

**CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL  
CONSULTATION TEAM**

**COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME  
2019/20 SURVEY**

**CONSULTATION ANALYSIS REPORT  
SEPTEMBER 2018**

## **Introduction**

From 1 April 2013 councils have been able to create their own local Council Tax Reduction schemes (CTR) (formerly council tax benefit). Every year since then Chichester District Council (CDC) has consulted the public on the Council Tax Reduction scheme for the financial year ahead.

A banded scheme was introduced after the consultation last year and this year some administrative changes have been proposed to make administering the claims more efficient.

## **Executive Summary**

- **107 responses** were received over the 8 week consultation period
- Most respondents (**7 in 10**) pay council tax to Chichester District Council but do not receive council tax reduction.
- **86.9%** of respondents agree that council tax reduction and Housing Benefit claims should start on the same day
- **3 quarters** of respondents agree that the existing banded scheme should be expanded to include all working age claims
- Over **4 in 5** respondents said they would support the introduction of De Minimus parameters

There were **high levels of uncertainty** around most questions. This is likely due to the complex nature of the subject of this consultation. There were comments within the questionnaire and on social media about people not understanding the questions or some of the terms or acronyms within the questions. This has highlighted the importance of using plain English when writing for the public.

## **Methodology**

An electronic survey was available on the 'Current consultations' page of our website. The survey was available from Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July until Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2018 – a period of 8 weeks. Paper copies were made available on request.

The survey was promoted via CDC's social media channels, including Facebook and Twitter, throughout the consultation period. Two Facebook posts were promoted to reach a wider audience and after each boosted post there was a spike in responses. A Twitter poll was also pinned to the top of the Council's Twitter feed. A full breakdown of engagement is included in Appendix A.

The Revenues and Benefits Team sent out leaflets promoting the survey with Council Tax correspondence and email acknowledgements contained notification that the consultation was live. 3,000 leaflets were sent out with the Universal Credit magazine encouraging people to respond. Housing Associations were sent the survey directly and consulted as stakeholders. Posters and leaflets were displayed in CDC's reception.

A total of **107 responses** were received. This level of response is typical of previous Council Tax consultations and considerably higher than the 2017 survey which received 71 responses.

This report presents and analyses the results of each survey question. Where percentages do not add up to 100% this is because respondents could select more than one answer. Agreement and disagreement figures quoted include all those who indicated they 'agreed/strongly agreed' or 'disagreed/strongly disagreed' with a particular proposal.

## **Respondent Profile**

The survey asked respondents about their current situation concerning Council Tax. The largest group among respondents were those who pay council tax to Chichester District Council (CDC) and do not receive Council Tax Reduction (CTR). The table below details the responses.

<b>Which of the following statements describe your current Council Tax situation?</b>		
<b>Council Tax Circumstance</b>	<b>% respondents</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>
Pay Council Tax to CDC and do not receive CTR	<b>72.9%</b>	<b>78</b>
Pay Council Tax to CDC and receive CTR	23.4%	25
Do not pay Council Tax to CDC	4.7%	5
Landlord of property/properties in Chichester District	3.7%	4
Owner of an empty property in Chichester District	2.8%	3

1 respondent said they represent a local or community sector organisation in Chichester District (Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner).

**92 respondents** provided valid postcodes which are shown by area in the table below.

Area	Count	Area	Count
<b>Chichester City</b>	<b>38</b>	Bosham	4
Midhurst	9	Lavant	3
Selsey	8	Westhampnett	3
Tangmere	5	Bracklesham Bay	2

Single responses were also received from: Arundel, Birdham, Bognor Regis, Chidham, Easebourne, East Harting, East Wittering, Emsworth, Fernhurst, Halnaker, Hambrook, Haywards Heath, Heyshott, Lewes, Southbourne, Stedham, Sutton and West Wittering.

The spread of ages is similar to the 2017 results with the exception that this year the largest age group among respondents was 55-64 (as opposed to 45-54 in 2017). The table below show the distribution of respondent ages.

Age Group	% Respondents (Counts)	Age Group	% Respondents (Counts)
Under 16	0.0% (0)	45 – 54	21.5% (23)
16 – 24	1.9% (1)	<b>55 – 64</b>	<b>22.4% (24)</b>
25 - 34	15.9% (17)	65+	15% (16)
35 - 44	19.6% (21)	Prefer not to say	3.7% (4)

The male / female split of respondents was skewed towards females with women making up **57%** (61) of respondents. **37.4%** (40) were male and **5.6%** (6) did not wish to disclose this information.

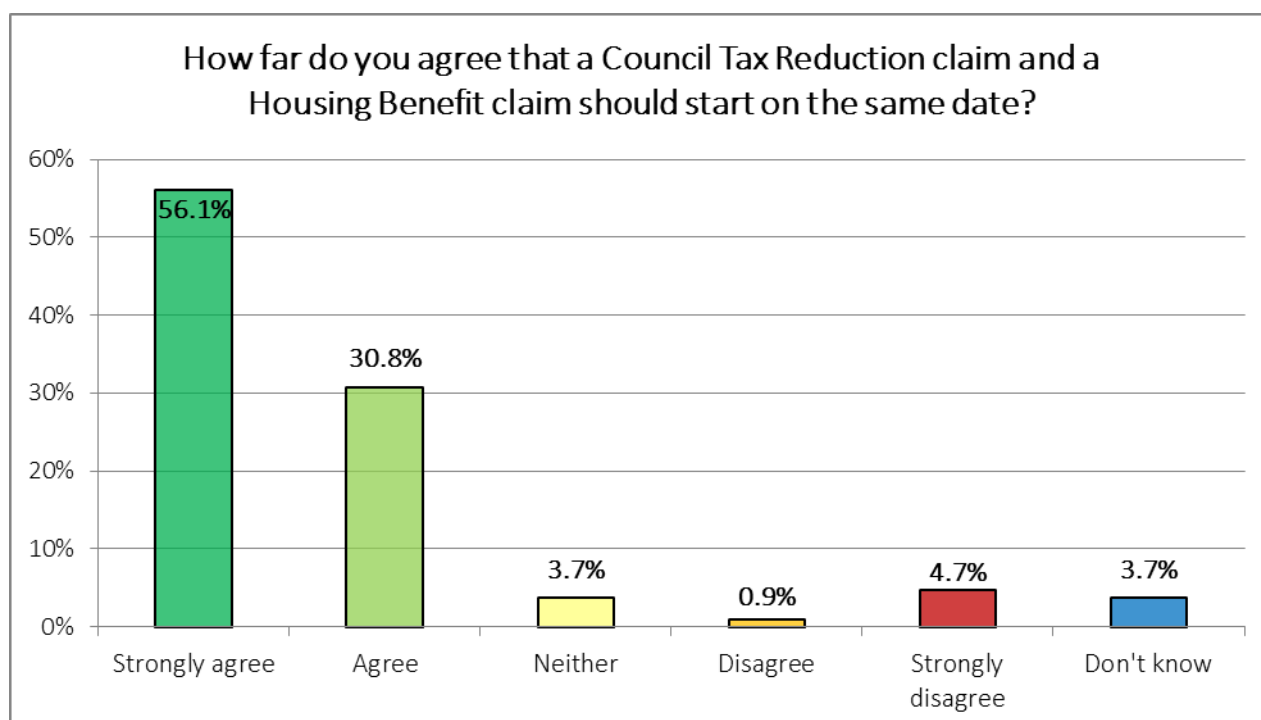
**15.9%** of respondents (17) have a long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities, **67.3%** do not and **16.8%** did not wish to disclose their health status.

## Survey Results

Respondents were given some background information about the proposed administrative changes to the Council Tax Reduction scheme. They were then asked how far they agreed with the changes.

### **Option 1 – Small Administrative Changes**

Currently, the start date of a council tax reduction claim is the day the application is received. Housing Benefit, on the other hand, starts the Monday following the receipt of an application. The different start dates makes it difficult to manage the two claims. This could be improved by realigning the start dates.



**86.9%** (93) of respondents agreed that council tax reduction claims and housing benefit claims should start on the same date, **7.4%** (8) were uncertain or felt strongly neither way and **5.6%** (6) disagreed.

Currently, the calculation of UC includes a deduction for non-dependents based on their weekly earnings. A non-dependent is someone aged 18 or over living in your property who is not a partner, spouse, or lodger (e.g. a child who is now 18 or over and in work). The current CTR scheme applies the deductions as set out in the table below.

Non-dependent Deductions	
Non-dependent's Weekly Earnings	Amount Deducted from CTR
Less than £202.85	£3.90
£202.86 - £351.65	£7.90
£351.66 - £436.9	£9.95
£436.91+	£11.90

A flat rate deduction regardless of the income of the non-dependent was proposed instead. As it stands currently, this amount would be the lowest deduction shown in the table above - £3.90.

Respondents were asked if they think non-dependent deduction levels for UC claims should remain the same or be introduced at a flat rate of £3.90. **37.1%** (39) said it should remain the same and a further **37.1%** agreed that it should be introduced at a flat rate. **22.9%** (24) were unsure.

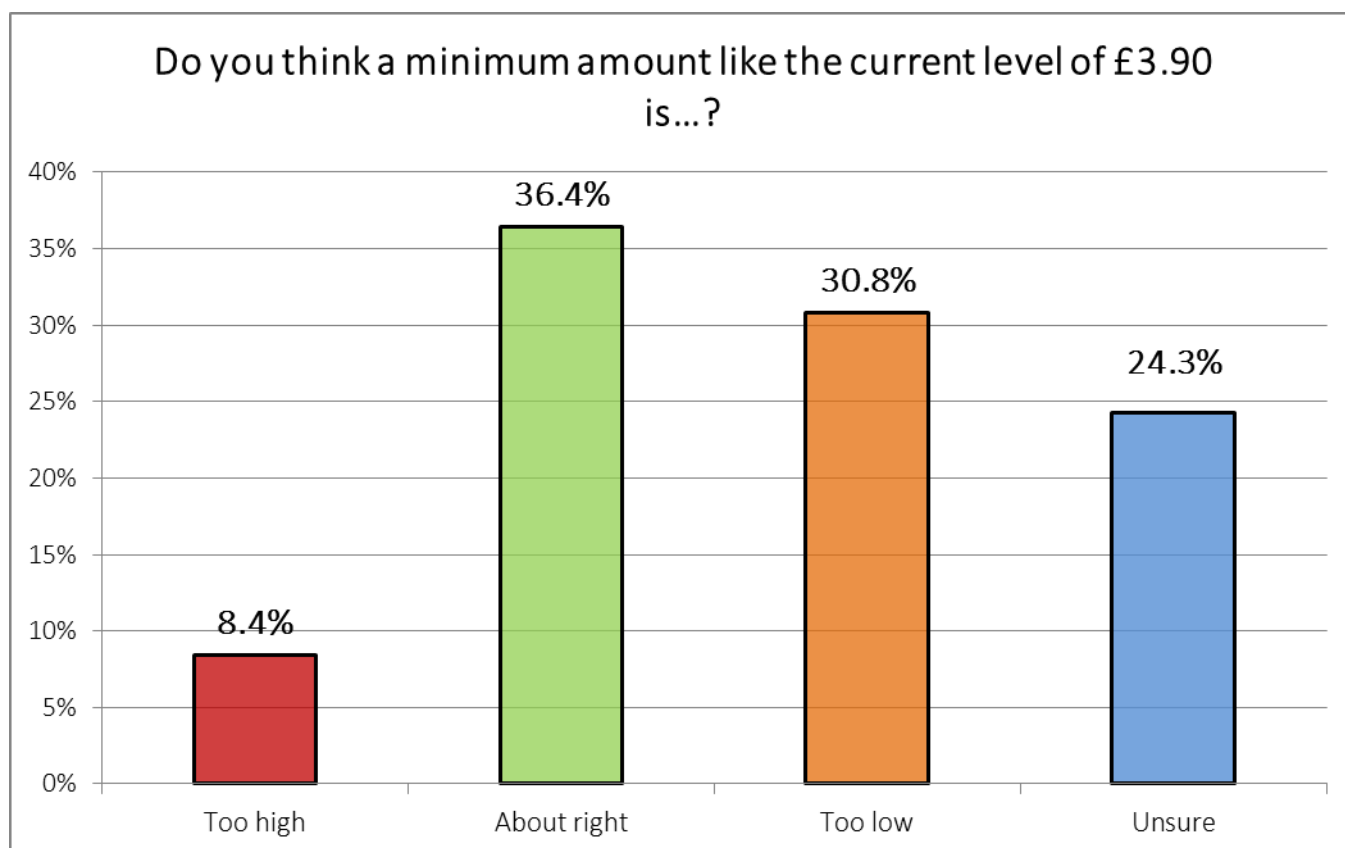
3 respondents ticked 'Other'. All 3 provided a comment explaining their suggestion:

*"Higher"*

*"Universal Credit is a Tory plot to screw the finances of the poor."*

*"I don't think they should have a reduced rate they should pay the same."*

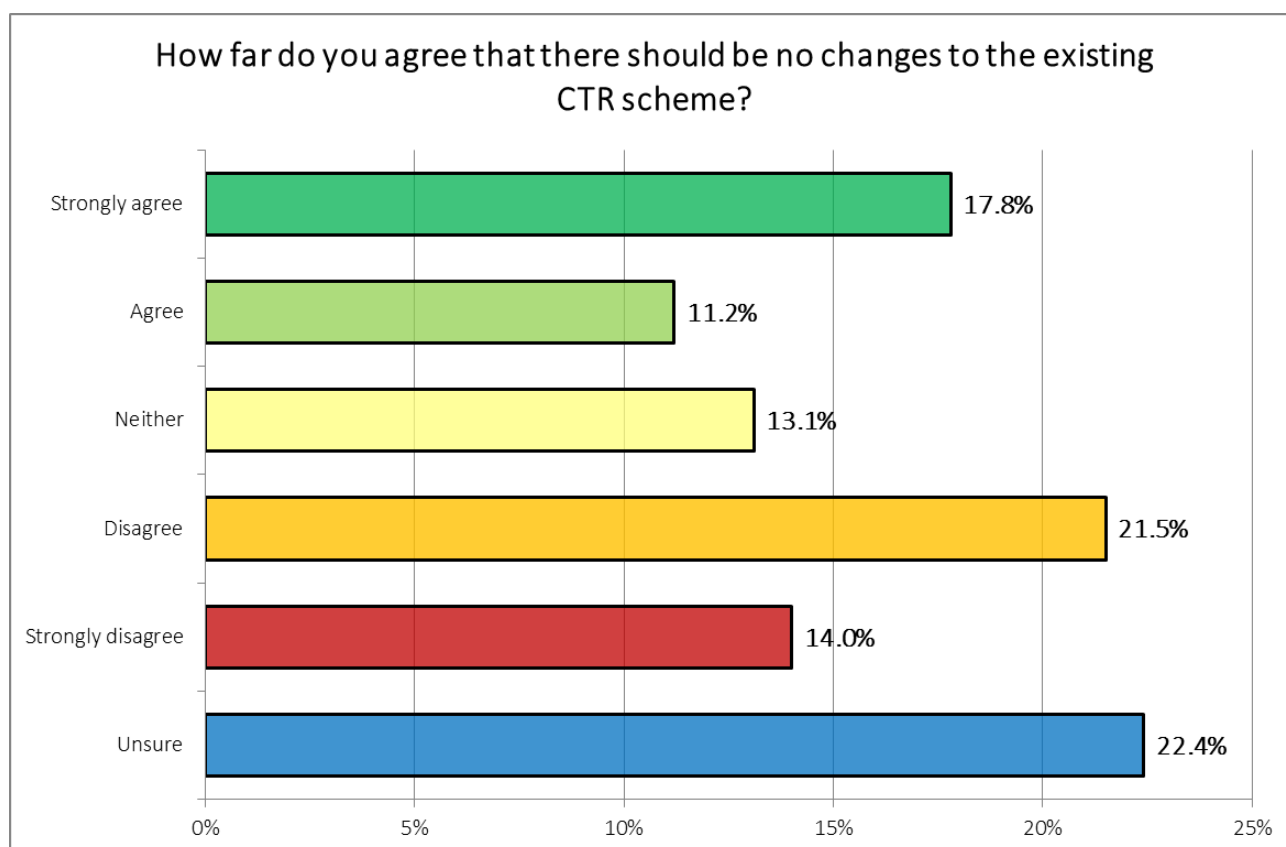
When asked whether they thought a minimum amount like the current level of £3.90 was too high, too low, or about right. The largest proportion of respondents (**36.4%** or 39) said it was about right. The chart below shows these responses.



## Option 2 – Make No Changes to Existing CTR Scheme

Respondents were asked how far they agreed with making no changes to the current scheme.

**35.5%** (38) were uncertain or had no strong feelings either way and further **35.5%** did not feel that the existing CTR scheme should be kept the same. **29%** of respondents (31) agreed that the current scheme should remain unchanged. The chart below details the breakdown of responses.



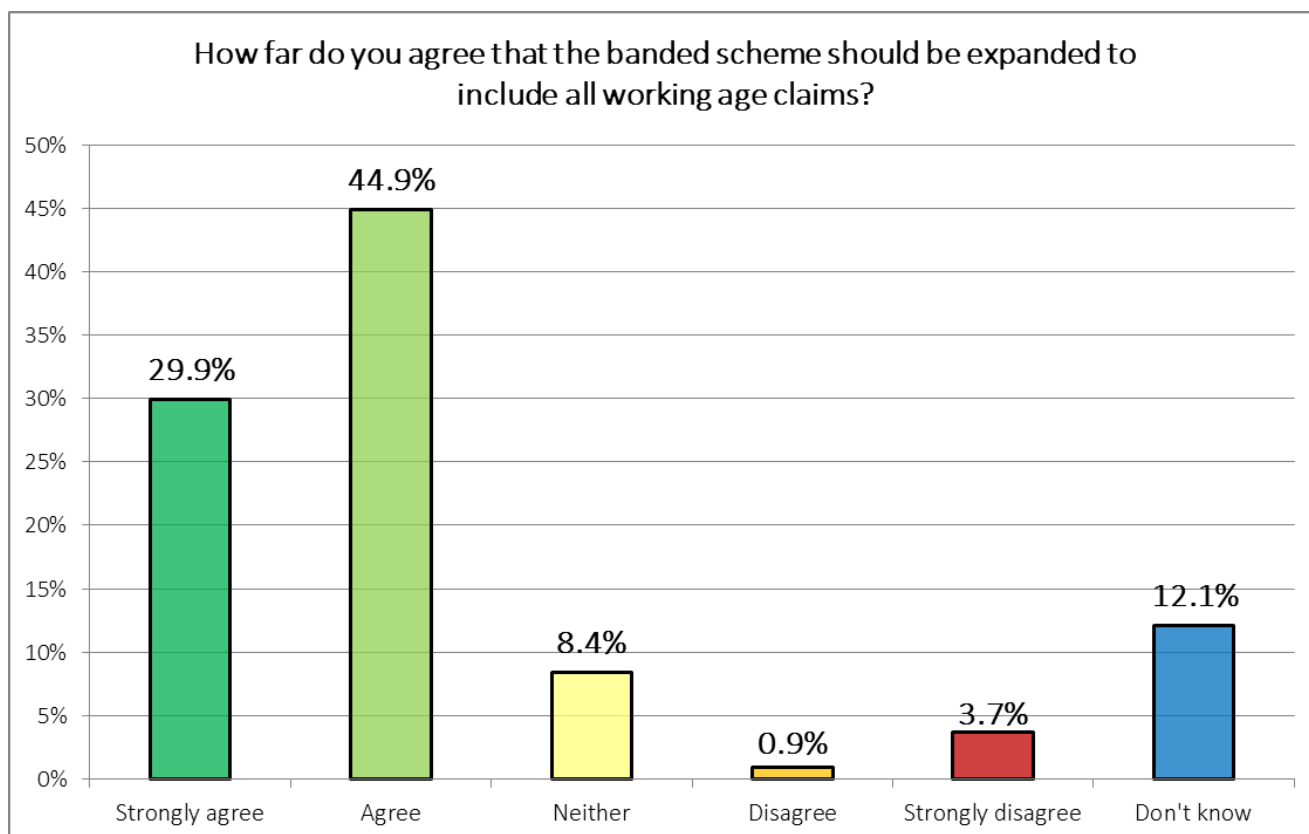
There is a high level of uncertainty in the responses to this question and a high level of disagreement.



### Option 3 – Alternative Changes

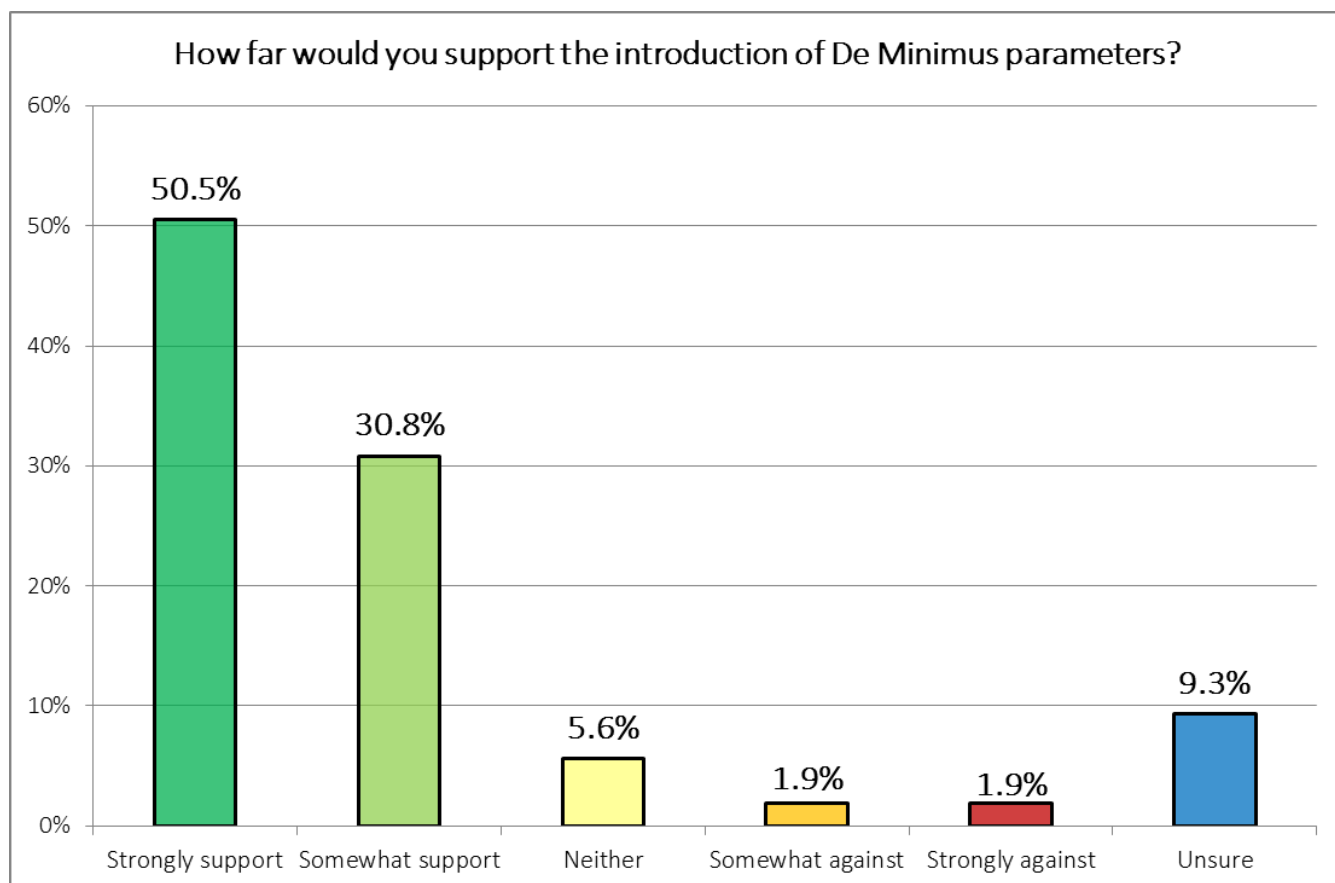
The existing banded scheme for UC claims was introduced to reduce the cost of administration. Expanding this scheme for all working age benefit claims could further reduce the cost of administration. It would also make the scheme simpler and easier for claimants to understand.

Respondents were asked how far they agreed that the banded scheme should be expanded to include all working age claims. There was a high level of agreement to this question. The chart below shows the response.



Currently, small changes in income can change a person's CTR entitlement. If De Minimus parameters were introduced, it would mean that working age claimants would not see any change to their entitlement if their income increases or decreases within a small range. It would also mean a further reduction in the cost of administration.

Respondents were asked how far they would support the introduction of De Minimus parameters. The chart below shows levels of support among respondents.



When asked what respondents felt was a suitable amount to be applied under the De Minimus parameters, most respondents (**55.3%** or 57) felt £1.00 was a suitable amount. **19.4%** (20) said 50p and the remaining **25.2%** (26) ticked 'Other'. There were 21 'Other' comments which have been categorised in the table below:

What do you think is a suitable amount to be applied under the De Minimum parameters? [Other]	
Comment	Count
£10	7
£5	6
No less than £2.50	1
£100	1
£2	1

3 comments did not give an answer of monetary value – these have been quoted in full below:

*“Ridiculous Tory Government scheme to tax the poor. Not strong and stable... STOP BREXIT save money.”*

*“A sensible balance to still help people”*

*“I don’t understand exactly what you mean by De Minimus”*

## Further Comments

14 general comments were received at the end of the questionnaire. These are quoted in full below:

"I would also like to see more help for working people. Myself and my husband came off housing benefits as it was claimed we were earning too much. The moment we were taken off housing benefit we were expected to suddenly try and find the full amount for council tax. I did ask and was told we were now expected to find over £100 a month that we didn't have"
"Really?! I don't understand what you are asking in the 1st question. And in The 3rd question are you genuinely saying that if a claimant's income changes by 50p/£1 in a week you will reassess the claim?! How much does it cost to reassess a claim? Then notify and implement?"
"Please leave council tax reduction as it is. Universal Credit is a terrible"
"People's individual circumstances should always be accessed individually as to lone parent family's on a low income every penny counts."
"de minimus must be a practicable amount"
"The scheme needs to be made as simple as possible, ie instead of sending out numerous pre-printed pages incurring postal charges just send out one notice that includes the total amount of council tax less a total figure of deductions and an amount that has to be paid. Please stop listing deductions for this and that as it is all very confusing"
"It was difficult to answer these survey questions without more information. As an example I don't know how many households currently have non-dependents earning an amount greater than the current cut-off level for a £3.90 contribution. So my answers can only be based on the assumption that the council have done the analysis and believe that, in that example, the loss of revenue from introducing a flat rate is outweighed by the reduced administration costs of not having to keep track of non-dependents income."
"Whatever we say, CDC will do whatever they want to get additional money."
"I feel very strongly that council tax should be means tested by income and number of residents per household, too much is spent on employing people to get in money from people who just can't afford the amount charged where as those with larger incomes bigger houses more waste bigger and more cars per household could pay more"
"£5.00"
"I think the banding seems are quite generous and that you should look to change the levels of the banding. I also feel that the value in the working non dependant reduction in benefit should apply to each and every working non dependant individually within the household. Eg. two working non dependants earning £180 per week each, 2 x £3.90 reduction."
"You have not said what time period the de minimus relates too. Is it a change of 50p per day, week or month. If it's per week then I suggest a de minimus of more than £1 but no higher than £5"
"The whole thing is loaded in your favour .if you are self employed you had to provide accounts every six months .if you are on a low income it costs more to pay an accountant than the rebate"
"I think it should be higher, see child tax credit having a £2500 tolerance over a year"

## **Conclusions**

- Most respondents (7 in 10) pay council tax to Chichester District Council but do not receive council tax reduction. There was also a large proportion of respondents who live in Chichester City. More women responded (57%) than men (37.4%)
- 86.9% of respondents agree that council tax reduction and Housing Benefit claims should start on the same day
- Respondents' views on non-dependent deductions levels were split with 37.1% agreeing that a flat rate of £3.90 should be introduced and a further 37.1% saying there should be no changes
- Very few respondents (8.4%) thought £3.90 was too high, in fact 30.8% felt it was too low. 36.4% thought £3.90 seemed about right
- 35.5% of respondents felt that there should be some changes made to the existing council tax reduction scheme. A further 35.5% were unsure
- 3 quarters of respondents agree that the existing banded scheme should be expanded to include all working age claims
- Over 4 in 5 respondents said they would support the introduction of De Minimus parameters
- Over half felt that £1.00 was a suitable amount. However, a quarter of respondents provided comments suggesting alternative amounts – these ranged from £2 to £100 but the most common suggestion was £10.

Overall, there were high levels of uncertainty around most questions. This is likely due to the complex nature of the subject of this consultation. There were comments within the questionnaire and on social media about people not understanding the questions or some of the terms or acronyms within the questions. This has highlighted the importance of using plain English when writing for the public.

## Appendix A – Social Media Engagement

Total number of posts: 12

Total number of clicks: 487

- Facebook: 353
- Twitter: 134

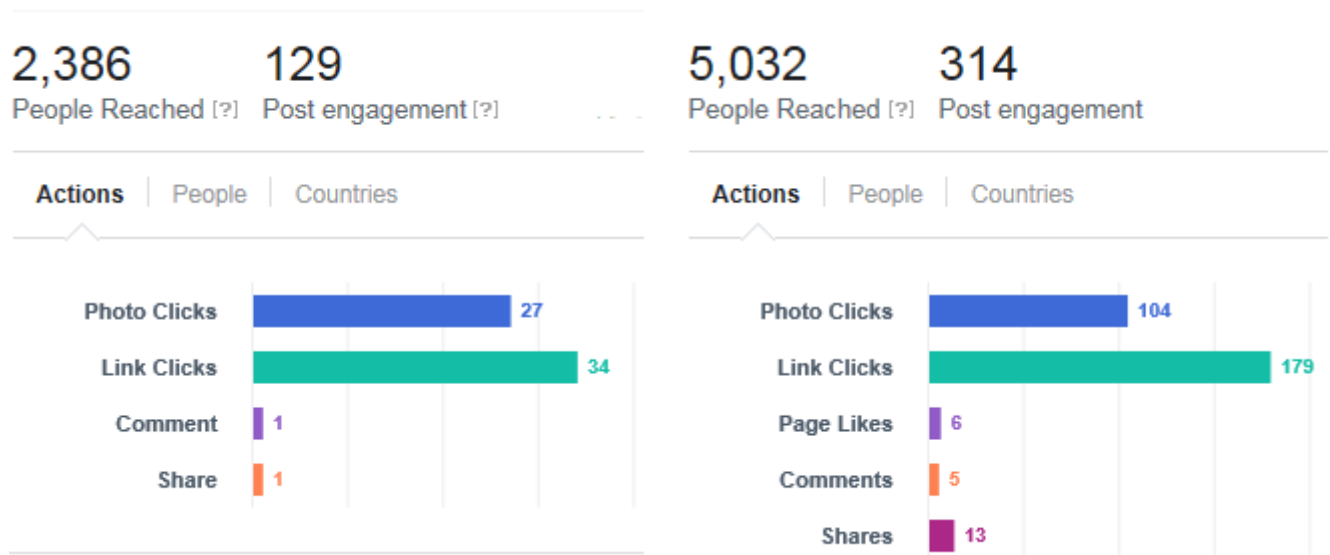
Total reach: 53,242 people:

- Facebook: 11,241 people
- Twitter: 42,001

Retweets / shares: x30

Likes: x32

Two of the Facebook posts were promoted and the results of their reach and engagement are shown below:



### **Appendix C – Most Effective Promotional Methods**

Respondents were asked at the end of the survey where they heard about the consultation. The table below shows the results:

Where did you hear about this survey?	Percent
Facebook	68.2%
Postcard / leaflet	11.2%
Council Tax bill	11.2%
Other	3.7%
Twitter	2.8%
Web banner on Council website	1.9%
Council offices	0.9%

4 respondents ticked 'Other' and 2 of these provided comments to explain where they heard about the survey. Both respondents received a direct email from the Let's Talk Panel, notifying them about the consultation.