

## **Appendix A: West Suffolk Council Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) Review: consultation survey summary**

### **Background**

1. Public consultation took place between 2 and 30 October 2023 on the extension of the LCTRS for another 12 months, covering 2024-25.
2. Each year the council is required to consider whether to revise its Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS). This report advises about the conclusion of the 2023 annual review of the scheme and the resultant proposals for consultation for changes to the LCTRS scheme, to take effect from April 2024.
3. Where it is determined that the existing scheme should be retained without any changes, this must be decided by 11 March of the preceding year.
4. Where councils seek to amend their schemes, it will be necessary to consult preceptors and stakeholders prior to a wider consultation to inform a final scheme design by 28 February of the preceding year. Therefore, work on any amendments needs to start in the summer to allow sufficient time to consult, approve and implement changes prior to 28 February 2024.
5. Changes implemented between April 2023 and April 2024 ensured that the maximum discount a working-age resident could receive on their council tax would increase from 91.5 percent to a maximum of 100 per cent. This reduces the amount that many council taxpayers have to pay and could result in some working-age residents paying zero Council Tax.
6. The current, 2023 to 2024 scheme was approved by Cabinet and Council in December 2022. The changes implemented were temporary and unless extended, from April 2024, the maximum discount will automatically revert back to 91.5 per cent.

### **Methodology**

7. During the consultation period, evidence was sought from the public, community groups or organisations across West Suffolk regarding the possible extension of the reduction scheme.
8. An online response form was created, and this was published through media, website, social media, councillors, staff and partner organisations. As well as highlighting through the media and social media for residents and businesses to give their views, the council also undertook direct engagement with key stakeholders across the district, including town and parish councils, police, health partners, housing associations, residents' associations, and local councillors.
9. At the time the consultation closed, 24 online forms had been completed. This report outlines the results from the analysis of quantitative data and themes that can be drawn from the qualitative (free text) data.
10. Please note:

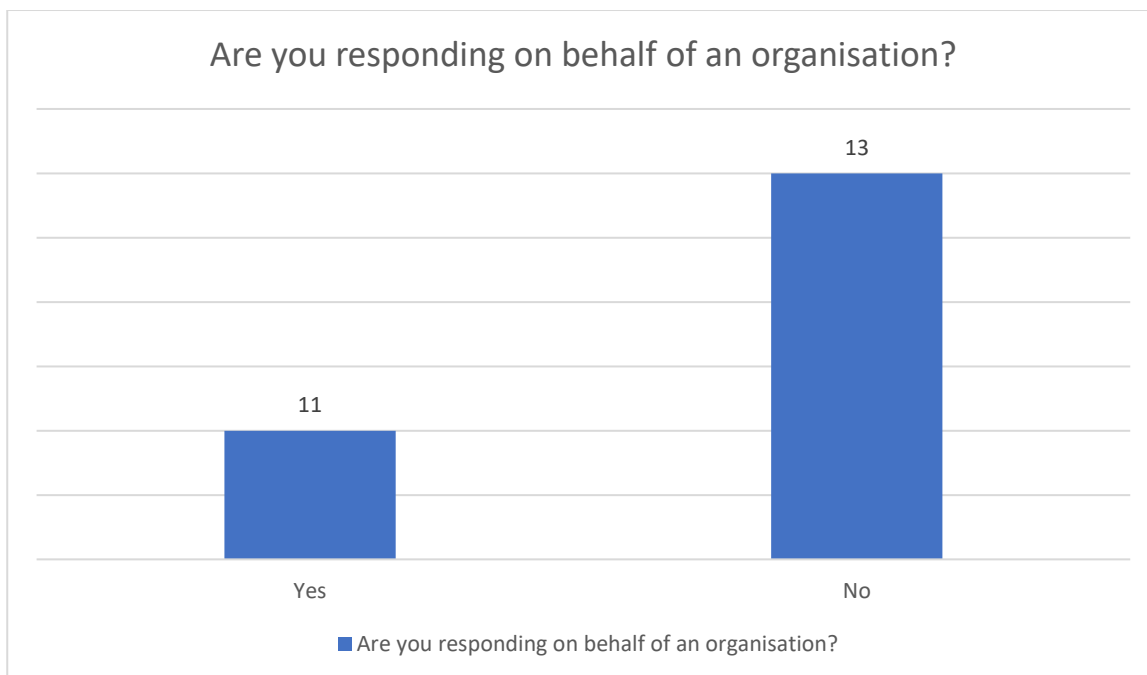
- All questions are listed thematically to highlight the key findings of the consultation – namely whether there was agreement to extend the 100 per cent discount.
- A large part of the survey was made up of free text responses. These have been analysed using standard manual techniques for free text analysis, which while highly effective are unable to fully eliminate any degree of judgement or subjectivity.

### Major preceptors

11. The major preceptors, which include Suffolk County Council, the Suffolk Constabulary, as well as town and parish councils, were approached separately to provide comment on the proposal to extend the 100 per cent discount. The outcomes of this part of the consultation are contained in the covering report.

### Section 1: About the respondents

12. Of a total 24 respondents that responded online, the largest group of respondents (13) were not responding on behalf of an organisation, while 11 respondents were representing an organisation.



13. Of the 11 respondents representing an organisation, five were representing housing associations (three from Havebury Housing Partnership), with four representing charities and two community groups.

Group	Frequency
Havebury Housing Partnership	3
Flagship – Samphire Homes	1
Resident association (unspecified)	1

BME Suffolk Support Group (BSSG)	1
YMCA Trinity Group	1
Bury Drop In	1
Citizens Advice West Suffolk	1
Racing welfare	1
Bridge Community Church	1

14. All 24 respondents were asked whether they were in receipt of the LCTRS from West Suffolk. All 24 respondents responded that they were not in receipt of the discount.

### Age and health-disability

15. The age breakdown (see chart below) shows a larger proportion of older people completed the survey; ages 45 to 70+ represents 60.9 per cent of the total respondents aged between 18 and 44 represent 39.1 per cent. However, there is no representation from those aged under 18.

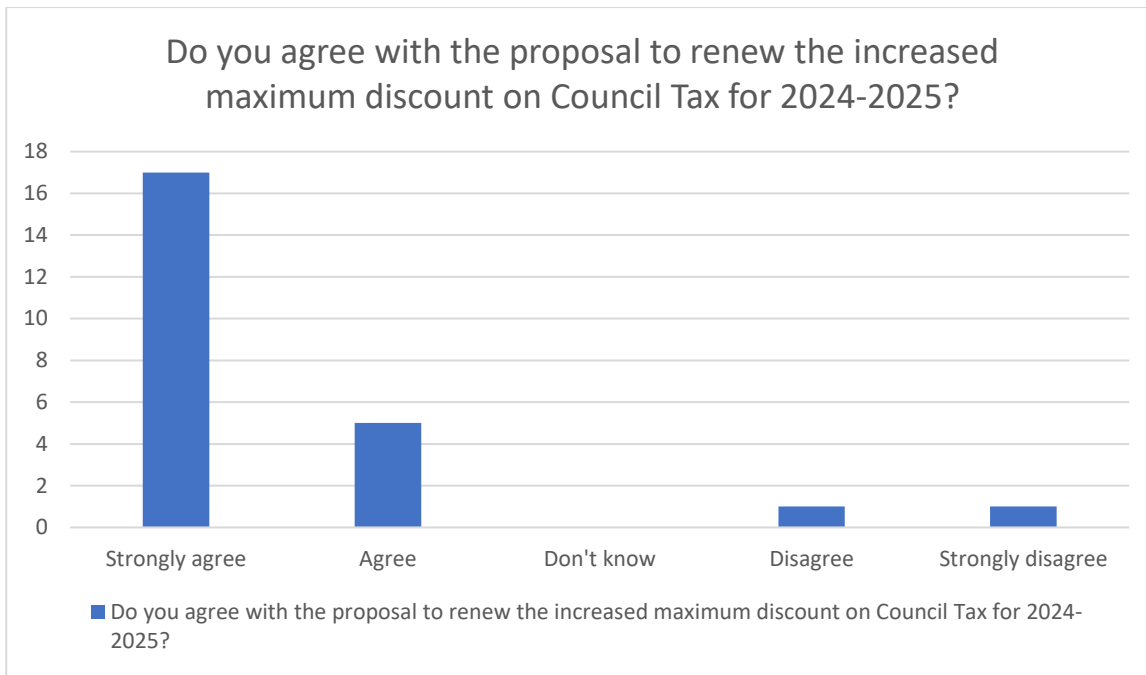
Age breakdown of respondents		
Age categories	% in each category	West Suffolk % (2020)
<b>0-17</b>	0	21.2
<b>18-24</b>	4.4	6.8
<b>25-34</b>	21.8	13.3
<b>35-44</b>	13	12
<b>45-59</b>	43.5	19.4
<b>60-69</b>	8.7	11
<b>70+</b>	8.7	16.4

### Equalities information

16. 23 respondents answered questions on ethnic origin. 20 identified as English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British (87 per cent). One identified as Irish (4.4 per cent), and one identified as African (4.4 per cent). One respondent identified as 'Any other white background' (4.4 per cent) but did not explain further.

### Do you agree with the proposal to renew the increased maximum discount on Council Tax for 2024-2025?

17. Of 24 online responses, 17 respondents (70.1 per cent) strongly agreed and five (20.1 per cent) agreed with the proposal to renew the maximum discount on council tax. One respondent strongly disagreed (4.2 per cent) and one disagreed (4.2 per cent).



18. All 11 respondents representing an external organisation either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to extend the 100 per cent discount.
19. Respondents that disagreed with the proposal were invited to explain their answer. Both respondents supplied a free text response. One respondent stated that a 100 per cent reduction was too much and a waste of money in light of other government support being available; the other respondent stated that not renewing would mean there is more money available for other services and that this support will need to end at some point.

<b>Response</b>
They've already spent over £3m in one go, a 100 per cent discount is too much. I'm all for me supporting this in hardship, but with extra government support out there already the local council's money could be used more effectively elsewhere, but then I'm not surprised the Council are being frivolous with taxpayers money, Labour run councils are extremely good at financial mismanagement.
There is already a good discount available. There will be more money available for other services across the area. It will have to be stopped at some point and this will always be difficult. It sets a precedent that will become an expectation in the future.

### **Equalities**

20. All respondents were asked if they had anything further to say on the proposals, with particular regard to the impact on protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Six responses were received. Five respondents referred to the need to support low-income and vulnerable residents as a priority during the cost of the living crisis.

21. One respondent made reference to their personal need for a discount, especially as there is heavy traffic on the road on which they live.

Response
At Citizens Advice, we are speaking with increasingly more people that are generally struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. Extra help with council tax frees up money for essentials such as food and energy for those clients on a low income.
No, we've just got to help the poorest and most vulnerable as a priority.
It is important to maintain support for those worst affected by the cost-of-living crisis.
I suggest that West Suffolk Council continues the 2023-24 changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working age customers that would extend the decreased contribution rate (maximum discount of 100 per cent) to support low-income households and those facing financial hardship, in light of the cost-of-living crisis.
Yes, I'm a widower of 78 but still pay £116 a month? On ST OLAVES ROAD ALLDAY ITS HEAVY TRAFFIC AND LARGE LORRYS GOING PAST OUR DOOR WE SHOULD GET A DISCOUNT ??
Not renewing will impact poorer people.

## Conclusion

22. Of the 24 responses received during the four-week consultation period, respondents were in favour of extending the 100 per cent discount for a further 12 months.
23. Respondents that disagreed with the extension highlighted the perception of waste or inefficiency in the council's proposal to extend.