

Dorset Council Tax Benefit Support Scheme, 2018

Consultation Response Report
Main report without appendices

Produced by Mark Simons
for the Shadow Dorset Council

December 2018

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Consultation Response Report

<p>What was the consultation about?</p>	<p>The current two tier system of local government in Dorset is changing from 1 April 2019 and the nine existing councils will be replaced by the following two unitary councils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, which will provide services covering that area • Dorset Council, which will provide services covering the rest of the County. <p>As a result of these changes the existing Council Tax Support schemes will effectively cease from that date and Dorset Council will need to agree a new scheme which is affordable, consistent and fair for all residents (not only those that receive support but also those who depend on wider services). This consultation exercise is being undertaken to help obtain feedback on the Council Tax Support scheme options being considered.</p>
<p>Over what period did the consultation run?</p>	<p>The consultation ran for 9 weeks finishing midnight on 10 December 2018.</p>
<p>What consultation methods were used?</p>	<p>The consultation was available both electronically and in paper form from libraries and council offices. The consultation was promoted widely through both the local press and social media. All households currently claiming council tax benefit were written to making them aware of the options being considered and seeking their views.</p>
<p>How many responses were received overall?</p>	<p>382 overall responses were received, with 377 confirming on what basis they were responding. 214 (57%) were responding as benefit claimants 156 (41%) responding as council tax payers and 2 (<1%) representing organisations and 0 (0%) representing local businesses.</p>
<p>How representative is the response to the wider population affected?</p>	<p>The response size is reasonable for a consultation of this type with 382 residents/organisations taking part.</p>
<p>Where will the results be published?</p>	<p>Results will be published on the council's website www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk</p>
<p>How will the results be used?</p>	<p>The feedback will be considered by the Shadow Authority in February 2019 when determining the 2019/20 scheme.</p>
<p>Who has produced this report?</p>	<p>Mark Simons, Consultation Officer DCC/DCP December 2018</p>

Analysis Method: Questions were considered on an individual basis. Overall responses were examined -and also specific responses of respondents who claimed council tax benefit and those who were just responding as council tax payers. The main method of analysis was looking at the percentage of respondents who expressed a view on each question. For several questions the percentage strongly supporting and supporting are calculated. Those opposing and strongly opposing are also recoded. One is taken from the other giving a net agreement figure. This could be positive or negative. A figure of zero would mean an equal number of people supported and opposed a statement.

For each open question the text comments have been studied and coded depending on what issues were raised. The coded comments are then reported on based on the amount of times those individual issues have been raised. Total redacted comments are provided in an appendix. Note: some figures may not sum due to rounding.

About respondents

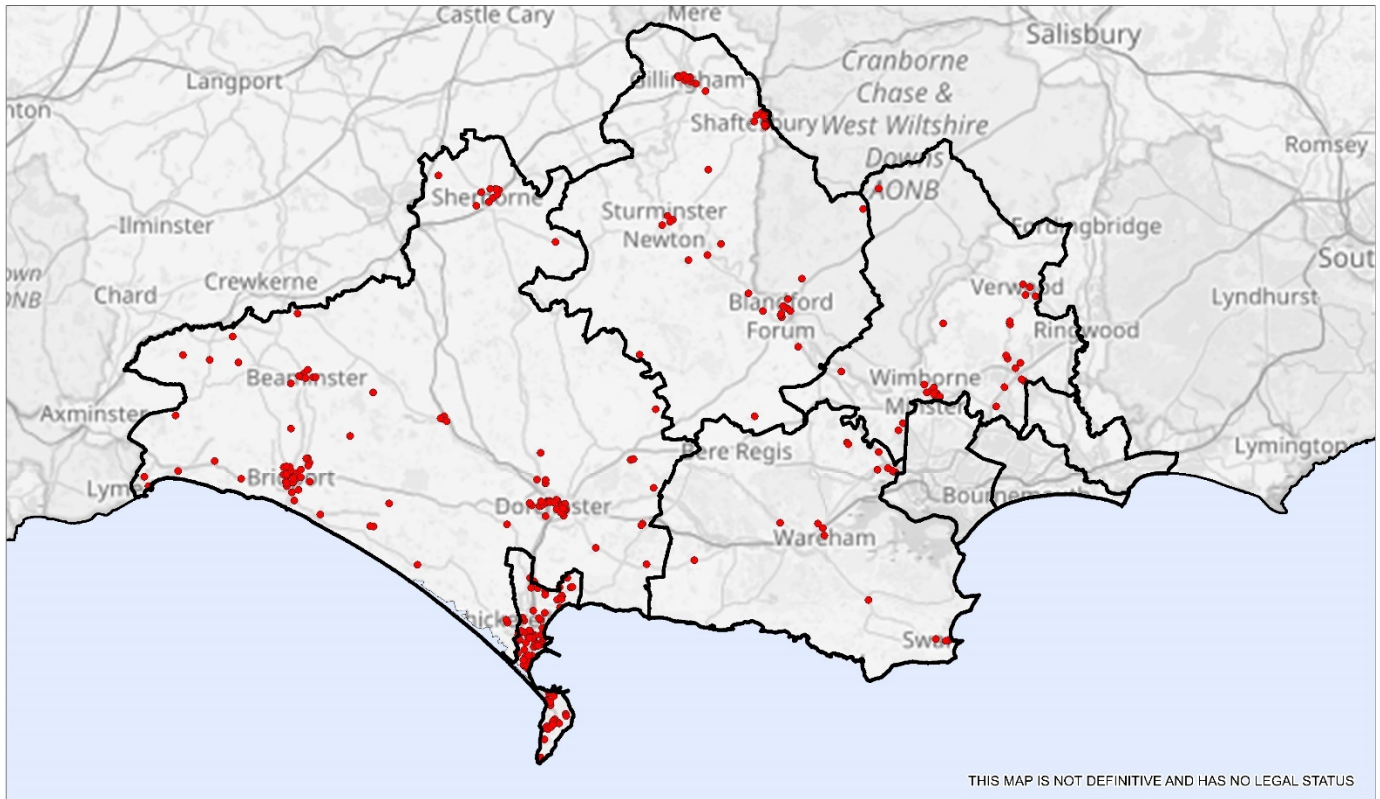
382 overall responses were received, with 377 confirming on what basis they were responding. 214 (57%) were responding as benefit claimants, 156 (41%) responding as council tax payers and 156 (41%) representing organisations and 0 (0%) represented local businesses. Those selecting “other” responded either as local residents or mixed households.

Are you responding as:

	Someone who receives council tax support	A council tax payer	A local councillor	A business	An organisation	Other
Number	214	156	0	0	2	5
% of all responses	56.8%	41.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	1.3%


Where do respondents live?

Respondents were asked for their postcode. 339 people provided their home postcode, with just under 305 proving to be complete and valid. The postcodes of all respondents living in or around the Dorset area were plotted on a map. Below is a map of those responses. This clearly shows responses (indicated by a red dot) were received from right across the Dorset area, with all areas being represented.



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Ref:
Date: 07/12/2018
Scale 1:393840
Drawn By:
Cent X: 382693
Cent Y: 100998

GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Dorset County Council
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Respondents were also asked which district they lived in

(overall responses)	East Dorset	North Dorset	Purbeck District	West Dorset District Council	Weymouth and Portland Borough Council
Number	39	53	24	147	177
%	10%	14%	6%	39%	31%

Whilst the number of respondents from each district/borough is not a good match with the overall population within the district, the responses are more in tune with the % of the population claiming council tax benefit who are of working age (see the table below). For example, Weymouth and Portland make up 18% of the Dorset Council area population but 31% of the respondents to the survey live in that area. Likewise, 24% of the Dorset Council area population live in East Dorset but only 10% of the responses come from that area but that fits well with the 11% of the respondents who live in that area.

District	% Population	% of Working Age Claimants	% Survey Responses
EDDC	24%	11%	10%
NDDC	19%	12%	14%
PDC	12%	14%	6%
WDDC	27%	31%	39%
WPBC	18%	32%	31%

What were the proposals

The Shadow Authority was proposing that the Council Tax Support scheme from 1 April 2019 be based on one of the following options.

- **Option A** Under this option, the Dorset Council Tax Support scheme would be based on incorporating the existing sovereign Council schemes. This would result in some claimants being treated more (or less) favourably than others with similar circumstances.
- **Option B** Under this option, the Dorset Council Tax Support scheme would be an aligned scheme which would limit the maximum support provided to unprotected working age claimants to 90%. The option would also look to calculate entitlement on an estimated average, rather than actual, Universal Credit over a six-month period. Protection arrangements would be included allowing a claimant to ask for a review of their entitlement, during that period, if their circumstances had significantly changed.

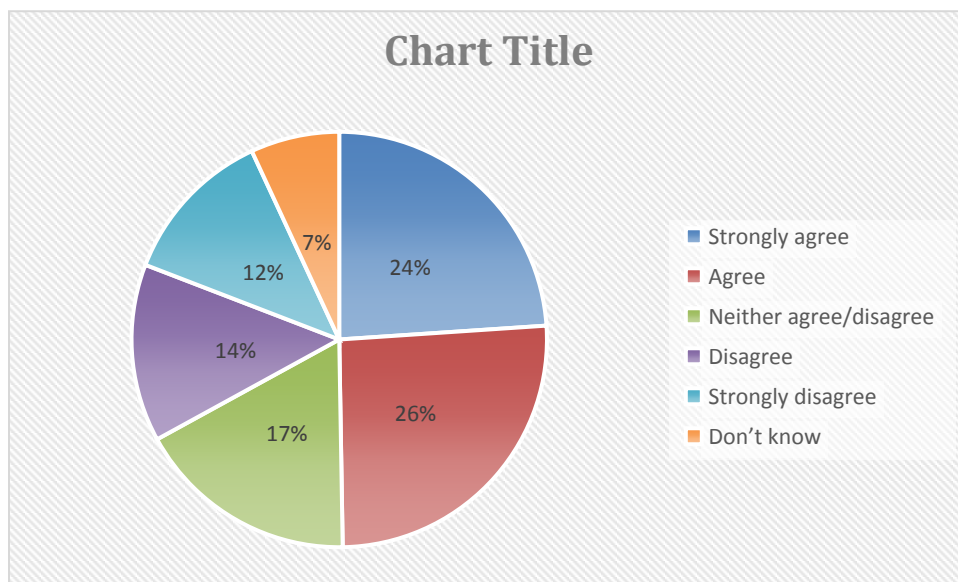
This option would simplify the process and entitlement from a customer perspective and significantly reduce the administration of the scheme.

- **Option C** Under this option, the Dorset Council Tax Support scheme would incorporate the conditions mentioned in Option B but would limit the maximum support provided to unprotected working age claimants to 85%.

Option A

Q2. Under this option the Shadow Authority would retain the existing Council Tax Support schemes as set out in Appendix (at the end of this document), having regard to where the claimant lives. In relation to this option please state to what extent you agree with this proposal.

(overall responses)	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Number	90	97	65	52	46	26
%	24%	26%	17%	14%	12%	7%



A total of 376 people responded to this question. **In simple agreement terms 50% strongly agreed/agreed with this option.**

50% of respondents either strongly agreed/agreed with option A whilst 26% disagreed/strongly disagreed. **This gives a net agreement figure of plus 24%**. In numeric terms this means 187 either strongly agreed/agreed whilst 98 disagreed/strongly disagreed. 17% neither agreed/disagreed with this option and 7% did not have a view.

When looking at the responses from people who were claiming benefit compared to those responding just as council tax payers this showed, as expected, stronger support for this option by those claiming benefit. The response in this case was net agreement figure of plus 48%. This compares to a net agreement figure of minus 7% for those responding as council tax payers.

Responses from people who said they were disabled showed a net agreement figure of plus 41%, which is high, showing support for this option.

Analysing the responses by the 5 district areas there is overall support for the option in each district area with a positive net agreement. However, support for this scheme (the status quo) is mixed across the districts. There is strong support in North Dorset District Council area (plus 48%) and East Dorset District council area (plus 54%). There is significantly less support in Purbeck (plus 17%), West Dorset District (plus 16%) and Weymouth and Portland Borough area (plus 14%)

Dorchester & District Labour Party official strongly disagreed with this option as “This would be unfair in treating people differently according to which former authority they lived in. In its favour people would receive a higher rebate than under B or C.”

Q3. Please provide any additional comments about this option below:

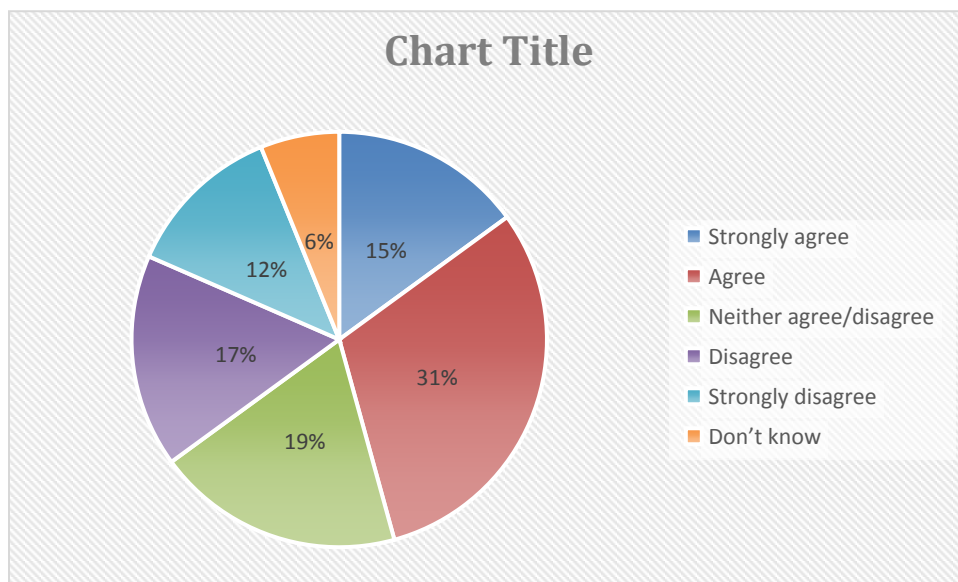
81 comments were received covering a wide range of issues. The comments were coded into themes raised. Whilst a significant number of comments responded that the need for one system regardless of where you live was important other people raised a wide range of concerns. There was support for the existing system as people understood it and knew where they were. The summary list is available in the table below and the full comments in the appendix.

Issue	mentions
Need one system for efficiency regardless of where you live	23
No need to change	11
Existing system is fair/logical	8
Can't afford to lose any money at all	7
Other	7
Better to harmonise but not reduce %	6
Universal Credit doesn't work so stay the same	4
Not clear enough/ don't understand	4
Should get appropriate support	3
Admin costs	3
Longer lead in time needed	2
Council Tax is unfair anyway	2
Universal Credit is better	2
Same system for everyone	2
Option C is better financially	2
Under 25s shouldn't pay anything	1
What's it based on?	1
Need to change as doesn't work	1
Need financial protection	1
Options B & C are easier to manage	1

Option B

Q4. Under this option, the Shadow Authority would introduce an aligned Council Tax Support scheme with a maximum support for those of working age (that were not protected) limited to 90%. In relation to this option please state to what extent you agree with this proposal.

(overall responses)	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Number	56	115	72	62	46	23
%	15%	31%	19%	17%	12%	6%



A total of 374 people responded to this question. **In simple agreement terms 46% strongly agreed/agreed with this option.**

46% of respondents either strongly agreed/agreed with option B whilst 29% disagreed/strongly disagreed. **This gives a net agreement figure of plus 17%.** In numeric terms this means 171 either strongly agreed/agreed whilst 108 disagreed/strongly disagreed. 19% neither agreed/disagreed with this option and 6% did not have a view.

When looking at the responses from people who were claiming benefit compared to those responding just as council tax payers this showed stronger support for this option by those responding just as council tax payers, with a net agreement figure of plus 27%. This compares to a net agreement figure of plus 8.6% for those responding as council tax claimants.

The responses from people who said they were disabled showed a net agreement figure of plus 21%, a relatively positive response.

Analysing responses by the 5 district areas the support for this scheme (Option B - aligned scheme with max 90% support) shows support is mixed. There is stronger support in West Dorset District Council area (plus 27%) and Weymouth and Portland area (plus 22%). Then there is less support in East Dorset District (plus 14%) and Purbeck (plus 13%). Finally, there was opposition to this scheme from North Dorset District area responses with a net agreement figure of minus 19%.

In Dorchester & District Labour Party official response they disagreed with this option saying “We support options B/ C with a maximum support for those of working age limited to 92% (as most generous existing scheme). BUT using actual Universal Credit payments not an estimated average. Linking to the rules for Housing Benefit leads to a reduction in the payment. Therefore, not in claimant’s interest. Creating the new Dorset Council is supposed to save money but we object to savings made at the expense of people on low income. Even £0.25 a week is a further cut, and some will face more than this.”

Q5. Please provide any additional comments about this option below:

A total of 64 comments were received. The comments were coded into themes raised. Whilst a number of comments responded that Option B was the best many other people raised a wide range of issues, some supporting the option and others opposing it. The summary list is available in the table below and the full comments in the appendix.

Dorchester & District Labour Party official strongly disagreed with this option as “This would be unfair in treating people differently according to which former authority they lived in. In its favour people would receive a higher rebate than under B or C.”

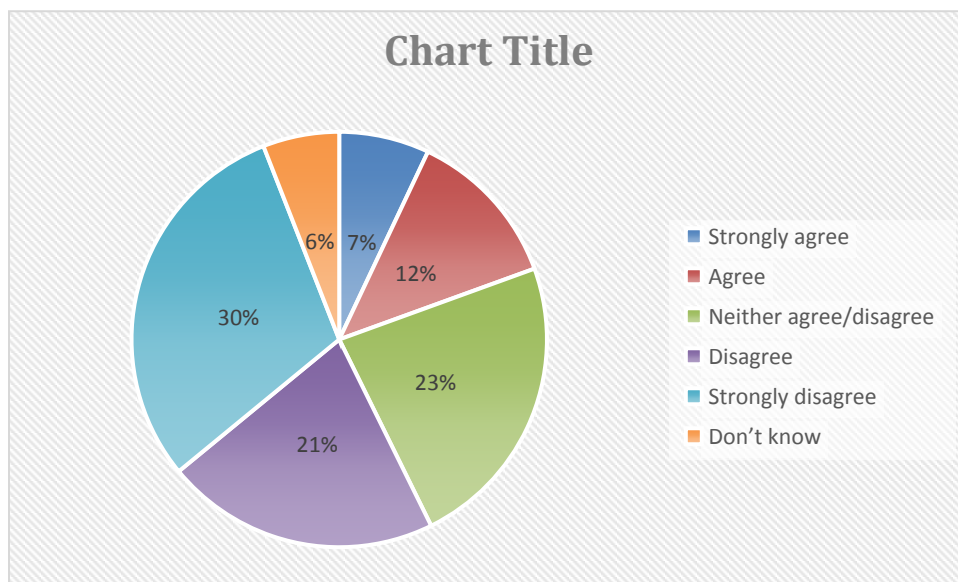
Issue	mentions
B is best option of three on offer	9
Impacts on the poorest	7
Should be based on current %	6
People can't afford ANY more	5
Other	5
Sensible way forward	4
Complicated with more getting into debt	3
Prefer option C	3
Should get 100%	2
Appears to be fairer	2
Less admin on option B is better	2
Option B is unfair	2
Unclear	2
Stay as is	2
Need protection	1

Option B ok with protection	1
Monitor over time	1
Aligned system	1
No one should be worse off	1
Prefer option A	1
Some people work system	1
% discount is too high	1
Get people back to work	1
Universal Credit is a disaster so don't link	1
Council will do what it wants anyway	1

Option C

Q6. Under this option, the Shadow Authority would introduce an aligned Council Tax Support scheme with a maximum support for those of working age (that were not protected) limited to 85%. In relation to this option please state to what extent you agree with this proposal

(overall responses)	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Number	26	46	86	79	111	22
%	7%	12%	23%	21%	30%	6%



A total of 370 people responded to this question. **In simple agreement terms 19% strongly agreed/agreed with this option.**

19% of respondents either strongly agreed/agreed with option C whilst 51% disagreed/strongly disagreed. **This gives a net agreement figure of minus 32%.**

In numeric terms this means 72 people either strongly agreed/agreed whilst 190 disagreed/strongly disagreed. 23% neither agreed/disagreed with this option and 6% did not have a view.

Responses from people who were claiming benefit compared to those responding just as council tax payers showed opposition to this option. Those claiming benefit strongly opposed it with a net agreement figure of minus 42%. This compares to a net agreement figure of minus 18% for those responding as council tax payers.

When looking at the responses from people who said they were disabled this showed strong opposition with a net figure of minus 36.7%.

Analysing responses by the 5 district areas there is very limited support for this scheme (aligned scheme with max 85% support). There is the highest opposition in East Dorset District Council area (with a net figure of minus 43%) and West Dorset District Council area (with a net figure of minus 41%). Then there is slightly less opposition in North Dorset and Weymouth and Portland. The opposition is the lowest in Purbeck but still minus 13% net, but the number of responses were limited.

In Dorchester & District Labour Party official response they disagreed with this option saying “We support options B/ C with a maximum support for those of working age limited to 92% (as most generous existing scheme). BUT using actual Universal Credit payments not an estimated average. Linking to the rules for Housing Benefit leads to a reduction in the payment. Therefore, not in claimant’s interest. Creating the new Dorset Council is supposed to save money but we object to savings made at the expense of people on low income. Even £0.25 a week is a further cut, and some will face more than this.”

Q7. Please provide any additional comments about this option below:

There were 55 comments made covering a range of issues. The most consistent response was that to adopt option C with a lower percentage support would lead to debt and hardship and other costs like debt recovery. Other comments focused on the percentage change and the lack of affordability. The summary list is available in the table below and the full comments in the appendix.

Issue	mentions
Will lead to debt and hardship	14
Keep % as before (92%)	6
Other	5
Can't afford this cut	4
C is the worst option	4
Confusing	3
C is the best of poor options	2
Everyone should contribute	2
Unnecessary	2
Council will ignore anyway	2
Prefer option B	2
Everyone should contribute	2
Universal Credit a disaster	2
Keep simple	1
People who pay full CT are just coping	1
Poor idea for single parents	1
Non- viable option	1
Affects all badly	1
Affects those with disability	1

Comparison of the responses to the three options

Looking at the **simple agreement figures** (strongly agree/ agree) for each of the three options it shows:

Option A: 50% agreement (with 26% strongly disagree/disagree)

Option B: 46% agreement (with 29% strongly disagree/disagree)

Option C: 19% agreement (with 51% strongly disagree/disagree)

The simple agreement figures show most support for option A and still significant support for option B with only 4% between the two. On the flip side Option C was opposed by a significant majority

Looking at the overall **net agreement figures*** for each of the three options it shows

Option A: Plus 24%

Option B: Plus 17%

Option C: Minus 32%

Hence, the overall figures show most support for option A and still significant support for option B. On the flip side Option C was opposed by a significant majority

*net agreement compares the percentages “strongly agreeing” or “agreeing” with the percentages “disagreeing” or “strongly disagreeing”. A figure of zero means an equal percentage support as oppose, a positive figure shows support and a minus figure shows opposition.

Q8. Please use the space below to describe any alternative options you would like the council to consider:

There were 90 comments in this section of the consultation. Whilst some offered other alternatives to the three proposals being consulted on, many of the comments covered a very wide range of issues relating to council tax and the benefits system. Because of the wide range of comments with no strong themes running through the comments are not summarised here but included in full in the appendix.

Specialist officers of the council will consider the viability of any suggestions included within the answers to this question.

Q9 The council has a duty to take into account the impact of decisions on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation).

Are there any positive or negative impacts that you believe the council should take into account in the decision-making process in relation to protected characteristics? If so, please describe below, and suggest any ways in which the council could reduce or remove any potential negative impact or increase any positive impact.

There were 67 comments in this section of the consultation. Whilst some offered suggestions of impacts on protected groups relating to the three proposals being consulted on, many of the comments covered a very wide range of issues relating to council tax and the benefits system. Because of the wide range of comments with no strong themes running through the comments are not summarised here but included in full in the appendix.

About You

Q10 Are you responding as:

	Someone who receives council tax support	A council tax payer	A local councillor	A business	An organisation	Other
Number	214	156	0	0	2	5
% of all responses	57%	41%	0.0%	0.0%	<1%	1%

57% of the responses came from people receiving council tax support and 41% were responding as council tax payer. Throughout the report the responses from each group were considered separately as well as together.

Q11 Are you providing your organisation's official view?

	Yes	No
Number	9	284
%	3%	97%

Q12 What is the name of your organisation/business?

In reality only one official response was received from an organisation. This was from the Dorchester & District Labour Party.

Q14 What age group do you belong to?

	Under 18	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-and over	Prefer not to say
Which age group do you belong to?	0.0%	2.7%	9.7%	16.7%	24.2%	26.9%	16.4%	3.5%

The tables above show the profile of people taking part in the consultation. The consultation has attracted residents covering quite a wide age range. In Dorset itself 24% of the population are aged

65+. In the survey responses 17% were aged 65+. As the main impact is on working age people the response fits with that age profile.

Q15 The Equality Act 2010 describes a person as disabled if they have a longstanding physical or mental condition that has lasted, or is likely to last 12 months; and this condition has a substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. People with some conditions (cancer, multiple sclerosis and HIV/AIDS for example) are considered to be disabled from the point that they are diagnosed.

Do you consider yourself to be disabled as set out in the Equality Act 2010?

	Yes	No	Prefer not to say
Number	71	258	43
%	19.1%	69.4%	11.6%

19.1% of respondents considered they had a disability. The data has been used when analysing the responses to the questions to see if people who have a disability had a different view to the majority on the key questions in the consultation.

Q16 Please us which type of impairment applies to you?

	Physical disability	Learning disability/difficulty	Longstanding illness or health condition	Mental health condition	Sensory impairment	Prefer not to say	Other
Number	34	8	40	27	8	3	1
% of all responses	48.6%	11.4%	57.1%	38.6%	11.4%	4.3%	1.4%

Respondents were asked to specify all impairments that related to them. A longstanding illness or health condition was the most common, with 57% selecting that. This was closely followed by physical disability and then mental health condition.