



# Local Council Tax Support Scheme – Consultation Results

We received **409** survey responses to the consultation on the Council Tax Support Scheme for the new North Northamptonshire Council for the year 2021-22. The consultation ran for 8 weeks from 5 October 2020 to 30 November 2020. 406 responses were received via online survey and 3 via letter or email.

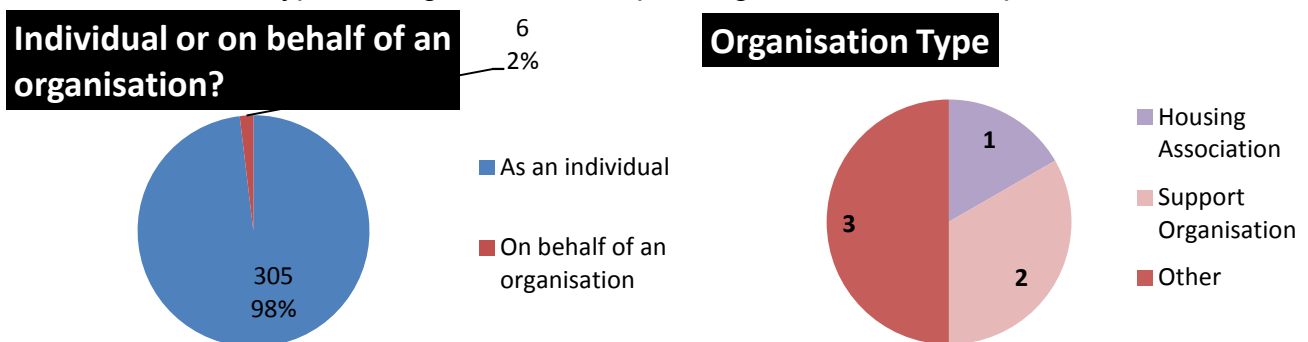
This report illustrates

- The demography of the respondents
- The levels of support for each proposal
- The relationship between responses and demography (e.g. did gender or age affect the level of support for each proposal?) – please note that this has only been completed this for proposal 1 so far.
- A summary of comments received as part of the consultation – please note that this has only been completed this for proposal 1 so far.

## Demography

These charts illustrate the different groups of survey participants. It should be noted that a number of respondents abandoned the survey before the end. The software system used still records the information that was submitted and it has been included in the analysis. However, the demographic questions were not answered by all respondents. For personal questions, respondents were also given the opportunity to “Prefer not to say” when responding to personal questions.

305 of the survey responses were from individuals and six were from organisations. This breakdown and the types of organisations responding are shown in the pie charts below:



The organisations which responded were:

- F.T.O.C.
- One response on behalf of both The Police Fire and Crime Commissioner for Policing and Northamptonshire commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority
- Thorpe Malsor Parish Council
- Central Tenants and Residents Association
- An unnamed housing association

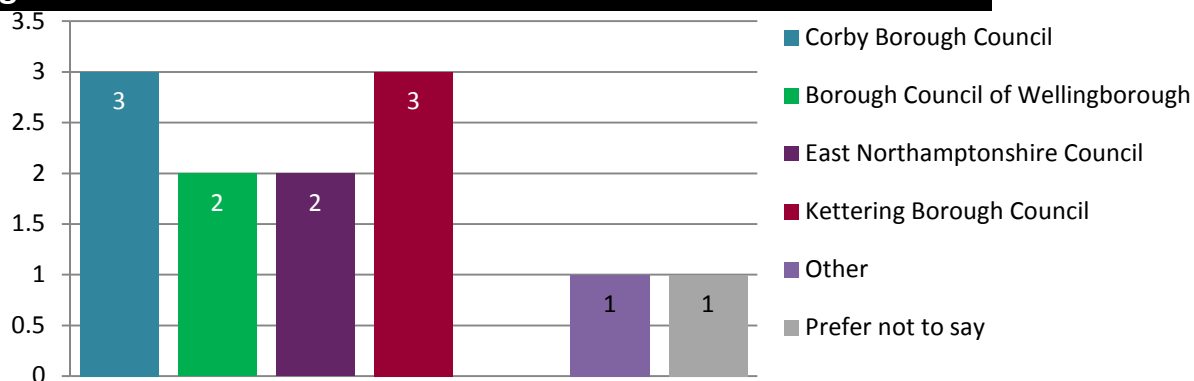
- An unnamed support organisation

There were a further two organisations who responded by letter:

- The Corby & East Northamptonshire Constituency Labour Party, Women’s Forum (by letter)
- Labour Group, North Northamptonshire Unitary Council (by letter)

Respondents answering the survey on behalf of an organisation were asked in which area the organisation works and the breakdown is shown in the pie chart below. The two organisations who submitted responses by letter were not able to be included in the question statistics; their responses have been incorporated into the comments section of the report.

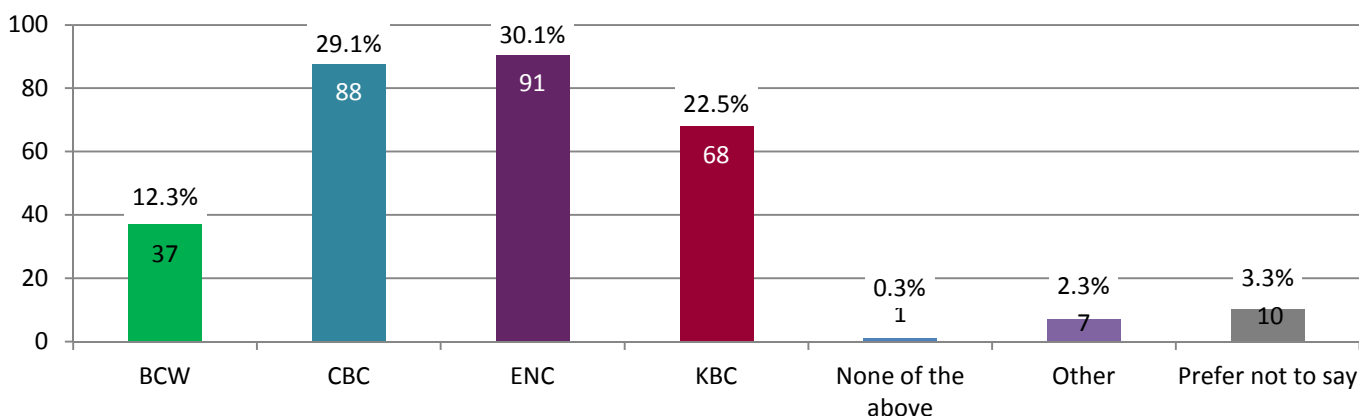
### Which Local Authority area of North Northamptonshire does your organisation work in?



Responses have been received from organisations from all areas of North Northamptonshire. Some organisations operate in more than one area. Organisations did not answer the other demographic questions which follow.

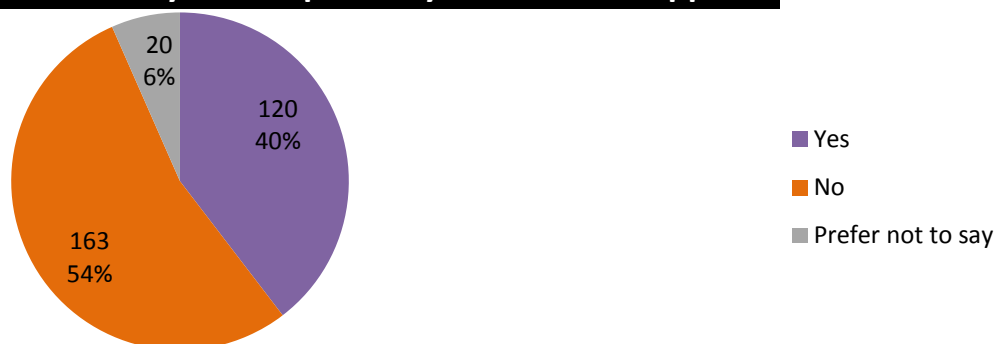
Respondents answering as an individual were asked which areas they live in. The breakdown is shown in the bar chart below.

### Which Local Authority area do you currently live in?



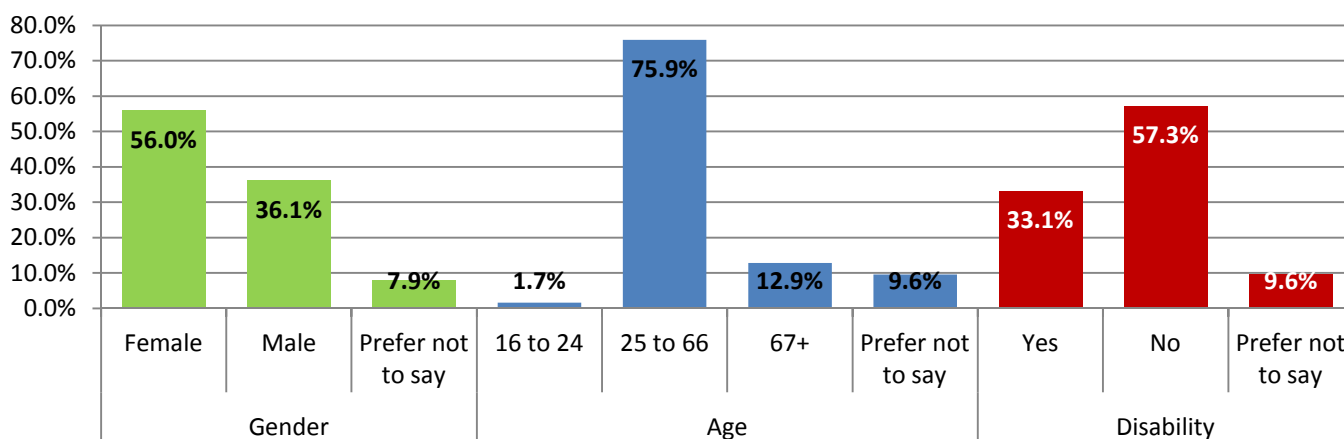
East Northamptonshire and Corby areas received the most responses from individuals at around 30% of the total responses each. 22% of the responses came from Kettering and only 12% from Wellingborough residents. One of the Wellingborough responses was by letter.

## Are you currently in receipt of any Council Tax Support?



40% of the respondents are currently in receipt of Council Tax support compared to 54% who are not. 6% stated that they would prefer not to disclose this; this includes one response by email to which did not state whether or not they were currently receiving Council Tax Support.

## Demographic Overview of respondents



There were more female respondents to the consultation than male (169 compared to 109). 24 respondents chose not to state their gender.

As you might expect being the largest age bracket, the majority of respondents were aged 25 to 66 (230), with 39 over 67s, 28 choosing not to say or being unidentifiable from letter response, and only 5 respondents aged between 16 and 24.

The proportion of respondents stated that they have a disability is higher than the average proportion of disabled people nationally and for our area. One hundred respondents have a disability compared to 173 who do not. Again there were 28 who chose not to answer this or who did not provide this data within their letter response.

## Support for the Proposals

Seven separate proposals were outlined in the consultation. Respondents were asked for each proposal whether they;

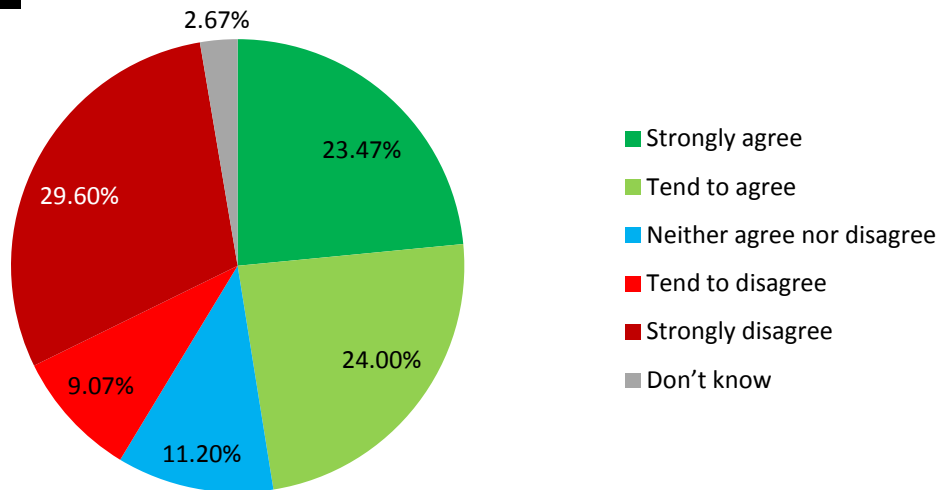
- strongly agree,
- tend to agree,
- neither agree nor disagree,
- tend to disagree or
- strongly disagree

They were also given the option 'don't know'.

In the pie charts below 'Strongly agreed' and 'agreed' are both coloured shades of green to easily indicate positive support for a proposal. 'Disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed' are both coloured shades of red to indicate opposition to a proposal.

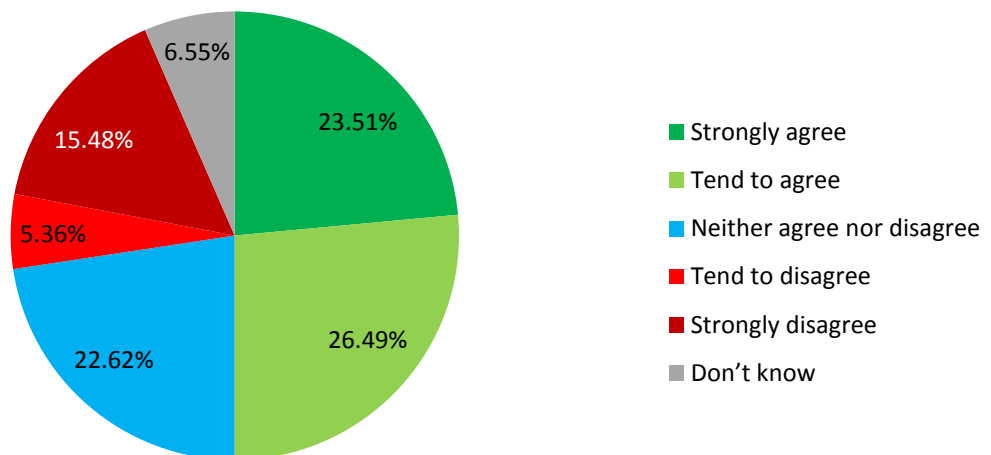
All respondents gave their opinion on all proposals and one response by letter has also been included.

### Proposal 1



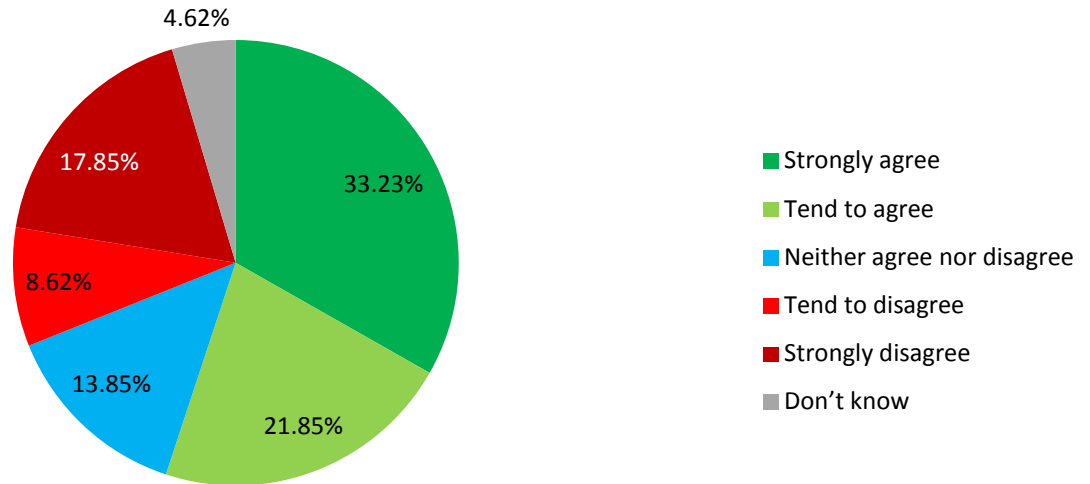
**Proposal 1:** Almost half of the respondents agreed with the proposal *to harmonise the minimum Council Tax contribution to 25% of Council Tax liability for working age people*. 39% disagreed and 11% did not have an opinion.

### Proposal 2



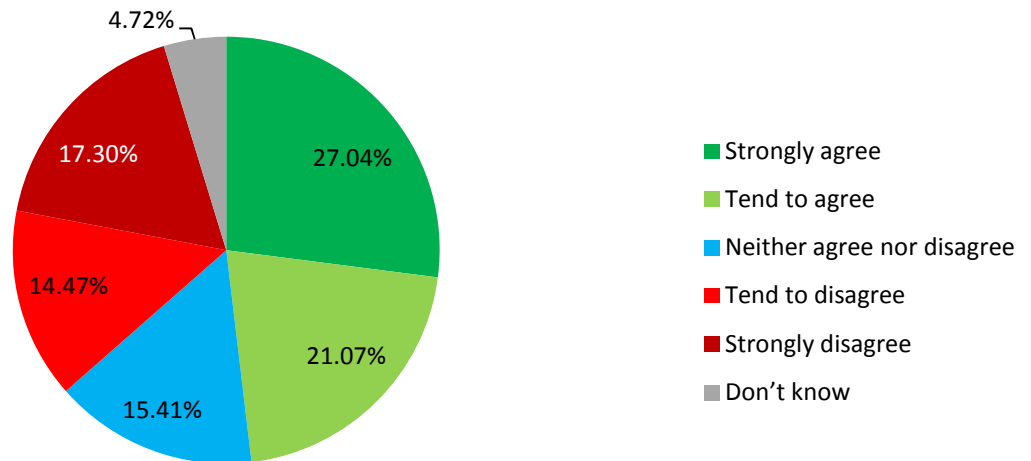
**Proposal 2:** Exactly half of the respondents agreed with the proposal *to remove the award of a family premium when assessing entitlement to LCTSS*. 21% disagreed and 23% did not have an opinion.

### Proposal 3



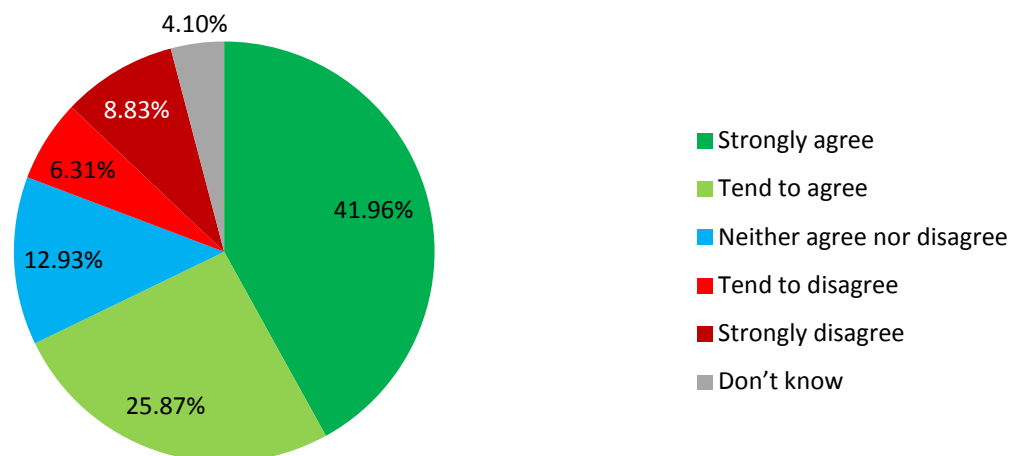
**Proposal 3:** More than half of the respondents agreed with the proposal *to limit the child allowance to two children*. Just over a quarter disagreed and 14% did not have an opinion.

### Proposal 4



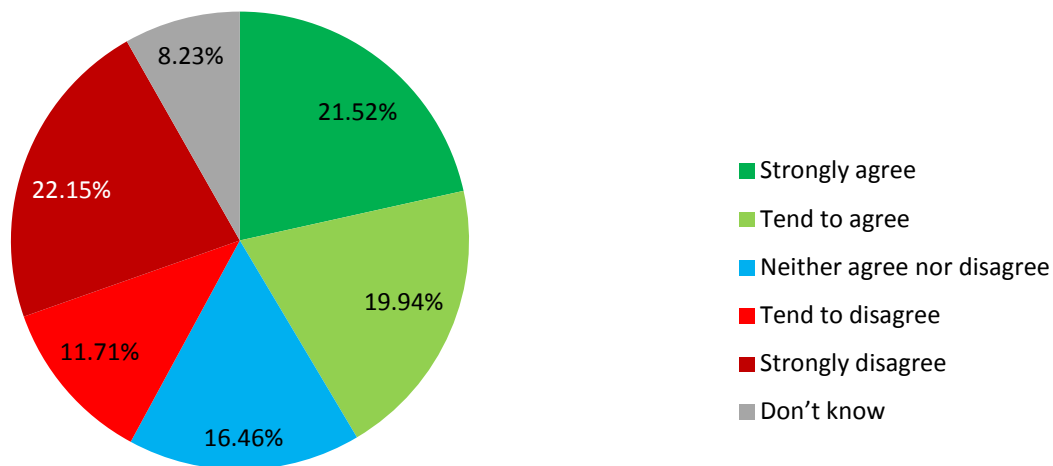
**Proposal 4:** Just under half of the respondents agreed with the proposal *to restrict backdating to 1 calendar month*. 32% disagreed and 15% did not have an opinion.

### Proposal 5



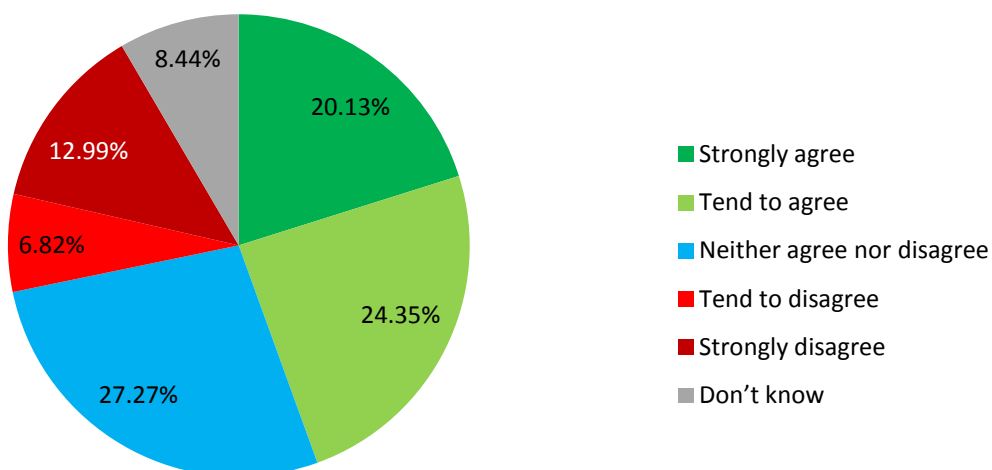
**Proposal 5:** 68% of the respondents agreed with the proposal *to restrict temporary absence outside of the UK to 4 weeks*. 15% disagreed and 13% did not have an opinion.

## Proposal 6



**Proposal 6:** 41% of the respondents agreed with the proposal *to remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium (SDP) where a person is paid Universal Credit (Carer's Element) to look after them*. 34% disagreed and 16% did not have an opinion.

## Proposal 7



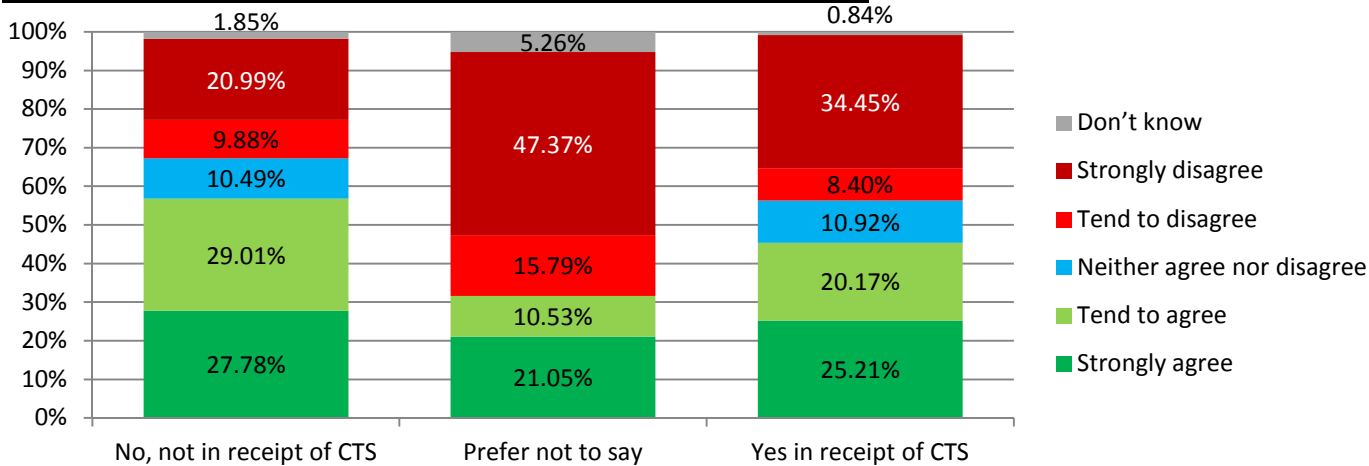
**Proposal 7:** 44% of the respondents agreed with the proposal *to remove the WRAC for new Employment and Support Allowance claimants*. 20% disagreed and 27% did not have an opinion.

## Relationship between responses and demography - Proposal 1:

Firstly we will look at whether being in receipt of Council Tax Support has an impact of how respondents felt about proposal 1.

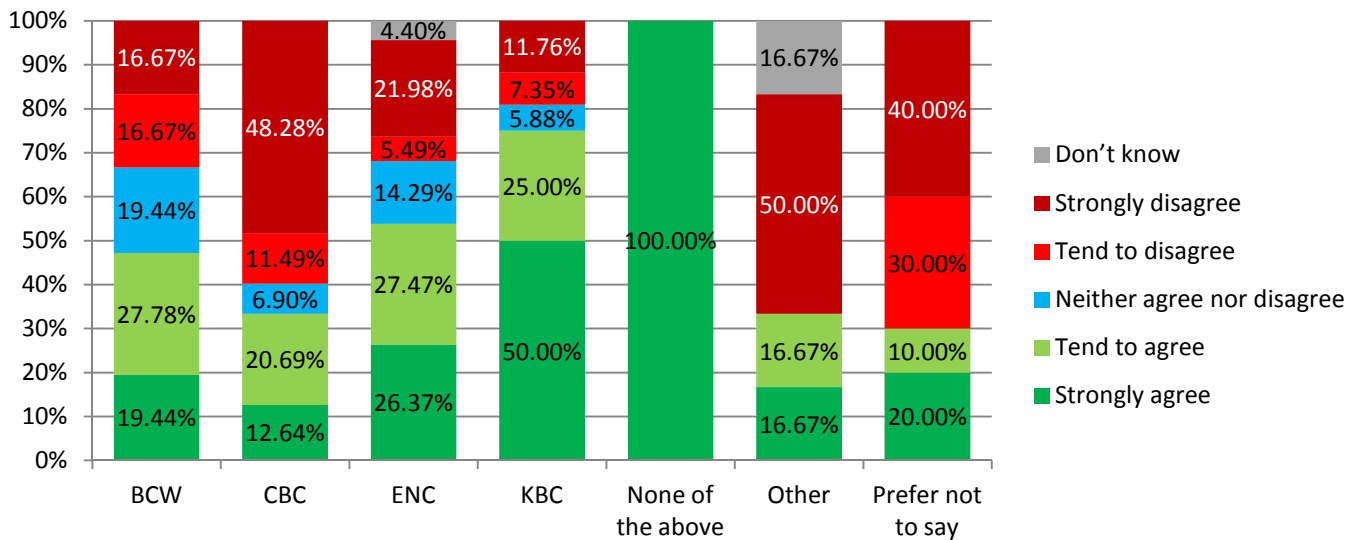
*Note. The extra individual respondent via letter has not yet been included in the figures within this section, however they did not provide all demographic data anyway and would feature as less than 0.5%.*

### In receipt of CTS / Extent of agreement with Proposal 1



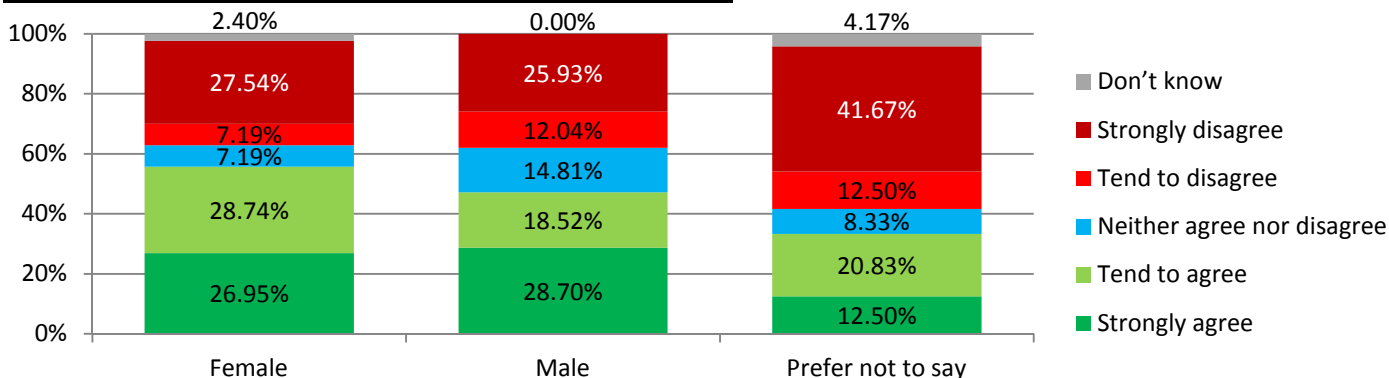
Those who are in receipt of council tax support disagreed with the proposal by 11% more than those who are not in receipt of council tax support. The results for the 40% of respondents receiving Council Tax Support were rather equally split; with just a few more respondents agreeing with the proposal than disagreeing. A larger portion (63%) of those who did not indicate whether or not they received Council Tax Support disagreed with the proposal, however this middle bar on the chart only represents 6% of all respondents.

### Area you live in / Extent of agreement with Proposal 1



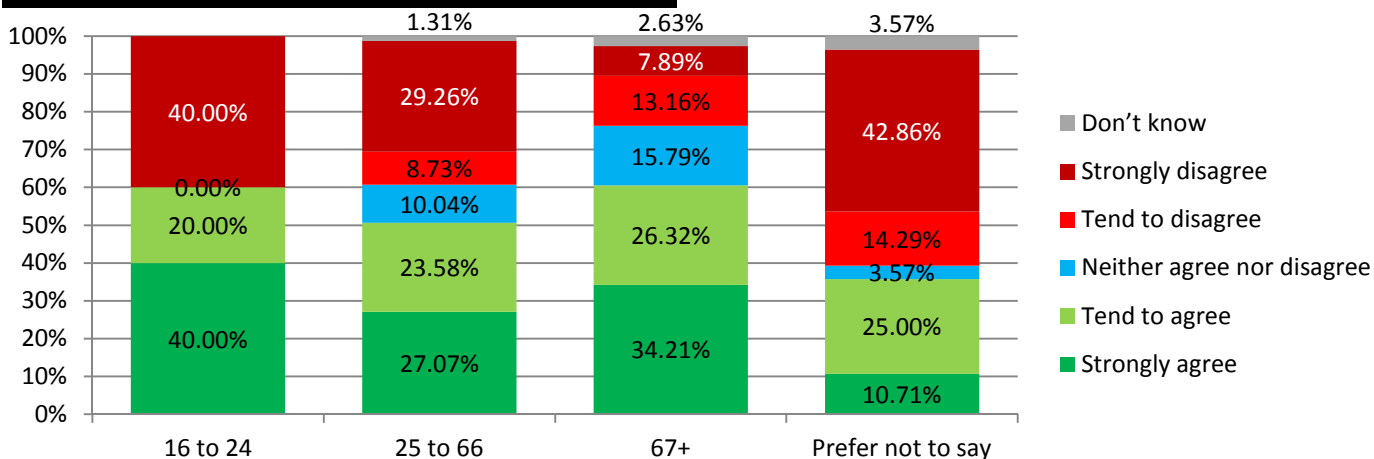
Residents' of Corby were in most disagreement with proposal 1, being the only area where more respondents disagreed than agreed. There were also more respondents' who disagreed within the group who chose not to say in which area they lived.

### Gender / Extent of agreement with Proposal 1



There is no real difference in whether male or female respondents agreed more or less with proposal 1. There were slightly more female respondents who agreed where males had no opinion either way.

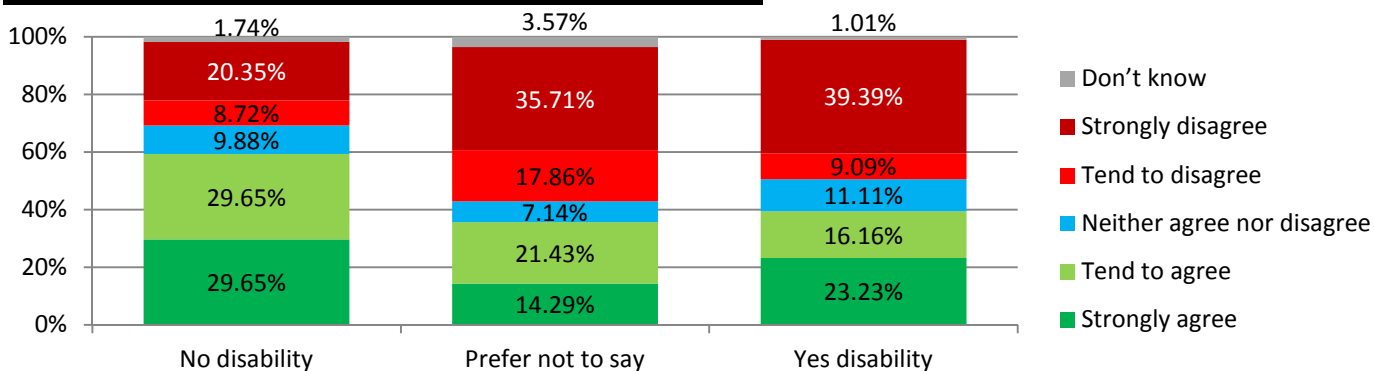
### Age / Extent of agreement with Proposal 1



The results show that respondents' of pensionable age, were more likely to agree with the proposals than respondents of working age. This is likely because they are not affected by the proposed change.

More 16-24 year olds agreed than disagreed, however only 1.7% (5 respondents) represent this group. Of those who chose not to state their age, there were more in disagreement than agreement.

### Disability / Extent of agreement with Proposal 1





The chart above indicates that a bigger proportion of those who answered 'yes' to having a disability disagreed with the proposals, while those who answered 'no' to having a disability were more likely to agree with the proposals.

## **Summary of comments - Proposal 1:**

### **Strongly Agree with Proposal 1**

The reasons for respondents strongly agreeing was because they feel they could be or already are paying more.

### **Tend to Agree with Proposal 1**

Those respondents who selected that they 'tend to agree' understand the need to harmonise it across North Northamptonshire but do slightly worry that it will be too much for some especially in the current climate and that there needs to be exceptions. The Police and Fire commissioners recommend that this is reviewed at appropriate times to assist with pressures from the COVID pandemic.

### **Neither agree nor disagree with Proposal 1**

Respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing were unsure how it affected working age people on long term sickness / disability benefits, and believe that council tax calculations should depend on circumstances including what services each residents regularly uses.

### **Tend to Disagree with Proposal 1**

A quarter of respondents who selected that they 'tend to disagree', disagreed because they thought it should be 25% or higher. Half of respondents thought it should be lower than 25%, and the remaining quarter made other comments about how it seems unfair to suddenly harmonise with massive jumps in payments for some and think payments should be subsidised more.

### **Strongly Disagree with Proposal 1**

A quarter of respondents who strongly disagree with proposal 1 disagree because they think it should be 25% or higher. A quarter disagree because they think it should be lower than 25%, some suggesting bringing it in line over a 2 year period or that only people in work should pay, and asking about exceptions for the disabled and for unpaid carers. There are also references to the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer as council tax will be reducing in more wealthy areas and increased in more deprived areas of North Northamptonshire. The other half made other comments such as that it should be harmonised over a 3 year period, that children shouldn't be included in decisions, that the current rates should be looked at and the most generous one applied to those who need it. It looks like there will be an enormous difference between rural and urban areas and that it will be harder for lower income people to get by.

*Further details of comments can be found in Appendix A at the end of this document.*

### **Other comments:**

Other comments received via letter from organisations and so not linked with a specific proposal included a suggestion to move to a flat rate of 20% rather than 25%, and for this transition to be made over a period of 3 years. There was also a comment about whether a child poverty needs assessment was completed and outcomes from it included within the proposals. There is questioning of why North Northamptonshire are not having a special dispensation for people in receipt of a war widows pension as part of their armed forces covenant commitment like West Northamptonshire are, and why the discretionary power to reduce Council Tax liability in cases of real hardship are not being used. There was also a requesting that these proposals are reviewed to ensure the statutory duty has been met to make this scheme fair and affordable for the residents.

## Appendix A – Further details of comments

### Comments Received for Proposal 1

#### **Strongly Agree with Proposal 1**

I agree with proposal 1 because its only 25% when we could be paying a lot more and I don't think people should stress at this as to me seems like the best proposal

I would agree as I'm sure that KBC are in the higher percentage tier. So it would theoretically lower the bill, however the concern is how much the council tax will be going up to compensate for all of this new council being set up.

I am a single working parent who earns £555 per month. My council tax is £150 a month! I struggle to pay it and often go without heating and food and other essentials because of this

#### **Tend to Agree with Proposal 1**

As a new authority it is right that so far as is possible and fair council tax relief should apply across the board for all residence of the authority.

Although, I tend to agree, I worry that 25% will be too high a cost for some families.

How will those who currently require more financial support be helped? With COVID impacting more and more heavily on everyone's finances, more support is needed for the less well off.

If you are already in a position of not being able to afford your Council Tax, the more we ask them to pay themselves, the less likely they will be to improve their situation. I'd prefer a maximum of 20% but less if possible.

Any increase in taxation would be the straw that broke the camels back at the moment.

I agree with the proposal in principal but you must accept there are exceptions in society where not everyone can afford this & you must offer more help to the most vulnerable in our society based on their income. You can't make people pay what they simply can't afford. It's o.k. to sit in offices & decide these things but get off your backsides & go out onto the streets & talk to people face to face to see the human aspect of this decision.

The Police Fire and commissioner for Policing and the Northamptonshire Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority supports a broadly cost neutral proposal. Given the current environment it is difficult to establish whether the scheme will continue to be cost-neutral whilst the COVID pandemic continues, therefore, if possible, it is recommended that this is reviewed at an appropriate time to do so.

#### **Neither agree nor disagree with Proposal 1**

Unsure how this will affect working age people on long term sickness/disability benefits

In order to be in a neutral position, I consider it necessary to implement some calculation policies, including the reduction by 100% of the council tax of the inhabitants depending on their circumstances. Social cases (people with disabilities who have a job should be exempted from paying the tax) or other disadvantaged categories.

I strongly believe that individuals who pay council tax should be paying for what they actually access within the community. For example, I live alone and can just about afford my council tax; however, when reading into what I pay for, I very rarely use any of the services which the money goes towards. Except bin collection of course.

#### **Tend to Disagree with Proposal 1**

##### **The amount of Council tax paid should be 25% or higher – 7 comments combined**

Should be higher than 25%. 30 to 50% would be appropriate and fairer to those who pay 100%. People should pay at least 50% of their council tax as a minimum. To discover I've been paying 45% to someone else's 8% is unjust!

The people who paid the lower amounts should pay more for as long as it takes to redress the balance and those paying 45% pay 8% for the same period then all pay 25%. This change will be unsustainable for those in financial difficulties.

**The amount of Council Tax paid should be lower than 25% - 14 comments combined**

I expect my Council to take care of the weakest of its residents.

If the contribution for those on very low incomes is limited to 15% the Council will have greater potential to be collect the debt without incurring extra debt via the debt recovery process and this would therefore be cost neutral for the Council. An increase will make living harder for working age disabled and pensioners and put them further into poverty.

Having to pay nothing toward Council Tax initially, but it has steadily increased to 20% will mean a further 5% will be almost impossible. It should be based on how much you earn and what you can afford. Those working shorter hours are already struggling especially considering the detrimental impact of COVID-19 & furlough. This is especially important now when central Government has indicated that it will allow Council Tax to rise further and even more people are forecast to become unemployed.

The current levels of support are clearly there for locally determined reasons and to now introduce additional levels of financial burden during a time of already increased hardship due to covid 19 would be wrong and this proposal should reflect current financial difficulties or be postponed.

**Other suggestions – 7 comments combined**

Should put a sum from reserves (to be protected from use to pay off NCC's debt) against a phased implementation to the proposed 25% level. Can't increase council tax massively for one local council to compensate for another, residents aren't used to this massive jump in payments to pay for the same service. Keep it near the same as it is for each area even in a unitary council, or compensate the higher paid areas so they fall to a lower percentage.

There are more areas to cover in one local council over another. Just because moving to a unitary, the resident population shouldn't have to suffer. Bring the council tax lower for higher paid areas and subsidise more to bring in line with other areas.

We understand that you need to have one scheme and appreciate how difficult bringing five schemes together into something that suits everyone can be. Out of all your proposals we feel this is the most contentious in the sense that those who have been on the lower end of the relief spectrum will be hit hard at the 25% bracket. Clearly those who have been subjected to a limited contribution in the past will be positively impacted but we wonder if 25% is just too much a leap, could the agreed amount be lower or introduced on a sliding scale over coming years?

While I appreciate you have assessed the potential of a banded scheme I feel this should be revisited. With the introduction of universal credit this has the potential for a new assessment each month with a new UC change which can cause confusion for the end user.

*Several comments also mentioned a lack of understanding of Proposal 1.*

**Strongly Disagree with Proposal 1**

**The amount of Council tax paid should be 25% or higher – 6 comments combined**

It is a tax on people who work. How does this incentivise people to work? The contribution to make should be 45% with a 55% discount. This makes it fairer to those who pay in full.

This isn't fair that it will be rising and people get more help when they don't work and we work and long hours just to pay our bills so looks like one off us will have to get another job somehow. However if couples like our selves could prove what we earned and we could get some help would help us a little more. Even £10 a month would help. I wish they would re look at the threshold earnings and take every case or all cases if was over a certain amount then not entitled etc.

Too many people on low income will be affected. Keep to allowing 45%. The discount is too high. Because it seems a much fairer system and does not incur additional monies from government funds.

**The amount of Council Tax paid should be lower than 25% - 58 comments combined**

25 % is a significant amount of money to find for people who are living on the breadline and it creates more debt within the local authority area. During the current pandemic this seems even harsher. The consequences of these changes to residents are not acceptable. Could a process be put in place that where the residents who will be hit the most with these changes see a gradual change over a period of 2 years to bring into line.

The figure should be set at 15%. Surely the cost implications in collecting 25% of the charges would be difficult as customers would find it difficult to pay; This would involve extra costs for the council and extra stress for customers. This decision will have a significant negative impact on the poorest in our society.

If harmonisation must happen, due to the inept financial management of the Conservative run County Council, then the initial decisions should consider the financial impact on residents and staff. This is better for Kettering residents but still way too high for those least able to pay. If Kettering wasn't so out of kilter with the rest the "average" would be way lower. The top percentage should be no more than 10%.

I disagree with the minimum contribution amount, if you wanted it fair you'd set a limit for either way. A whole council rate. Say 20% maximum rate for everyone. None of this 45% paying total rubbish.

You can't ask people who're unemployed to pay 25% of their council tax, only people who work should pay.

Will there be a safety net for those who cannot afford the increase or will big brother take over and start evicting people who cannot pay the huge increases mentioned here?

Those who are PIP/DLA then getting SDA should not have to pay any extra to top up on the council tax but those on jsa or working tax credit can pay 25% towards it.

Only residents of Kettering borough have a decrease, so unfair to 75% of borough. As a citizen out of work during the pandemic, cashflow is tight enough even with UC support leaving me in deficit. This is the case for so many and now would not be the time to decrease the maximum discount.

I am in receipt of ESA and have learning difficulties/ disabilities and don't think I should have to pay anything. My situation is I look after a very disabled husband 24 hours a day 365/6 days of the year and he needs heat or food if we look at it as 2 weeks food shopping or 1 months heating and I would have to choose between that and the increase in my Council Tax.

Proposal 1 is extremely unfair to what are referred to as "unpaid" carers. Getting only Care Allowance and a small amount of Income Support. But save the public purse around £1.3 billion a year.

In reality we the "unpaid" carers do not get a comprehensive rise each year. As one benefit increases the other goes down. Effectively my increase in April 2020 was about 50 pence.

We get paid a lower rate than Job Seekers and we commit to full time work. But we do not even get the legal minimum wage.

As a provider of benefits advice, and related budget advice, I have encountered far too many individuals on means tested benefits for whom the Council Tax charge was prohibitive, even with the discount. The aggressive manner in which councils pursue debt, i.e. via bailiff services, causes the debt to spiral out of control, and also costs the authority to engage these companies. By granting a higher award, even to zero, the need for these hostile (believe me, I have spoken with many!) organisations would be reduced substantially, focusing instead of those who WON'T pay rather than those who CAN'T pay. If a person/ family is purely on means tested benefits, I believe that their award should be 100%.

As a single person living alone in benefits I strongly disagree with your proposal to change the "working age" contribution from 20% to 25%.

Since I became disabled in 2010, the account of rent and council tax that I've become liable for has risen exponentially, but the rate of increase in benefits has not. I've found myself worse off than I was in 2010/11.

Unemployed people have a certain amount of money issued by the government what is the minimum to live on. If people have to pay at least 25% council tax then it means the amount to live on goes under what is required by law.

Alongside the CT Harmonisation scheme (this years CT will go up by 5% and also adding the Police Crime and Fire Commissioners uplift of £15) therefore vulnerable families in North Northamptonshire (Corby) could see their contribution to this years Council Tax Bill rise to 30.05% + the PCCs uplift: That is not fair and not affordable. Plus the Government has put £500 million into a pot for extra help for LCTSS.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved. The West has said they will be keeping to guidelines surrounding the Armed forces covenant why is the North not honouring this?

Because most people who pay this are struggling to feed themselves let alone pay extra tax, perhaps increase tax on the richest who can easily afford to pay more. Sadly this won't happen and more and more people will be plunged into debt and food banks. What makes me smile is why you are bothering to ask my opinion when you and I both know you are going to raise it anyway!

I disagree with this because this is the usual trend of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. The villages in North Northamptonshire pay a higher percentage which will be coming down, leaving them better off with more money, where as in Corby the percentage will be going up by more than triple leaving them wondering how they can afford it and leaving them with a lot less money.

This is definitely not a FAIR system as you say it is. Just because the county council made massive mistakes why should the people of Northamptonshire be punished.

#### **Other suggestions – 30 comments combined**

Phased harmonisation across 3 years. The splitting of Northamptonshire into two unitaries and amalgamation of 5 authorities is supposed to accrue financial benefits. Some of those benefits should be ploughed back into improved outcomes for the people of N. Northamptonshire.

25% is lazy and merely 'splitting the difference'.

Whilst it is understood that there is a need to harmonise services and maximise income, you have already made the decision to ensure that the Council Tax harmonisation is modelled in such a way that it brings in another £9 million as well as an increase of 5% this year and another amount as the police precept.

The solution is simple - list what is currently on offer from each of the four Borough / District Councils, and then apply the option that is perceived to be the most generous to people already in difficult circumstances usually through no real fault of their own.

Stop wasting so much money in the first place we all need some reductions. Leave things alone, why should Corby be bailing out other councils, let them all run independently. Residents are being penalised for the problems other Local councils are going through budget wise.

We need a local council not a unitary council. Fully understand the need to bring council tax in line across North Northants but not at expense of households in Corby. Need to ensure there are funds available to support families and individuals.

Any change in the reduction should be proportionate to the differing reductions already in place. You cannot and should not expect a one fits all approach. More than one option should be consulted on to give residents a broader choice and understanding of what could be put in place.

It seems that council tax increases year on year do not bring the paying citizen any increased benefits. A change in policy to review increases would be a good start rather than place legal obligations to pay, then charge us more and more only for this policy to say I am contributing less. The council are charging more and more, that is the problem, and my few pounds only ever go so far and income increases are not so easy for some.

I don't think children should come into the family element it shouldn't matter how many children you have!

In your statement which i received on the 9/11/20 I see you say the consultation runs from the 5th Oct 2020 to the 30<sup>th</sup> Nov 2020 therefore it would have more beneficial to have received this at an earlier date to allow me to understand this more as i now only have 21 days! Why not look at who or what Council offers the best help to its Community and use this as your start to the new Councils Programme of Assisting the people in your community rather than a rise in costs. Surely this will show all you do care for them that need it the most within our community, rather than every year we lose more of the little help we do get in assistance.

In the 4 councils there are 10,412 Support claimants, 7339 of which will see an rise from maximum discount 91.5 % - 80.0 %, Only the 3073 in Kettering will save money . Each one of the 7339 will have to find more money to pay for this service, in turn these customers will try for more benefits from the government which means every tax payer will pay more not just in Northants.

It looks and reads like you're trying to make it harder for lower income people to get by, removing help in various avenues from backdating if someone's had no income to taking away carers help (your wording of things is very convoluted)

There are enormous differences between the rural and urban areas. You are looking to bring in equality in a fundamentally unfair way. Different geographical areas within the boundaries of the new Authority have varying levels of economic depravity and thus this must be taken into account when dealing with the poorest households.