

**CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES TEAM**

**COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME
SURVEY 2015**

CONSULTATION ANALYSIS REPORT

OCTOBER 2015

Executive Summary

The annual survey about proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme was issued online from mid-August until early October 2015 (6 weeks). The survey received 54 responses, a decrease from the 75 responses received last year.

The majority of survey respondents (66%) said they pay Council Tax to CDC and do not receive CTR. Smaller numbers of responses were received from those who do claim CTR and the owners of second homes or empty properties in Chichester District. There were more male than female respondents and most responses came from those aged over 55.

Council Tax Reduction

Agreement with keeping the same level of CTR for customers for another year seems to have increased since 2014. Overall, agreement with this proposal has risen from 52.7% in 2014, to 62.9% this year. Agreement with uprating allowances in line with DWP figures has also increased a little this year. 60.3% of respondents in 2014 agreed with this proposal compared to 61.1% this year. Neutrality has fallen by 5.1% while disagreement has decreased slightly (6.8% in 2014, falling to 5.6% in 2015).

Open comments suggest some respondents recognise that there is a struggle to achieve a balance between protecting the most vulnerable and low-income households and ensuring the system is fair for everyone.

Introduction

From 1 April 2013 councils have been able to create their own local council tax reduction schemes (formerly council tax benefit) and set their own levels of discount on some empty properties and second homes. Following a public consultation in 2012, we introduced a council tax reduction (CTR) scheme in April 2013 and, at the same time, changed the level of discounts available on some empty properties and second homes. We made some further changes to the CTR scheme in 2014 but for 2015 it remained basically unchanged. Since April 2013, local authorities have also had the power to charge up to an additional 50% council tax on properties that have been empty and unfurnished for 2 years or more.

Successful public consultations have been conducted to inform production of the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme for 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16. To inform the production of the scheme for 2016/2017, the Corporate Information Team was asked to conduct a similar exercise in September 2015.

Chichester District Council (CDC) proposed to keep the same level of reduction for customers in 2016/17, meaning that the level of support received by those currently claiming CTR will not change.

Methodology

An electronic survey was deemed the best way to identify potential participants. This was accessible through the CDC website and advertised on the news section of the front page. The survey was available online from Thursday 20th August until Thursday 1 October – a period of 6 weeks. Paper copies were to be made available to those who requested them but no requests were received.

A total of 54 responses were received all via the online questionnaire. This is a decrease from the 75 responses in 2014, which may have been caused by the CTR Scheme remaining basically unchanged from the previous year.

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. Where quotes are given, these are answers to questions where respondents could free-type their answers. Invalid comments that are not reported could include 'No', 'Nothing' etc. or could be a repeated comment from an earlier question e.g. 'as above'. Reports giving all responses to these questions are available on request from the Corporate Information Team.

Respondent Profile

The survey asked respondents about their current situation concerning Council Tax. The table below shows responses to this question:

Council Tax Circumstances	Number of respondents	% respondents
Do not pay Council Tax to CDC	6	11.3%
Pay Council Tax to CDC and receive CTR	7	13.2%
Pay Council Tax to CDC and do not receive CTR	35	66%
Landlord of property/properties in Chichester District	7	13.2%
Owner of a second home in Chichester District	2	3.8%
Owner of an empty property in Chichester District	6	11.3%

Two thirds of survey respondents (66%) said they pay Council Tax to CDC and do not receive CTR. 13.2% pay Council Tax to CDC and do receive CTR and a further 11.3% said they were owners of empty properties in Chichester District.

94.5% of survey respondents said they were responding as individuals. 3 responses (5.5%) were received from those representing organisations working in Chichester District:

- Coastal West Sussex Mind
- Chichester District Food Bank

One of those 3 respondents did not disclose the name of their organisation and no responses were received from local businesses, parish/town councils or residents associations.

Respondents were asked to provide their postcode, or that of their organisation, if they lived or were based in Chichester District. 43 postcodes were given. Most of these came from the PO19 and PO18 postcode areas; together, these accounted for 67.4% of the postcodes given. Small numbers of responses were also received from the GU28, GU29, PO10, PO20 and RH20 postcode areas. Compared to each postcode area's proportion of the total postcodes in the District, the PO19 and PO18 areas are overrepresented for this survey. All other areas are underrepresented.

51.9% of respondents were male, 38.5% were female and 9.6% preferred not to say. According to the 2011 Census, the District population is 47.8% male and 52.2% female. It appears that women are slightly underrepresented in this survey. However, this will have been skewed by the higher than usual proportion of respondents choosing not to give their gender (9.6%). Only 1.7% of respondents to the 2013 Council Tax survey used this option.

The table below shows the number and percentage of responses received from each age group:

Age Group	Number of respondents	% of respondents
Under 16	0	0%
16 – 24	2	3.8%
25 – 34	4	7.5%
35 – 44	3	5.7%

Age Group	Number of respondents	% of respondents
45 – 54	13	24.5%
55 – 64	13	24.5%
65+	14	26.4%
Prefer not to say	4	7.5%

Most respondents were over the age of 55, with no responses received from the youngest age group, but this is a similar trend seen in previous Council Tax surveys. Responses from those aged 25 – 44 made up a smaller proportion of respondents this year than last year.

The vast majority of respondents (88.7%) said their ethnic group was ‘White – English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British’ – this is a slightly higher percentage than last year, when 86.5% of respondents put themselves in this ethnic group. The proportion of respondents who chose not to give their ethnic group dropped significantly from 9.5% in 2014 to 3.8% this year. According to the 2011 Census, 93% of the District’s population is ‘White – English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British’. 2 responses (3.8%) were received from ‘White - Irish’, 1 from ‘Any other White background’ and 1 from ‘Any other Asian background’.

49% of respondents gave their religion as ‘Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)’. This is lower than the figure of 56.8% from the 2014 survey. This year, 20.4% of respondents preferred not to give their religion (18.9% in 2014) and 28.6% said they had ‘No religion’ (23% in 2014). 1 response was received from someone who said they were Buddhist.

Around three quarters (75.5%) of respondents said they had no long-term illness, health problem or disability. 17% said they had and 7.5% preferred not to say. The proportion of respondents with a long-term illness, health problem or disability was higher this year than it was for the 2014 survey (10.8%).

Finally, respondents were asked if there was anything else about themselves that we would need to know to better understand their answers. There were **3** valid responses to this question. **1** respondent is the immediate carer of his 83 year old wife, **1** had to move into a care home using their own money due to poor health and **1** is a disabled pensioner who said their pension is not enough to cover their expenditure.

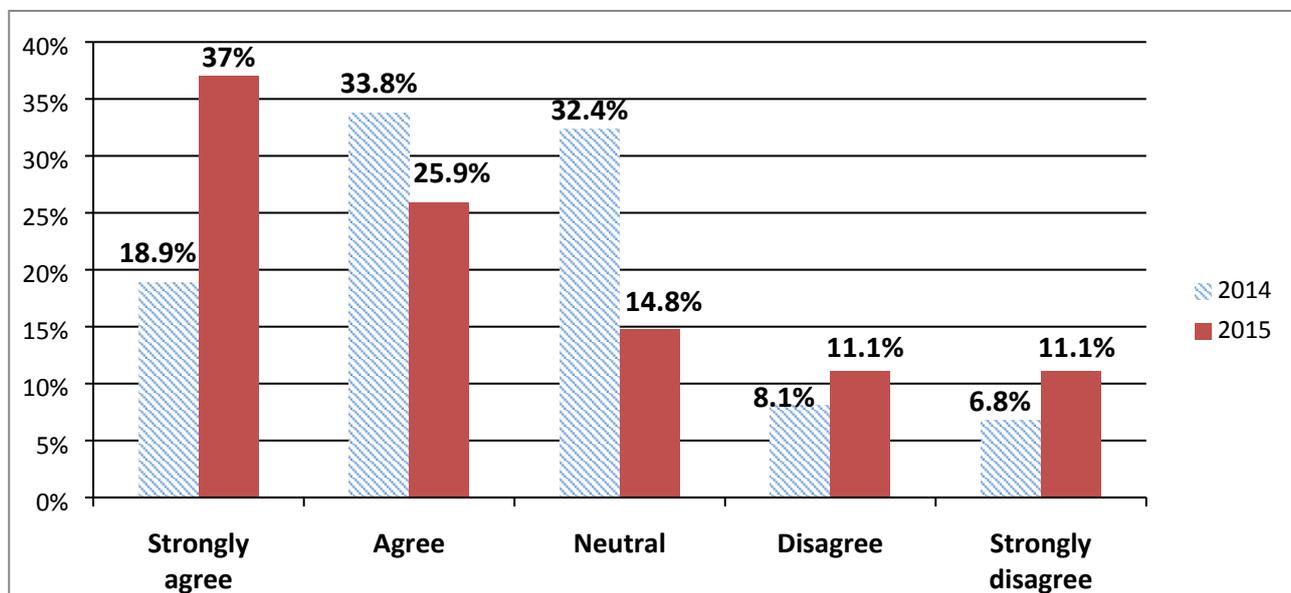
Due to the small numbers of respondents in some groups, not all the characteristics of a respondent will be used to analyse their responses to other questions. Where relevant, this report will include analysis by:

- Council Tax circumstances
- Gender
- Age group

Results – The Council Tax Reduction Scheme

The Council intends to keep the same level of Council Tax Reduction for its customers in 2016/17 as they receive this year. How far do you agree or disagree with this aim?

The graph below shows responses to this question, compared to responses to the same question in the 2014 survey that asked about the 2015/16 CTR scheme:



Agreement with keeping the same level of CTR for customers for another year has risen since 2014. Overall, 52.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this principle in 2014, compared to 62.9% this year. Neutrality decreased and disagreement increased slightly with this proposal in 2015.

Generally, agreement tended to be higher among older respondents (over 55). However, those aged 55-64 were also the most likely to disagree. Respondents who said they did not currently receive CTR were overall the most likely to agree with this principle (57.2%). Agreement was lower among those who own empty homes (50%), have second homes (50%) or are landlords (28.6%). Landlords were the most likely to be neutral to this proposal (28.6%) while the disagreement figures for landlords, owners of second homes and empty properties were all around 50%.

Those who disagreed with this principle were asked why and **14** respondents made comments in response to this. **5** respondents said that owners of empty properties should not have to pay council tax. **4** respondents said that council tax to be paid should reflect how much the council's services are used, so owners of a second home would pay less on that property. **3** respondents said that the CTR Scheme does not effectively support those on a low income and **2** respondents felt that local services would suffer if the CTR Scheme continued as it is.

The remaining comments showed some polarisation of views about Council Tax issues including empty homes:

'Why should you pay council tax on an empty property and you are not using any of its services. It took me 18 months to clear out my Father's house and we are now at the decorating stage yet I pay council tax! All wrong'

'Council tax reduction scheme does not support those on a low income. There is no discretionary pot, no overlap so if a person on a low income moves they are charged for two properties. There could be significant changes made to help support those on a low income.'

And the issue of CTR in general:

'Costs are rising and need to be capped to maintain other services'

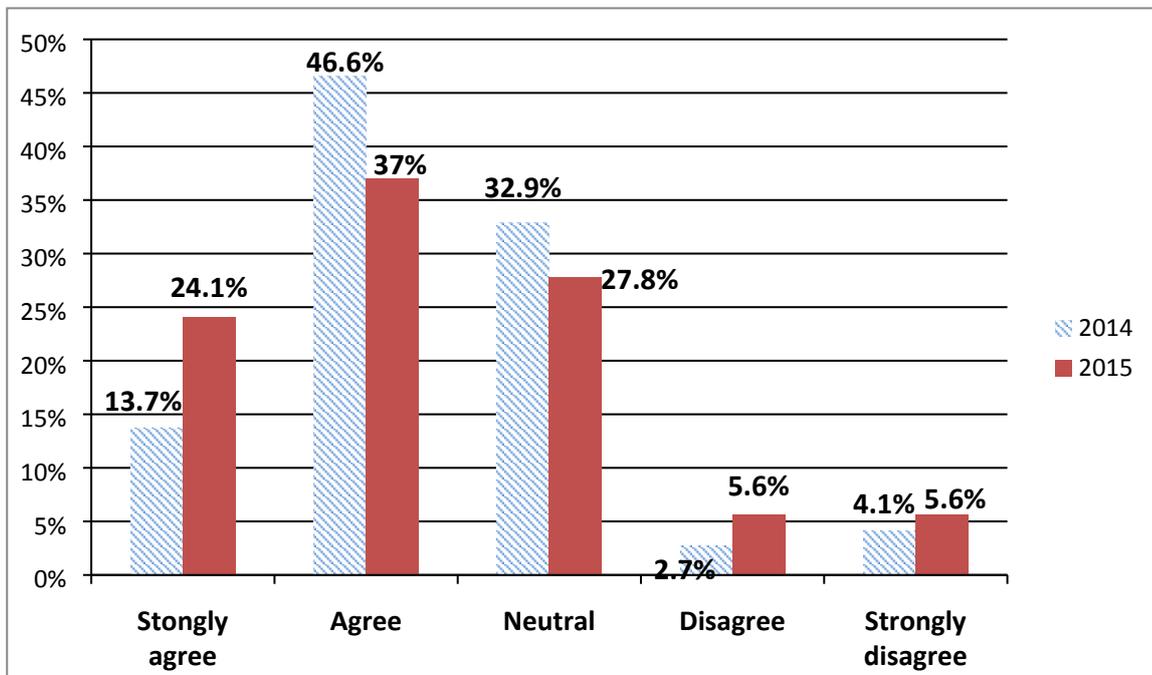
'Everyone should pay something as it covers services everyone uses, i.e. bin collections'

'Everyone should contribute to the services they use, even if it's just 50p a week'

'We are renting privately and I am only a carer and don't get paid that much'

How far do you agree or disagree that we should uprate allowances and deductions in line with the DWP¹ annual uprating figures when calculating Council Tax Reduction?

The graph below shows responses to this question, compared to responses to the same question in the 2014 survey:



Agreement with uprating allowances in line with DWP figures has risen a little this year. 6 in 10 respondents (60.3%) in 2014 agreed with this proposal compared to 61.1% this year. Neutrality has fallen while disagreement has increased (6.8% in 2014, rising to 11.2% in 2015). Disagreement was slightly higher (14.8%) among male respondents, while 42.8% of those over 65 agreed with this proposal. Agreement with this proposal was significantly lower (28.3%) among current claimants of CTR.

Those who disagreed with this proposal were asked why and there were just 2 valid comments in response to this; too few to categorise so they are quoted in full below:

'Other facilities need funding'

'Same reason as previously given, if they can't afford to live here then leave the district'

¹ Department for Work and Pensions
Corporate Information Team
October 2015

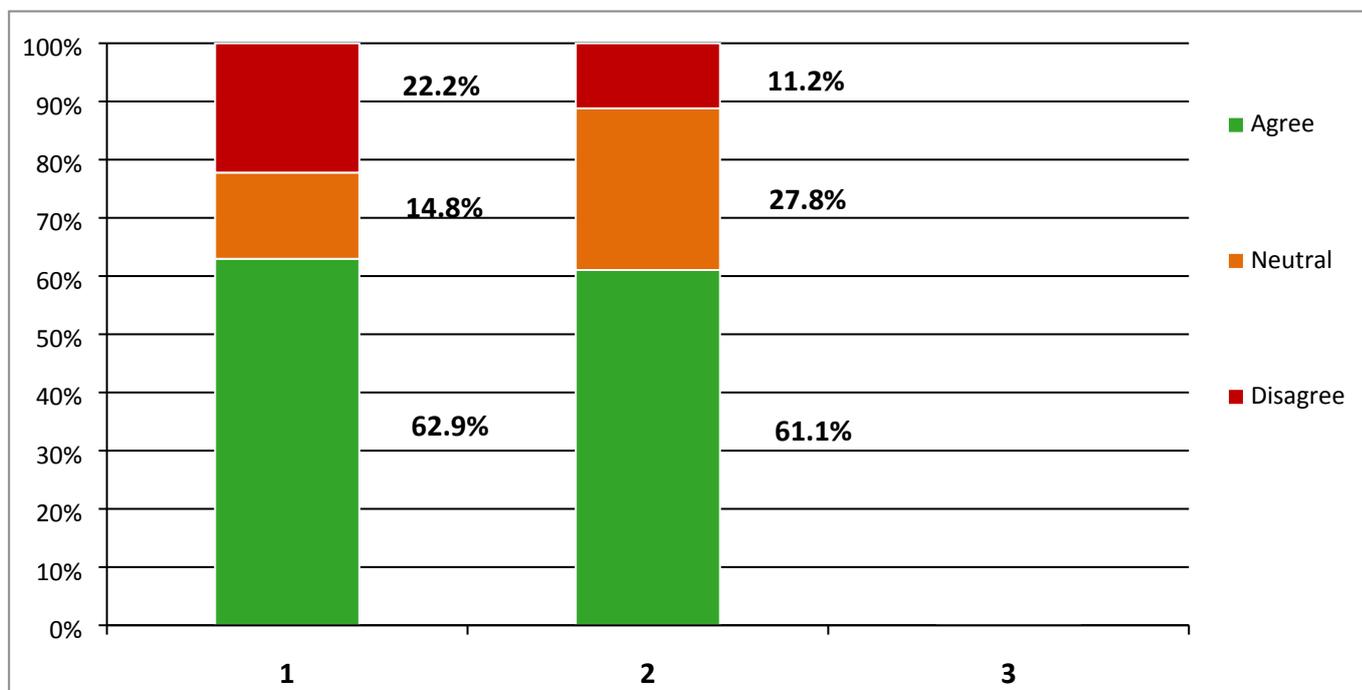
Is there anything we haven't considered or any further comments you would like to make about the Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2016/17?

□ There were **6** valid comments in response to this. **5** respondents said that the CTR Scheme should support those most in need (those on a low income, pensioners, people with disabilities etc.) and **1** respondent said that there should be a discount for those with second homes.

Conclusions

The graph and table below show each of the proposals from the CTR Draft Scheme and the level of agreement and disagreement with each, according to responses to this survey.

Column Number	Proposal
1	Keep the same level of CTR for customers in 2016/17 as they currently receive.
2	Uprate allowances and deductions in line with the Department for Work and Pensions annual uprating figures when calculating Council Tax Reduction.



Generally, agreement with the 2 proposals for CTR has risen since last year. Disagreement with both proposals has also increased, although neutrality has fallen significantly regarding the proposal to keep the same level of council tax for its customers. Neutrality also decreased regarding the proposal to uprate allowances and deductions in line with the DWP figures, but only slightly.

Empty properties that are undergoing structural alterations can already claim a Council Tax exemption for up to 12 months. However, completely exempting a property from an empty homes premium on the grounds that the owner is making reasonable efforts to sell but has not been able to would be far more complex.

Unlike the results from the 2014 survey, people's responses did not seem to relate to their own Council Tax circumstances; current CTR claimants were generally less likely to support both proposals and those who do not receive CTR were the most likely to agree with the proposal

to keep the same level of CTR for 2016/17. However, since the majority of respondents were council tax payers who do not receive CTR, their responses have most influence over the agreement/disagreement figures reported above.

There was a fairly low response from current claimants of CTR. This could be reflective of the technical nature of the proposals concerning CTR and/or the fact that the survey specifically stated that CDC aims to keep levels of CTR the same for claimants for another year.

To increase response rates, further consultation exercises could be made clearer and more accessible to potential respondents using Plain English and summaries of longer, more complex documents. However, it should be recognised that calculation of CTR is a complex process and the terms used in published information are sometimes subject to technical and legal requirements.