

Summary of Public Consultation

The Consultation opened on 27 November and closed on 18 December 2013.

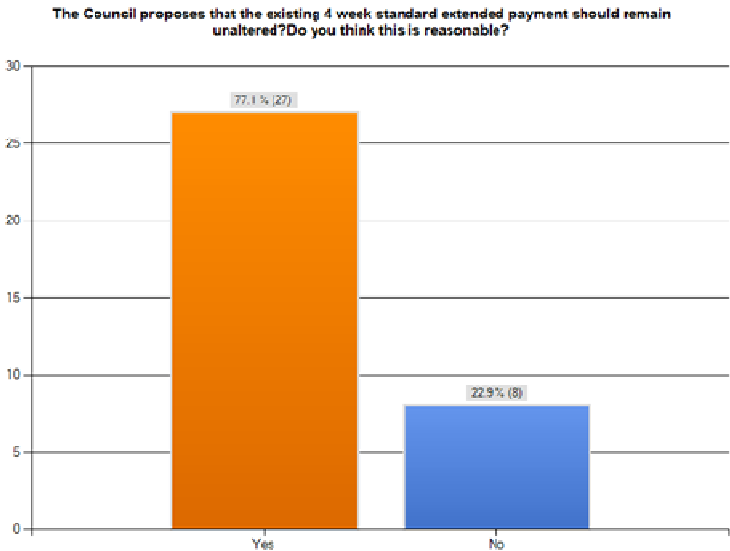
The survey was available publicly on-line via the Council’s website and was emailed to a range of identified stakeholders. It was also available in hard copy at public libraries, Flintshire Connects, Main Reception County Hall, Benefits Reception County Hall, Phase III Reception County Hall and Reception at County Offices Flint.

35 English responses were completed and 0 Welsh responses.

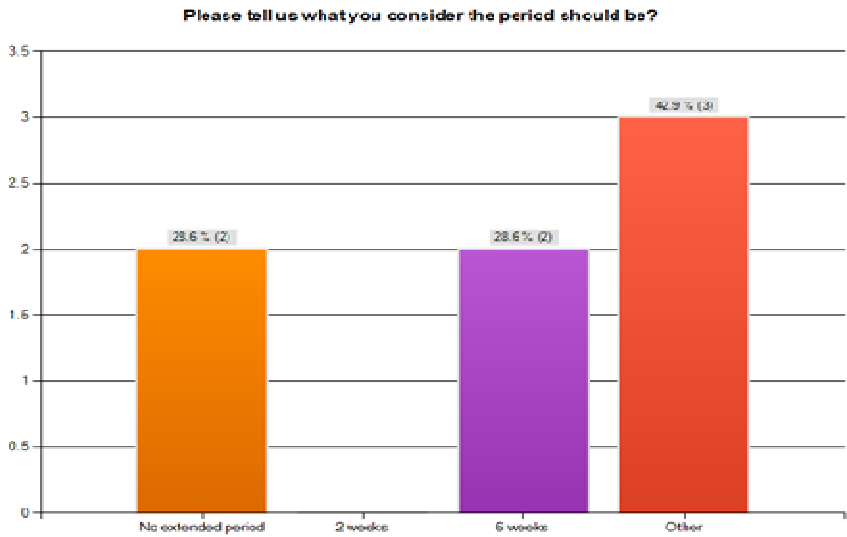
Of the 35 responses received 34 were completed on-line and 1 via hard copy.

Local discretion 1

The Council proposes that the existing 4 week standard extended payment should remain unaltered? Do you think this is reasonable?



If no, please tell us what you consider the period should be?



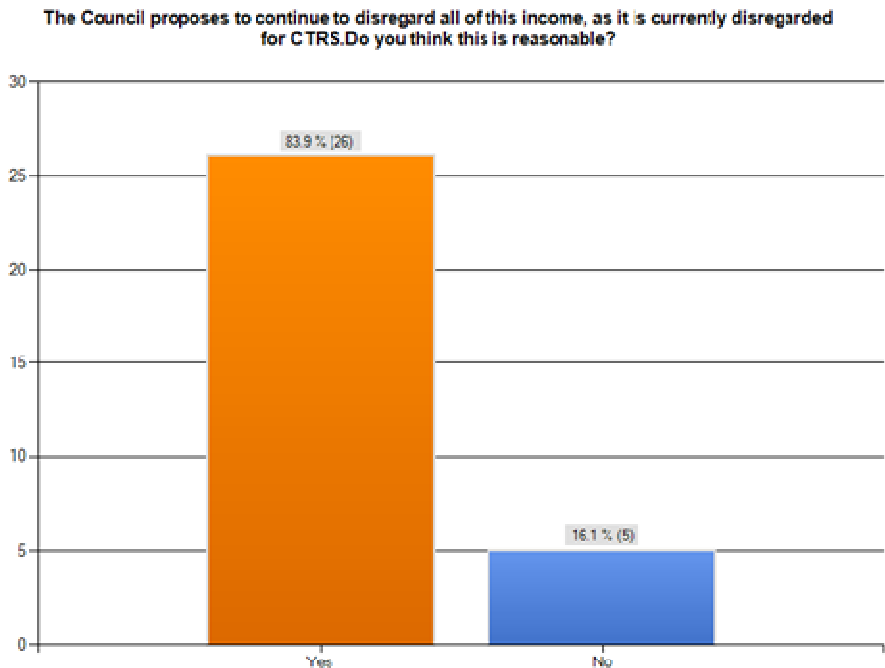
Of the three people who responded other, two respondents provided the following further information:

We feel that 4 weeks is generally sufficient time for an individual to continue to receive a Council Tax reduction after commencing paid employment. However we do feel that there should be a robust mechanism in place to proactively identify individuals who are in debt and/or facing financial difficulties despite finding employment. In these cases there should be recourse for individuals to discretionary Council Tax Reductions or other financial support for those who are facing difficulties paying their Council Tax, despite being in paid employment with earnings above the earnings threshold for Council Tax Reductions. For example some individuals will have accrued debts whilst unemployed that may result in a loss of heating or lighting to their home; homelessness; inability to feed themselves; inability to afford to travel to their workplace or other debts that cause not only distress and anguish, but also physical health and wellbeing concerns. In those situations individuals may require a longer period, in addition to independent advocacy and support, to address their financial difficulties before having to pay Council Tax. Consideration should also be given to delays in notifying the Council immediately of a change in circumstances, especially where this is due to not understanding their responsibilities due to communication barriers or disability-related barriers. In such circumstances retrospectively applying full Council Tax liability could force an individual into poverty and debt through no fault of their own.

Welfare reform changes to move benefit payments to calendar monthly payments will already push recipients into financial hardship as they will be paid a month in arrears, take 5 weeks to process (leaving them without funds) and therefore simply returning to work and waiting 4 weeks will not give them ample time to really catch up with themselves

### Local Discretion 2

The Council proposes to continue to disregard all War Disablement Pension and War Widows Pension income, as it is currently disregarded for CTRS. Do you think this is reasonable?



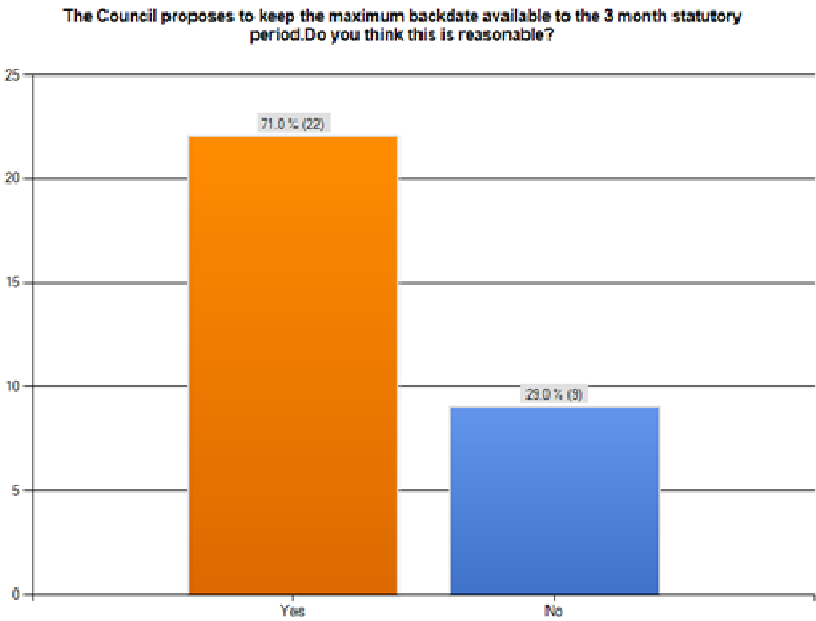
**Appendix 2 – Cabinet Report**

If answering no, respondents were asked; “Please tell us what you think would be reasonable?” and the following responses were received:

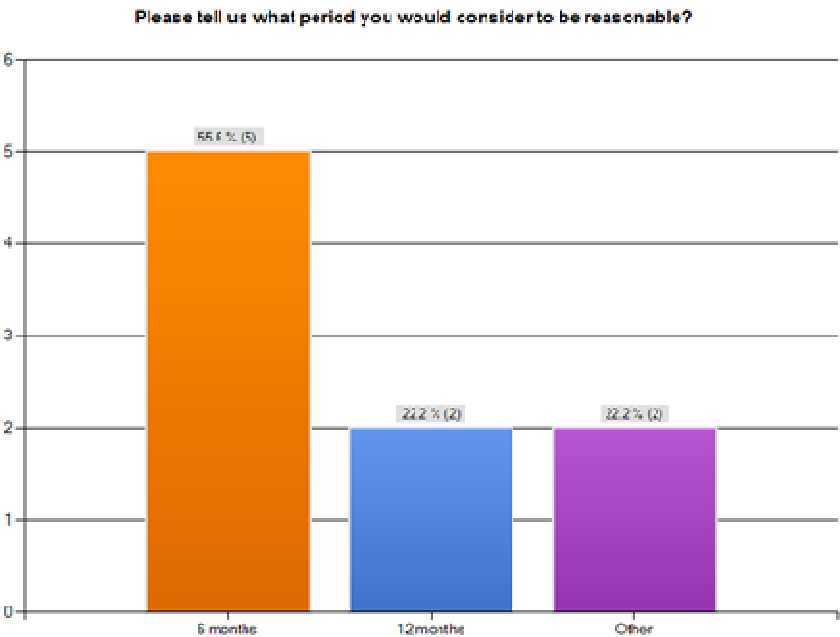
- Nothing
- To count it as part of their income
- I think a £40.00 per week disregard would be reasonable
- They have more disposable income than other households in order to meet their costs. Therefore a standard disregard could apply to the first £30 per week.

**Local Discretion 3**

The Council proposes to keep the maximum backdate available to the 3 month statutory period. Do you think this is reasonable?



If 'No' please tell us what you would consider to be reasonable?



## Appendix 2 – Cabinet Report

Of the respondents who ticked other the following supplementary information was provided:

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- None
  
  - We strongly believe Council Tax Reductions should be able to be back dated by 6 months if there are reasons for the delay, such as bereavement, mental distress, a hospital or hospice stay, caring for a family member, or disability-related barriers. The circumstances which have led an individual to claim Council Tax Reduction can often be both complex and lead to situations where an individual is struggling to access other entitlements and to continue to afford housing, utilities, water, food and other basic costs. In these situations there may be a delay in applying for Council Tax Reduction, which should be accounted for and 3 months is not sufficient time in some cases. Similarly many disabled people require additional time to complete forms either due to limited energy or time to fill in forms or due to not understanding the information or processes. Time limits can often place these individuals under extreme stress and anxiety and therefore any extension to backdating provisions, in order to account for these barriers and to prevent people falling into poverty and/or debt, is welcome. We would encourage Flintshire County Council to ensure that all individuals applying for Council Tax Reductions, any benefit, or any concern from the Council are signposted to independent professional advocacy to ensure that they are able to understand and complete forms accurately, reducing administration costs for the Council and stress and anxiety for the individuals applying. Accessible formats and community language information, documents and forms should also be proactively provided, including large print, Easy Read and audio documents. This should be in addition to providing all standard documents in Plain English and Cymraeg Clir as the usual format.
  
  - There are many reasons why backdating is necessary and limiting to 3 months is unfair in genuine cases