



Council Tax Support Survey 2015

Date: October 2015 Report prepared for:
Strategy & Resources Committee; Revenue &
Benefits Division

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1. Executive Summary

- There were 930 responses to the consultation survey
- 38% (n=356) agreed to increase the minimum contribution for working age recipients to 25%
- 31% (n=288) agreed to increase the minimum contribution for working age recipients to 30%
- 31% (n=286) stated there should be no increase from the current 20% minimum contribution for working age recipients
- 29% (n=271) of respondents were in receipt of Council Tax Support. Two thirds (66%) stated there should be no increase from the current 20% minimum contribution. 26% agreed to a 25% minimum contribution and 9% agreed to a 30% minimum contribution
- Of the 31% of respondents who answered no to increasing the minimum contribution of working age Support recipients 62% (n=172) stated the Council Tax shortfall should be funded through the use of Council reserves
- 86% (n=799) would like to see vulnerable residents protected
- The top three vulnerable groups identified for protection were those with severe disabilities (95%, n=758), full-time carers of disabled people, the elderly or infirm (80%, n=643), and those who are long-term sick (75%, n=597)
- Of those wanting protection for the vulnerable, 56% (n=446) wish this to be through the hardship fund while 41% (n=326) would like to see a lower minimum contribution set for the vulnerable
- Where a reduced minimum contribution was the favoured method for protecting the vulnerable the first choice was for a 10% rate where non-vulnerable rate was 25%, and 20% where the non-vulnerable rate was 30%
- The Epsom Citizens' Advice Bureau expressed concern over the financial hardship Council Tax Support recipients are already facing and highlighted the need for the Council to advertise the hardship fund widely to ensure vulnerable residents are protected through the fund
- Surrey County Council does not advocate a Council Tax Support scheme where every working age person is asked to make a contribution. They prefer the type of scheme we ran in 2013 and 2014. Without a full analysis of the 20% minimum contribution introduced in April 2015 Surrey County Council "see it as a risk to increase this further without knowing the extent of its impact".

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background and objectives

The aim of this consultation is to present the results of the survey to the Council's Strategy and Resources Committee by highlighting residents' opinions on proposed options. The findings will form part of councillors' decision making process in deciding a Council Tax Support scheme from April 2016 in the face of further budget cuts from Central Government. The key objectives are to analyse the levels of agreement or disagreement against the options proposed, highlight the most popular options and report on groups that respondents believe need added protection.

2.2. Methodology

The survey was developed by the Council's Consultation & Communication and Revenues & Benefits Division. The literals/open ended questions where respondents gave their opinions have been coded by the team to convert them into numerical scores. The survey was conducted online and through the use of paper copies.

The survey was sent to all members in the Council's Citizens' Panel, current working age Council Tax Support recipients (pensioners on Council Tax Support are not affected by the changes), Council venues, housing associations (in particular Rosebery Housing Association), and various voluntary and 3rd party organisations (e.g. Voluntary Action Mid-Surrey, Citizens Advice Bureau etc). Results from this survey inform the Council's decision making process regarding Council Tax Support. The raw data was captured using Snap and the data inputting was outsourced to SnapSurveys Shop.

The questionnaire was designed by the Consultation & Communication team and data was collected through two surveys; one for Citizens' Panel members and one for all other residents. 1,104 Citizens' Panel members were contacted, and offered an incentive of £3 vouchers for each survey filled. Overall, 579 responses were received from this group, representing a response rate of 62%.

Both surveys were started on 31/07/15 and the deadline was set for the 20/09/15. Both surveys were available in online and paper format. The overall number of responses received was 941. Following the fieldwork, data from both surveys were merged into one file to facilitate the analysis of the overall responses received. The principal contacts for the survey were Adama Roberts from the Consultation & Communication team and Judith Doney from the Revenue and Benefits Division.

Analysis of Results

Figures in this report are generally calculated as a proportion of respondents who answered each question. Percentages in a particular chart might not always add up to 100%; this may be due to rounding or respondents being asked to tick multiple options.

Please note that the overall base number might not always add up to the 941 responses received due to some respondents not answering some of the questions. It could also be due to routing within some of the questions. (Routing allows those completing the online survey to answer only questions that are relevant based upon their answer to a preceding question – for example only those respondents who ticked ‘No’ or ‘Other’ will be asked, “If No or Other please explain your reasons.”

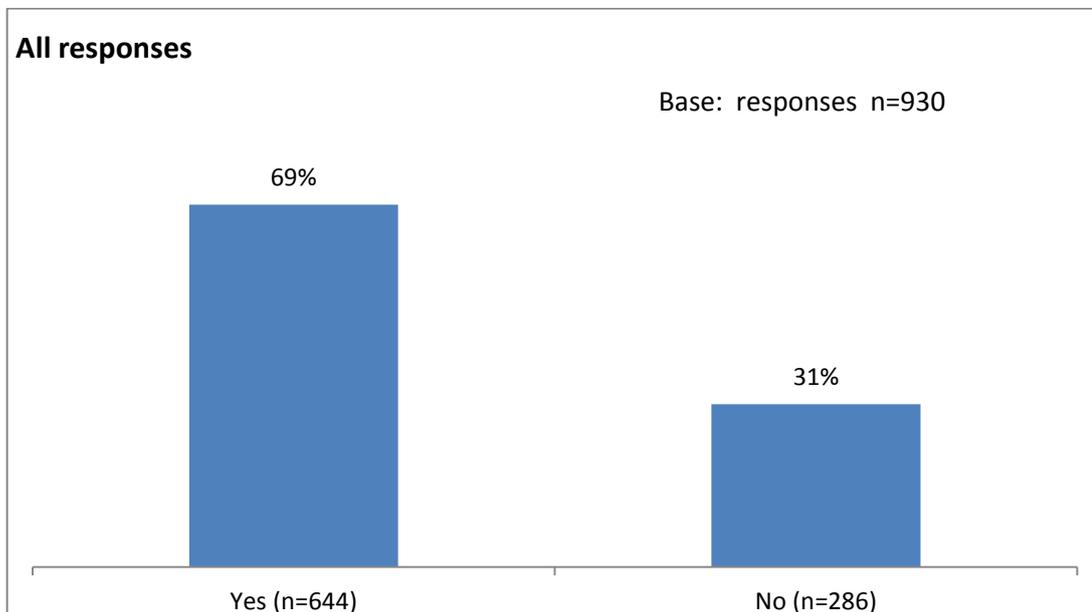
3. Proposed Options

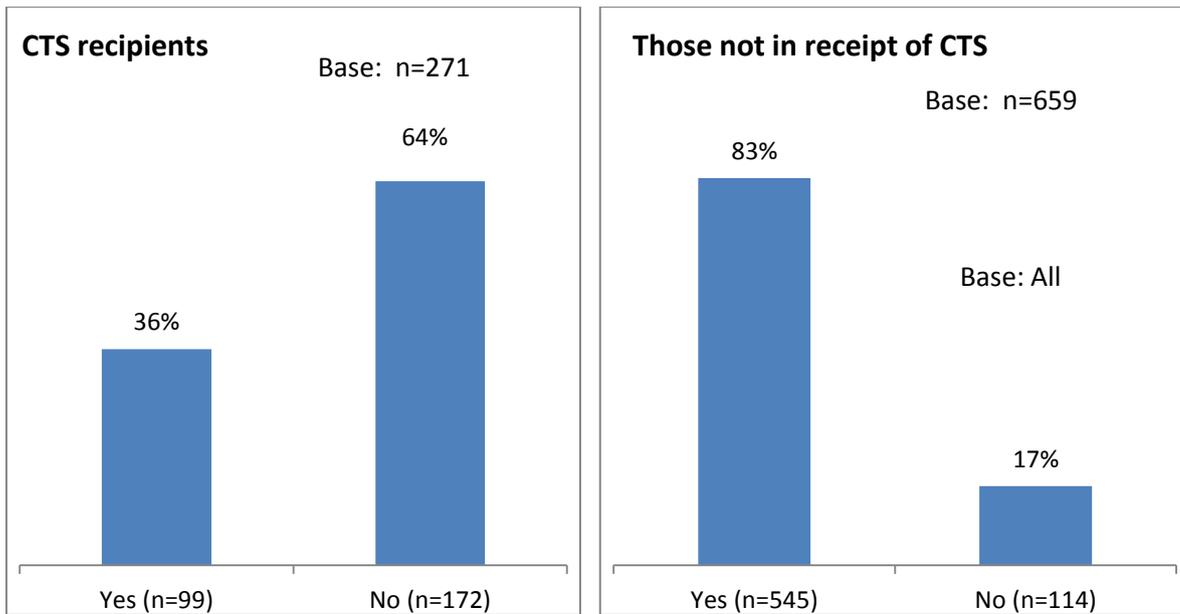
3.1. Introduction

This section of the report looks at respondents’ responses to whether the Council Tax Support (CTS) shortfall should be funded by increasing working age Support recipients’ contribution to their Council Tax bill and, if so, the amount, or, if not, how the funding gap should be met.

3.2. Funding shortfall

Currently a working age person receiving help can get Support up to a maximum of 80% of their Council Tax bill – in other words, they pay at least the first 20% of their bill. Do you agree that, to help meet the funding shortfall, we should increase the minimum amount of their Council Tax bill that working age Support recipients will have to pay?



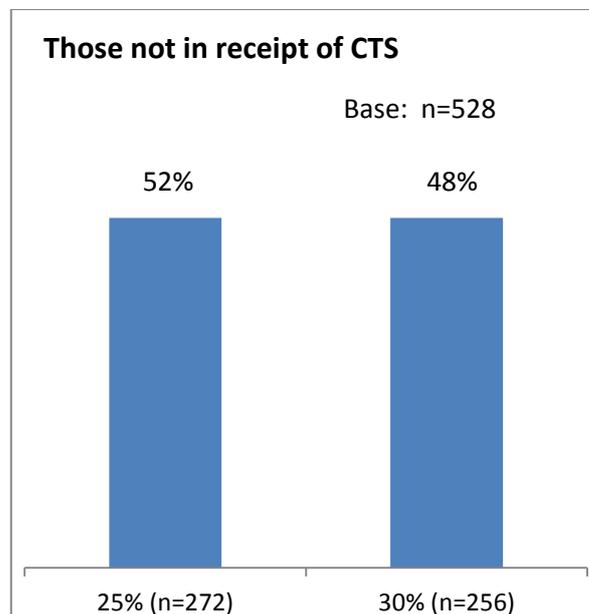
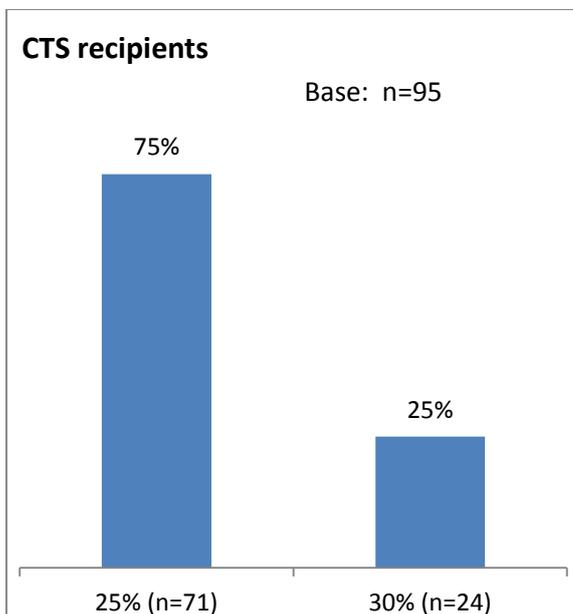
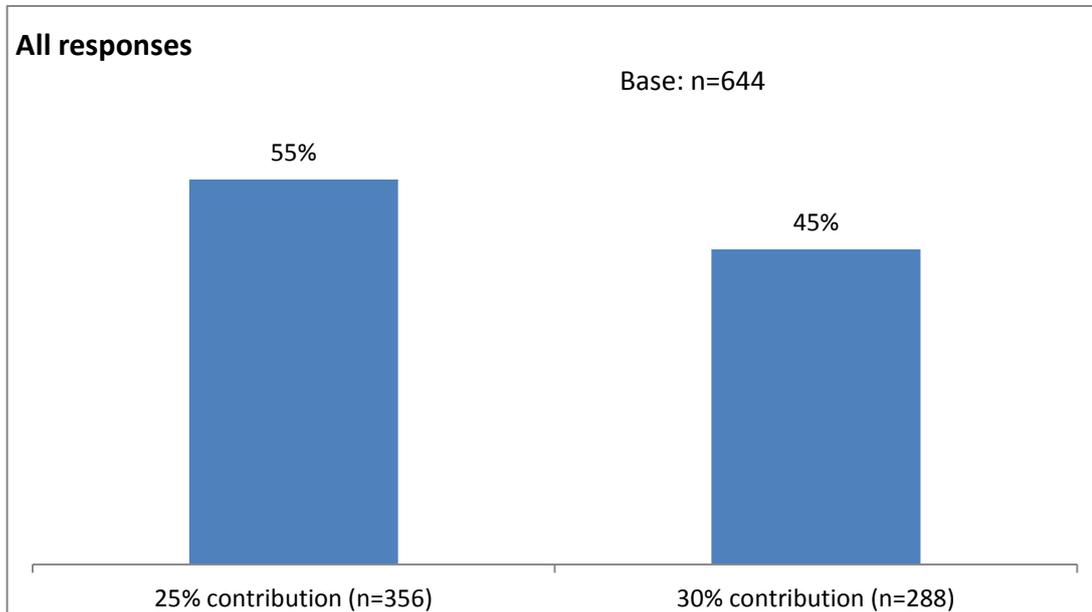


The majority of those respondents who are disabled (70%, n=76/108), full-time carers (67%, n=28), unemployed (58%, n=71) and those who are students (58%, n=7) ticked 'No'.

The majority of pensioners (87%, n=277/317), the full-time employed (82%, n=196/240), those who are employed part-time (68%, n=100/146) and those responding on behalf of an organisation or another individual (67%, n=6/9) ticked 'Yes' to increasing the amount paid by working age Council Tax Support (CTS) recipients.

3.3. Percentage Increase to 25% or 30%

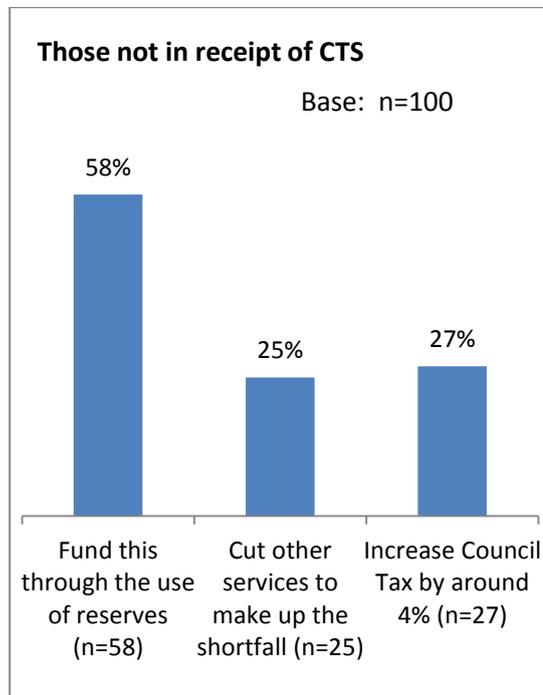
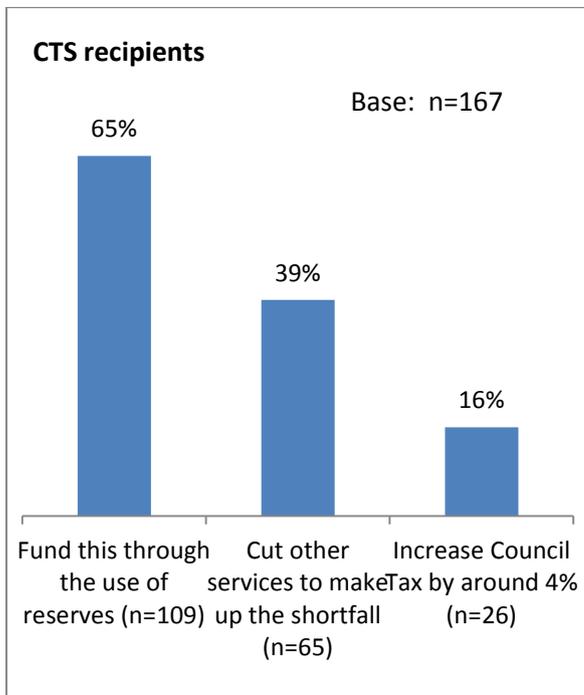
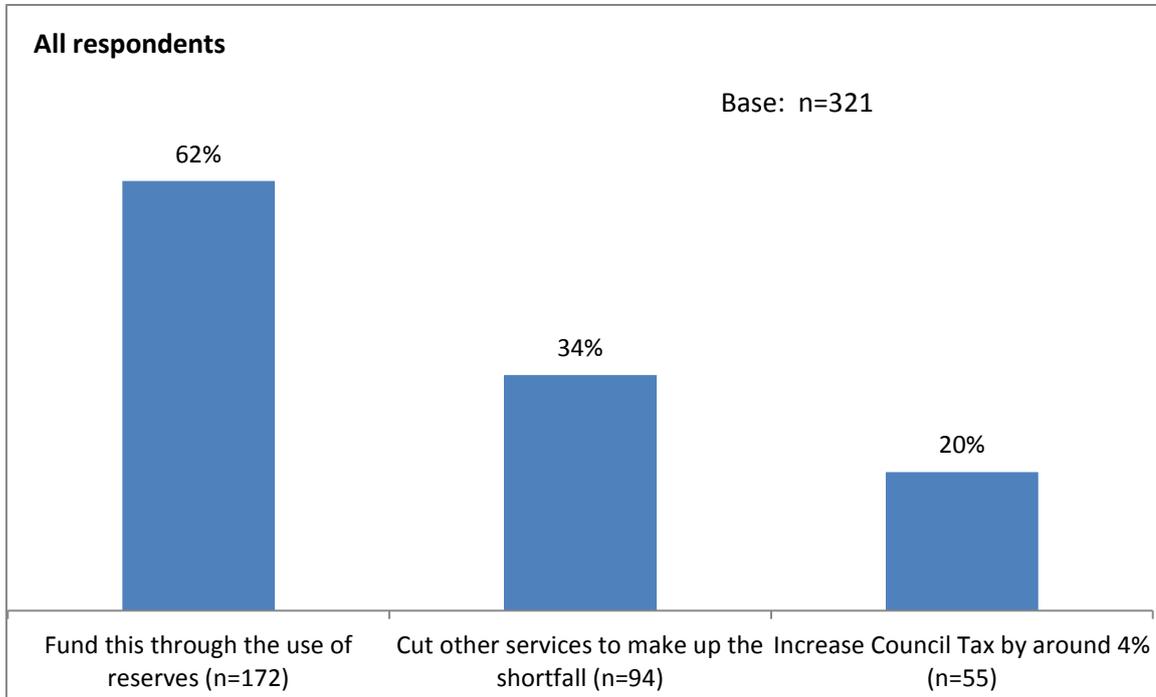
If we increase the minimum amount working age Support recipients have to pay from the current 20%, should it increase to 25% or 30%?



3.4. Funding the Council Tax Support Shortfall

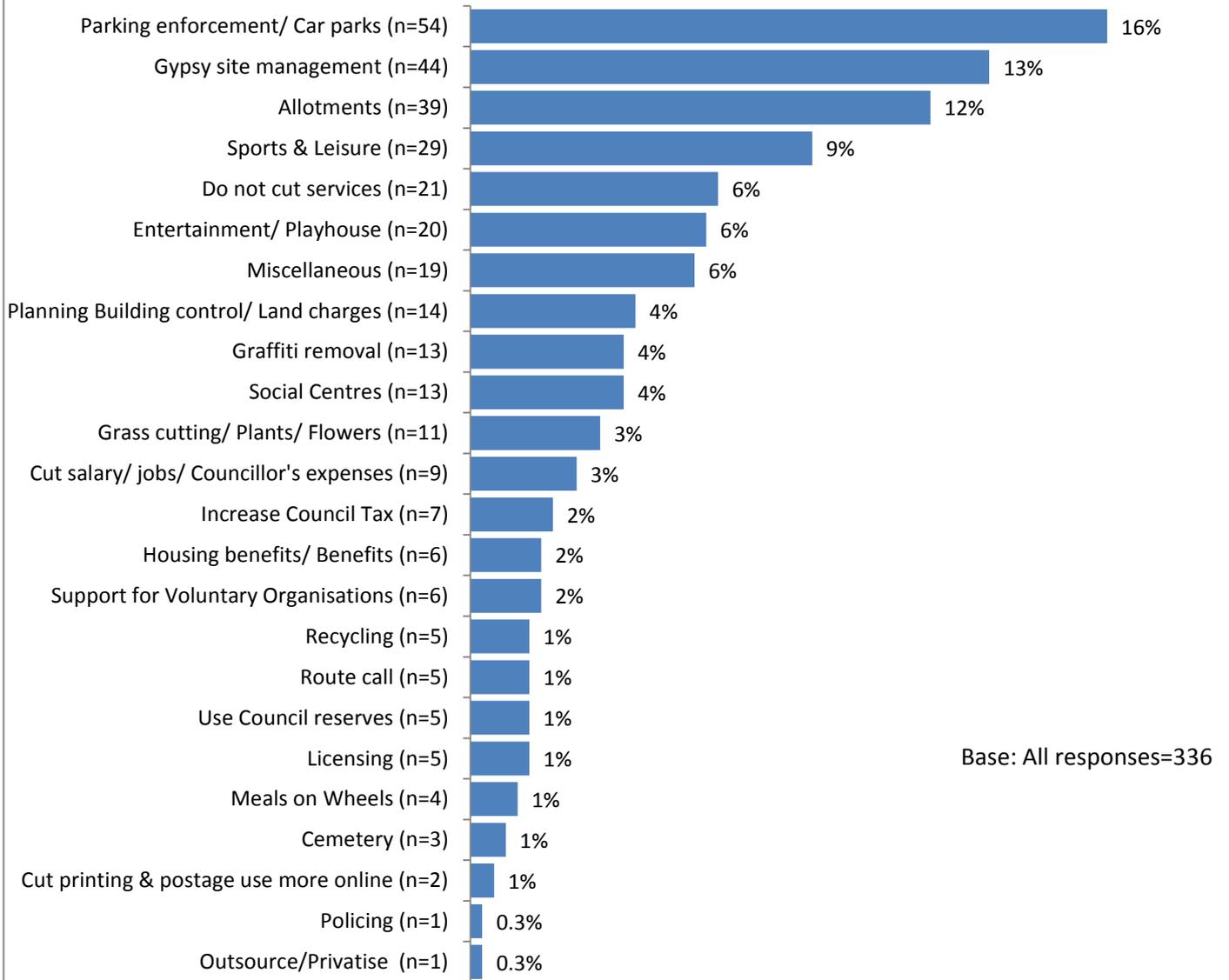
If we chose not to increase the minimum contribution how do you think we should make up the shortfall in funding?

(It was permissible to choose more than one option, hence responses not totalling 100%.)



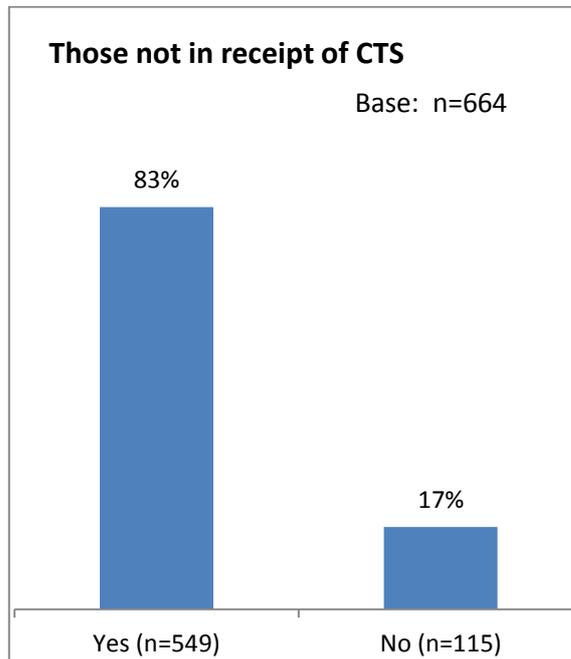
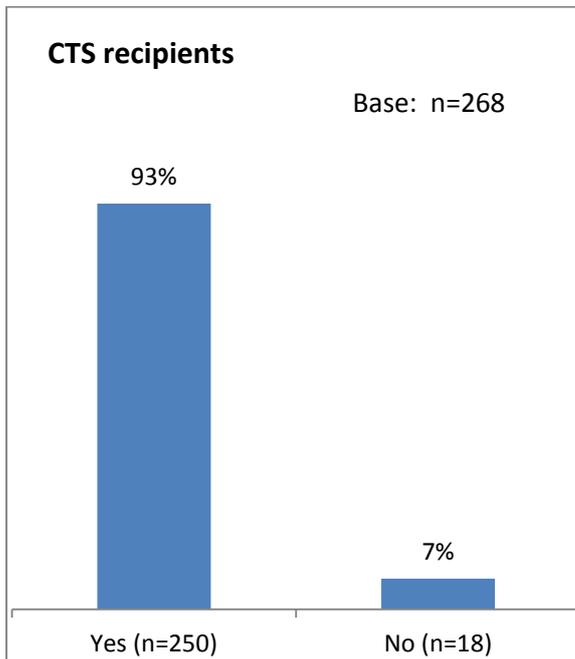
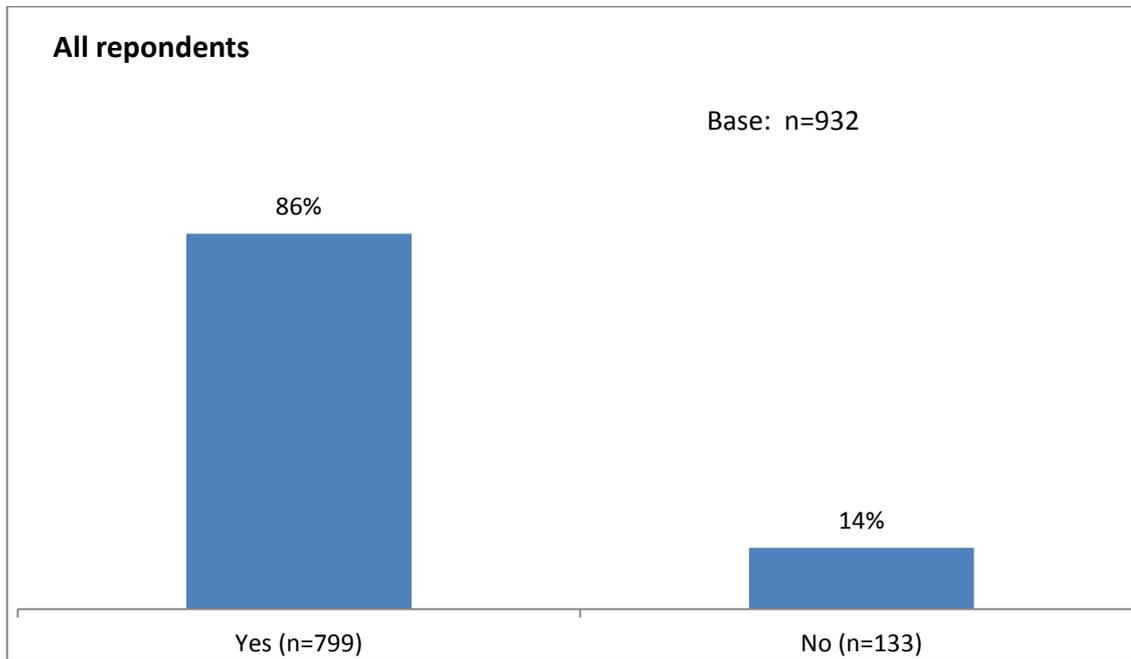
3.5. Services to Cut to Fund the Council Tax Support Shortfall

If we were to stop providing another service(s) to offset the reduction in funding from central government, which service(s) do you think we should stop providing? (Please state which one(s) you think should be stopped)



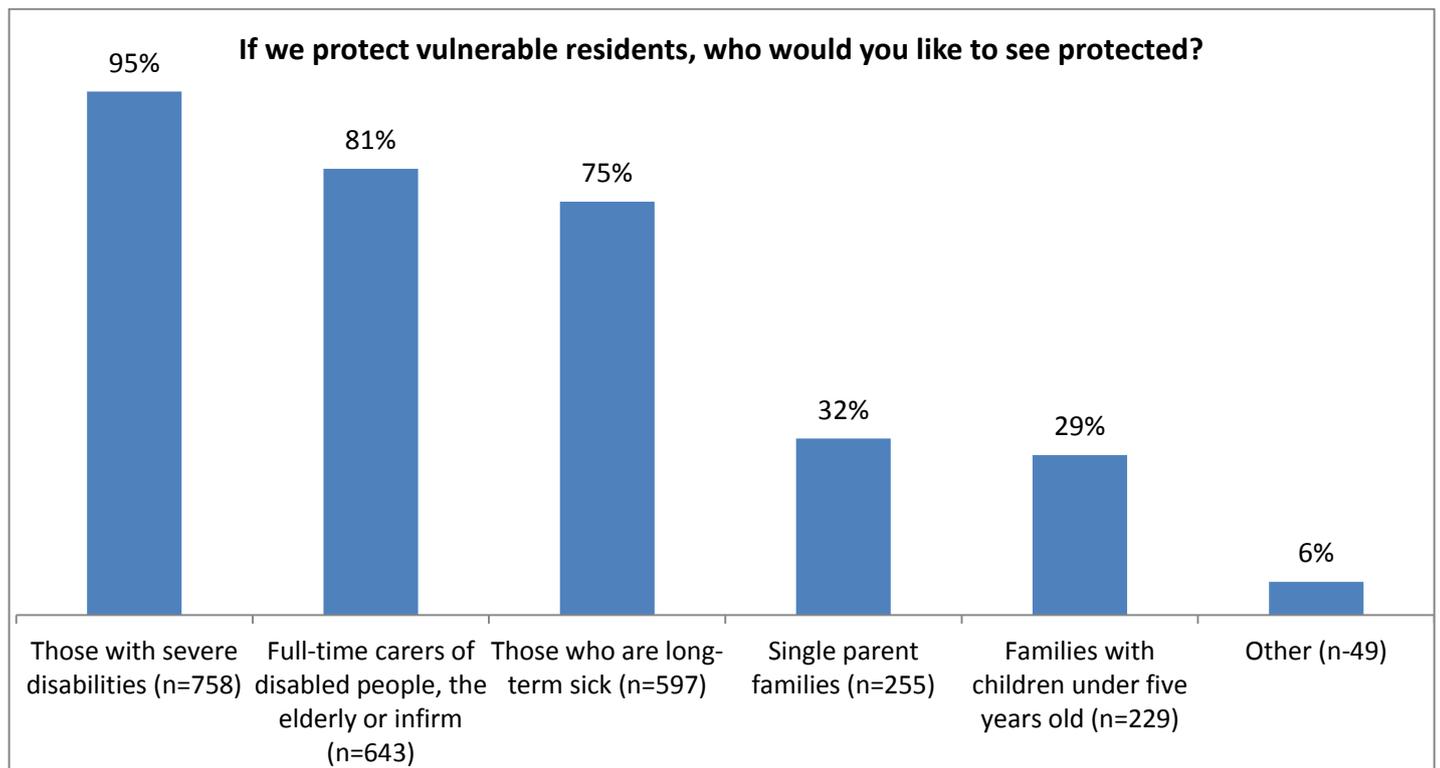
3.6. Vulnerable Residents and the Hardship Fund

Currently vulnerable residents are given extra Support through a hardship fund. Do you think vulnerable residents should continue to receive extra help towards their Council Tax



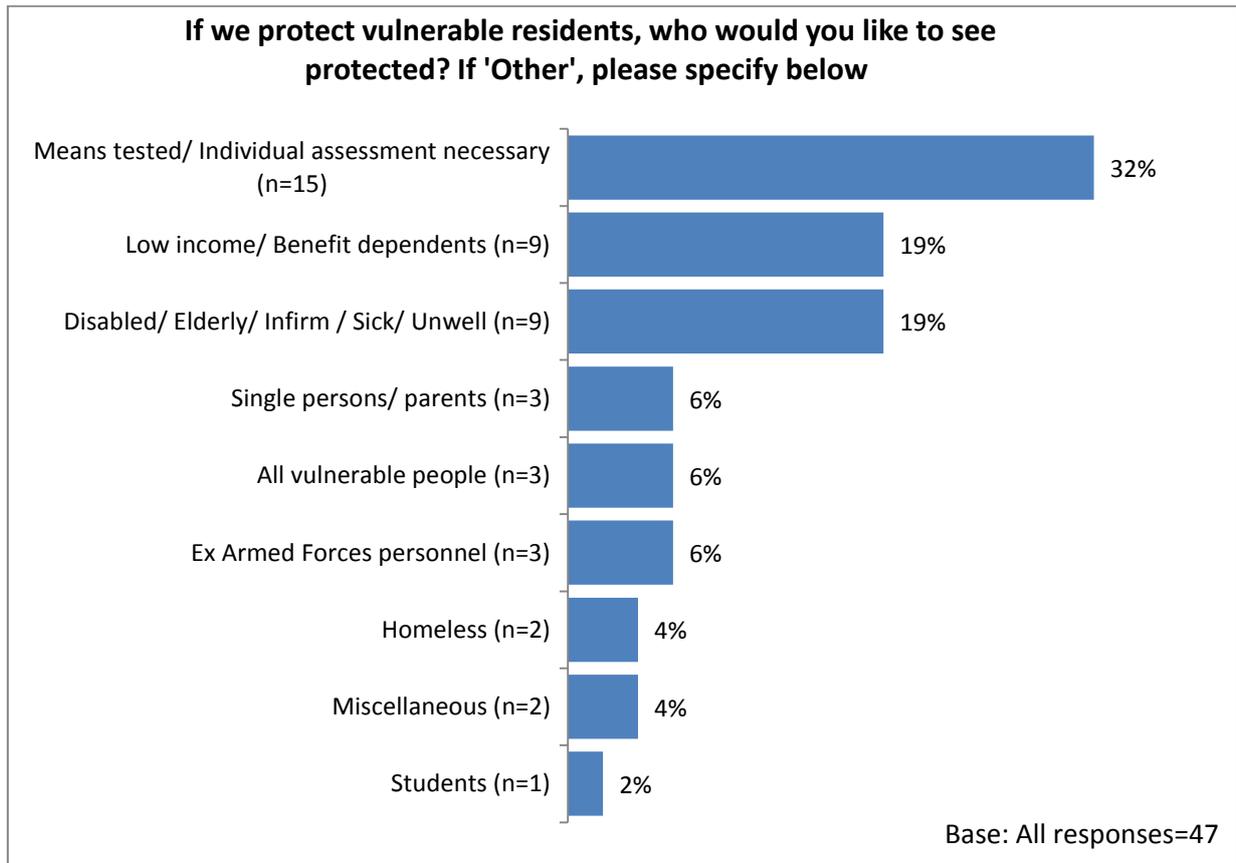
The vast majority of respondents who have a disability agreed that vulnerable residents should be given extra support 95% (n=172/182)

3.7. Vulnerable Residents to Protect

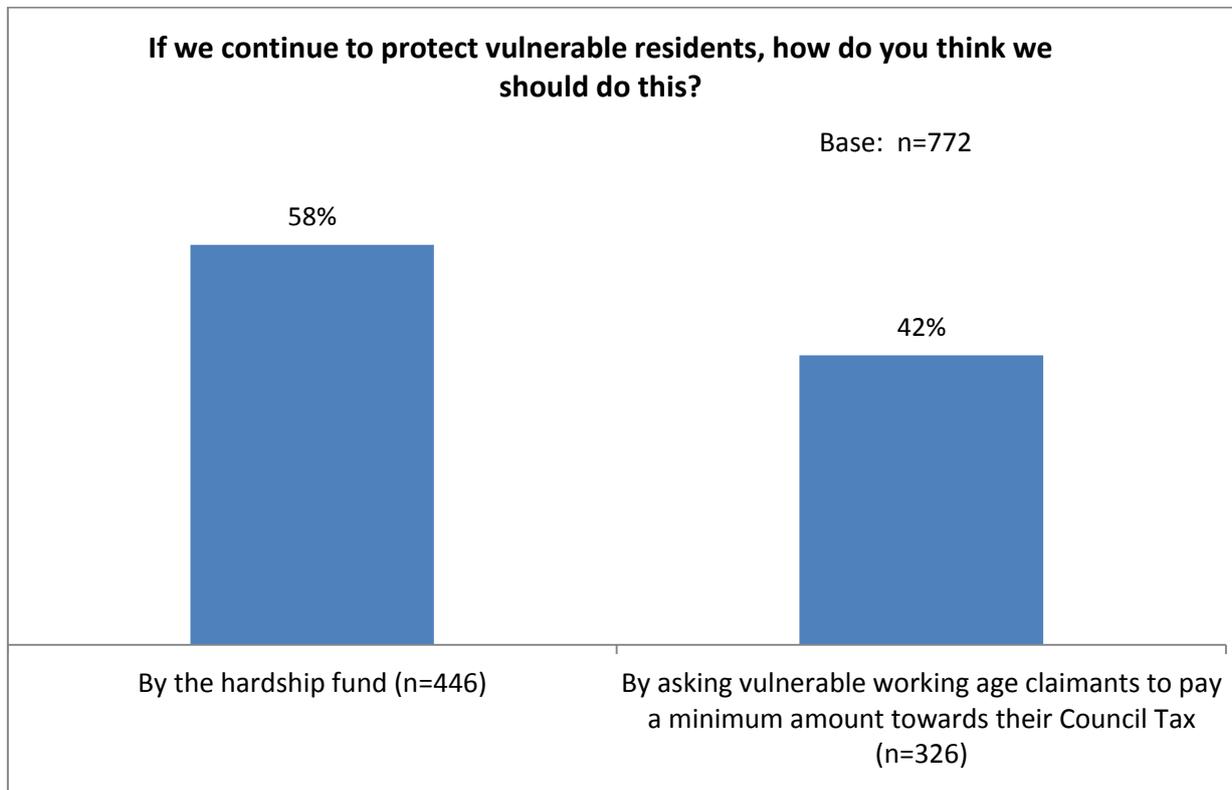


Please note that respondents were asked to indicate all that applied, hence an overall total greater than 100%.

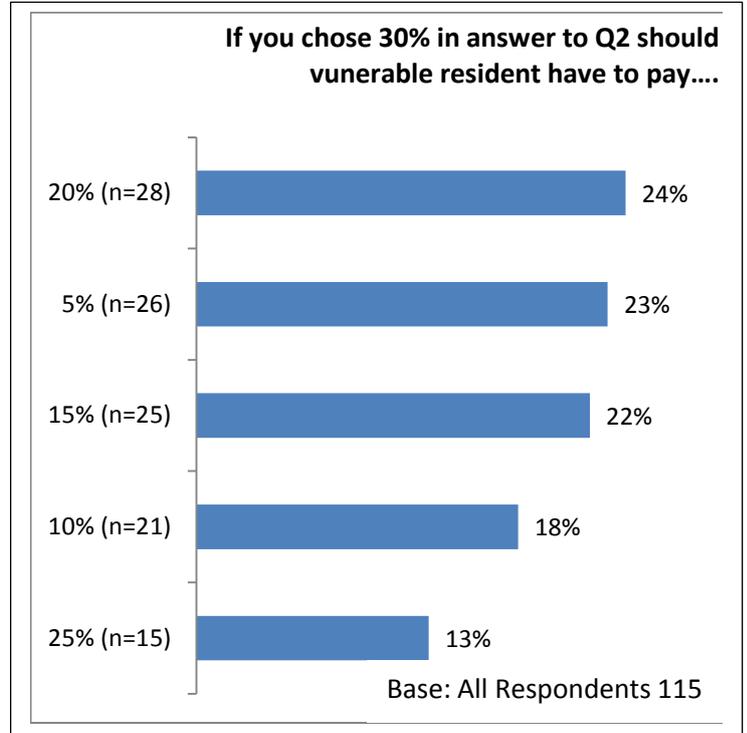
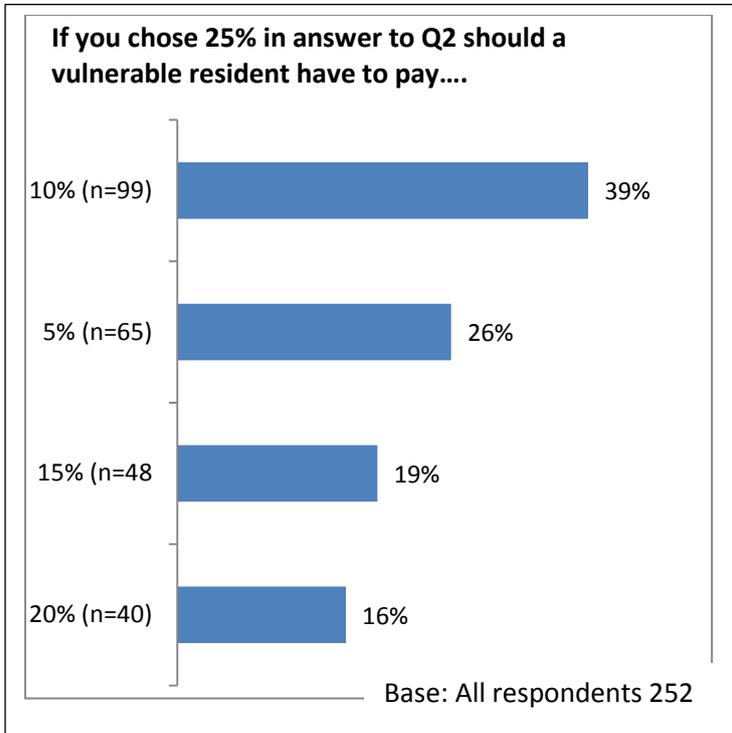
3.8. Other Vulnerable Residents to Protect



3.9. Funding Options for the Protection of Vulnerable Residents

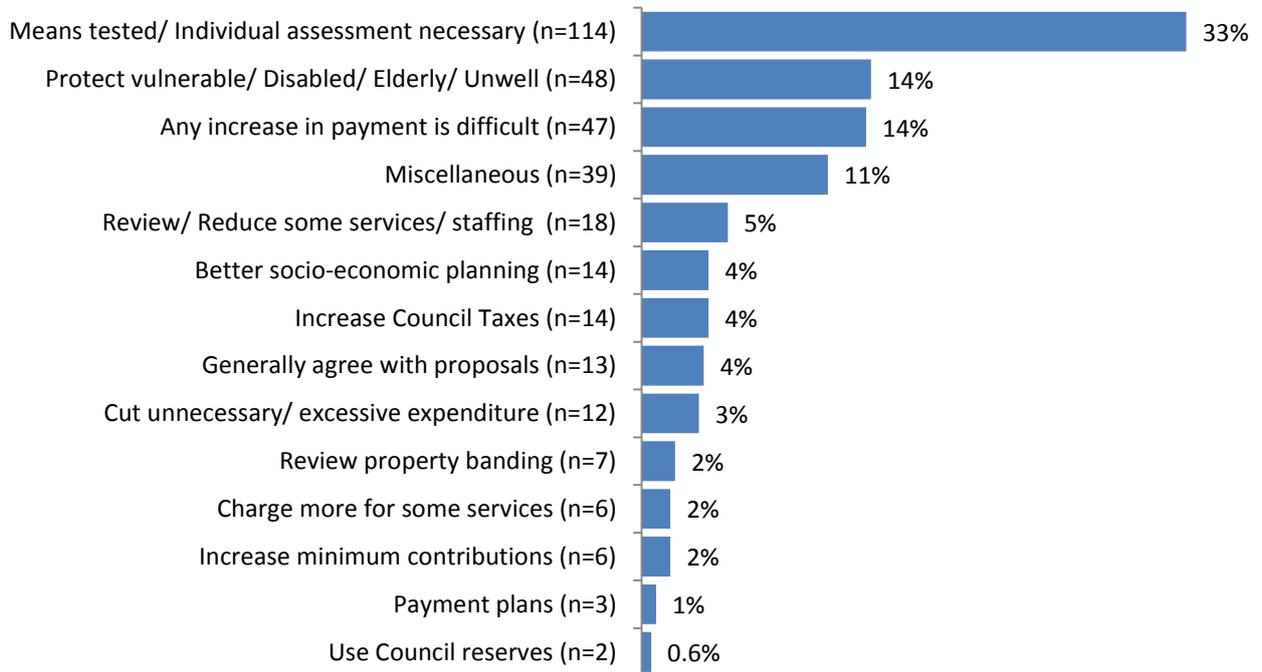


Respondents who ticked 'By asking vulnerable working age claimants to pay a minimum amount towards their Council Tax', were asked the question if we chose to protect vulnerable working age residents through a lower minimum amount to pay, how much should they pay? Their responses are illustrated on the graphs below.



3.10. Any Other Comment or Suggestions

Please give us any other comments or suggestions you have in relation to our proposals, or our Council Tax Support scheme in general below.



Base: All responses=343

4. Conclusion

There were 941 responses. Included with these were 599 from the Council's Citizens Panel and 271 from residents in receipt of Council Tax Support.

There is little to choose between the responses to the three main options:

- 38% (n=356) agreed to increase the minimum contribution for working age recipients to 25%
- 31% (n=288) agreed to increase the minimum contribution for working age recipients to 30%
- 31% (n=286) stated there should be no increase from the current 20% minimum contribution for working age recipients

For those stating there should be no increase, the preferred option for meeting the funding shortfall was through use of the Council's reserves.

The majority of those respondents in receipt of Council Tax Support stated there should be no increase to the minimum contribution.

A large proportion of respondents (86%) were in favour of giving extra Support to vulnerable residents, with a small majority of these (58%) preferring use of the Hardship fund instead of applying a lower minimum contribution. The most popular choices for those to be considered vulnerable were: residents with severe disabilities; full-time carers of disabled people, the elderly or infirm; and those who are long-term sick.

The Epsom CAB advised, "schemes that require all working age residents to pay a proportion of their council tax...has led to some of the poorest households...struggling to do so...Frequently the cost of collection increase the debt to financially crippling levels. All this leads to increased debt stress and related health problems...we are seeing an increase in the number of enquiries relating to Council Tax debt... 26% of the workload of our Specialist Debt Advisers...was to stop or prevent Council Tax bailiff action. Frequently these clients, with Council Tax debt, are unable to pay essential bills and other priority debts."

Surrey County Council's response argues for a return to the savings methods used in our 2013 and 2014 CTS scheme, but strengthened to reduce the increasing funding gap. They advise that where we pay less Support residents "compensate financially in other areas, such as by increasing rent arrears or other debt. Both of these are indicators of families and individuals who are struggling and increasing their reliance on other public services." Without a full analysis of the 20% minimum contribution introduced in April 2015 Surrey

County Council “see it as a risk to increase this further without knowing the extent of its impact”.

A more detailed version of this report (including more detailed breakdown of the consultation survey responses by characteristic / demographic, further literal / free format responses, and respondent profile) is available at *****.