%.

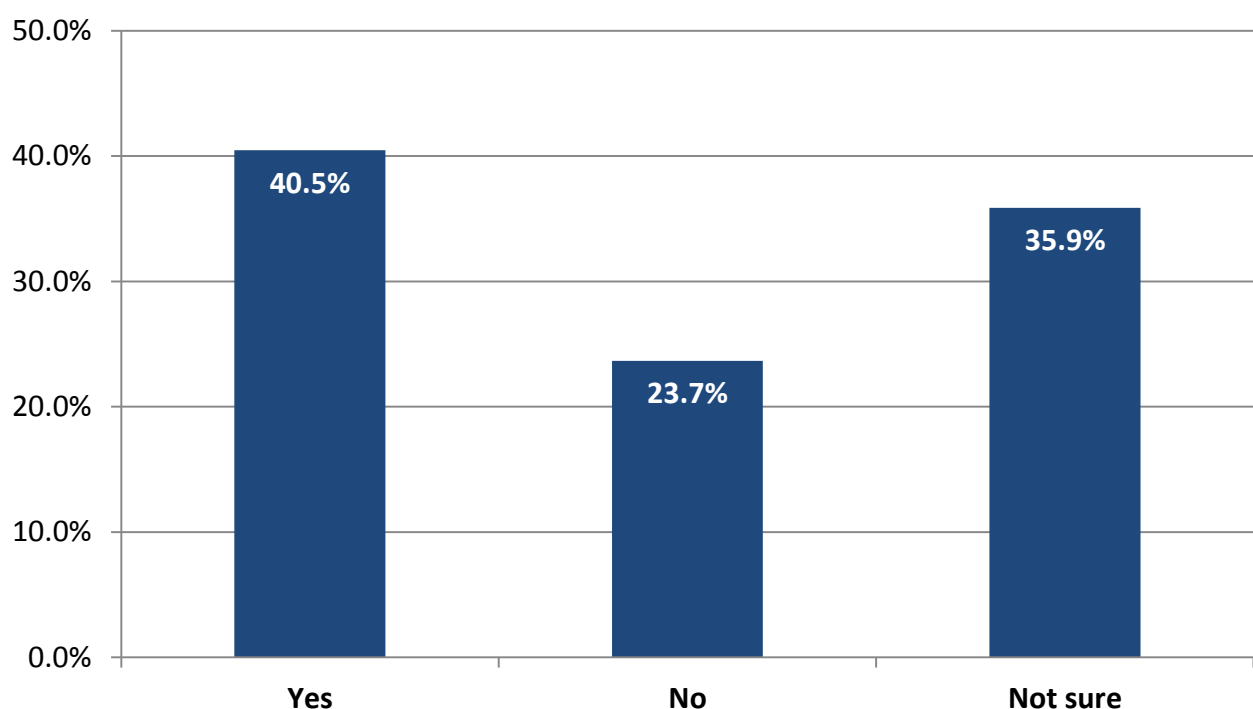
The data shows that men were more in favour of this option than women at 47.5% compared to 35.9%. It appears that there was more confusion about this option for women than men with 43.6% of women saying they are not sure, this was the most common response from this group compared to one in four male respondents selecting this response.

There is a 17.4% difference between the age group with the greatest proportion in support of option two (18 to 34 years at 47.4%) and that with the lowest (45 to 54 years at 30.0%).

There is a 24.6% difference in the proportion that are supportive of option 2 between those with a disability and those without a disability. Just over half (52.3%) of those without a disability were in favour of this option compared to 27.7% of those with a disability.

There were 32 comments received in relation to option 2. Three respondents were supportive of option 2 saying that this approach seem fair to everyone and the £3 either way was unlikely to have negative impact. There were five comments that were negative about option 2 saying that £3 is significant to some people. There were three comments where the respondent said they preferred one of the other options, and three said that the current system should be retained. Another respondent suggested a higher tolerance level to avoid constant changes.

Five respondents expressed concerns about people getting into financial difficulty and two said that this option sounded complicated. Two people were concerned about how this would impact them personally and there were six general comments about council tax in general.



OPTION 3 – NOT ACTIONING DEPARTMENT OF WORK & PENSIONS NOTIFIED CHANGES

Overall, 46.4% of respondents were not in favour of option 3 – not actioning Department of Work and Pensions notified changes. This option had the greatest proportion of people responding no compared to the other options that were consulted on.

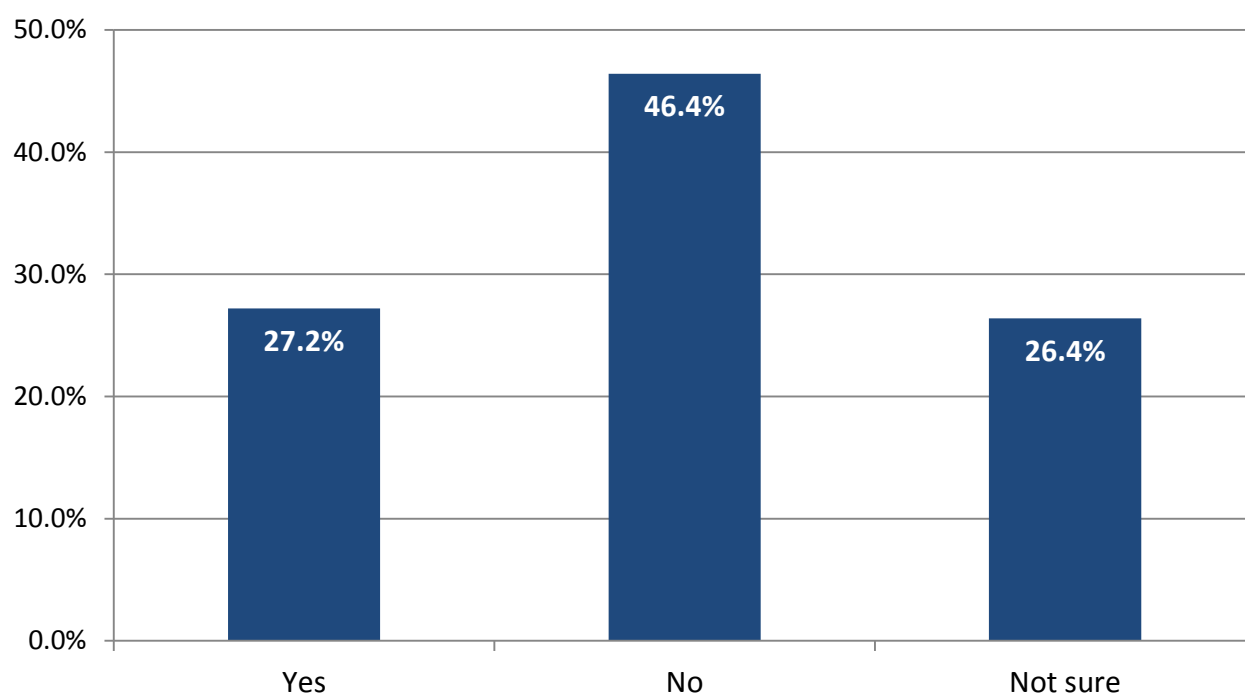
There were no significant difference in the response level between men and women.

There is a 31.1% gap between the age group with the greatest proportion supportive of this change and that with lowest proportion. The 65 years and over group had the greatest proportion supporting option 3 at 44.4% and the 45 to 54 years group had the lowest portion at 13.3%, more over half of the 45 to 54 and the 18 to 34 years groups were against this option .

There were differences in the response level between those with a disability and those without a disability with 17.4% of people with a disability supporting this option compared to 34.4% of those without a disability, however more than one in four respondents in each of these groups were not in favour of this option.

There were 50 comments relating to option 3. There were four comments expressing support for option three and eight that were negative about this option. Four commenters said they preferred option one and three said they preferred option 2, while two said either of the other two options were preferable. Three respondents said the current system should be kept.

Five respondents expressed concerns about people getting into financial difficulties and four were concerned about the impact this option could have on vulnerable people. Four respondents made suggestions about how the new scheme could work: one of these said people should sign a statement saying they will inform the local authority if they have a change that is longer than one month, another suggested reviewing peoples bank statements every six months. There were also eight statements about council tax and benefits in general and two people mentioned personal circumstances.



DEMOGRAPHICS

In receipt of CTRS		
Yes	98	79.7%
No	20	16.3%
No sure	5	4.1%
Grand Total	123	100%

Age		
18 to 34 years	19	15.6%
35 to 44 years	29	23.8%
45 to 54 years	30	24.6%
55 to 64 years	26	21.3%
65 years and over	18	14.8%
Grand Total	122	

Gender		
Male	41	33.3%
Female	78	63.4%
In another way	4	3.3%
Grand Total	123	

Ethnicity		
White Groups	110	94.8%
BME groups	5	4.3%
Other	1	0.9%
Grand Total	116	

Disability		
Yes	48	39%
No	65	53%
Prefer not to say	10	8%
Grand Total	123	