

# Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## BRIEFING NOTE – No. 1/2016

**Date:** 4 January 2016

**To:** All Members of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Purpose:** This briefing note was as a result of discussion at the meeting of this Committee on 8 October 2015

**Heading:** Consultation on Localising Support for Council Tax

This briefing paper reviews the current consultation undertaken with regard to the changes proposed to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. It looks to address comments made by members at the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee on [8th October 2015](#), specifically why the Citizens' Panel was not used for the purpose of the consultation and also about the representativeness of the samples used.

The Citizens' Panel is one of the council's primary consultation tools. The Medway Citizens' Panel consists of approximately 1,000 members specifically recruited to be representative of the area by geographical location, age, gender and ethnicity. The Panel research is conducted by postal survey with a consistent response rate of around 700.

The Citizens' Panel has not however been designed to capture a representative sample of Council Tax Reduction Scheme recipients and this information has not been captured for Panel members. When personal information regarding the Panel is captured during the recruitment process the Council states that this information will only be used as part of the quarterly Citizens' Panel process. The Council cannot use this information to identify whether there is a representative sample of Council Tax Reduction Scheme recipients within the cohort. It is therefore not possible to use the Citizens' Panel for the purposes of this particular consultation.

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme consultation has been sent to over 3,000 households, including a representative sample of those residents in receipt of the scheme (which is much larger sample size than the Citizens' Panel). Sample surveys are the main kind of survey used in research and consultation exercises as they provide a cost effective and reliable method of establishing community views.

We can state our confidence as to how closely the results match the 'true value' by using knowledge of the sample size and how often an answer is given to define a confidence level, normally set at 95% - the chances are 95 in 100 that

the 'true value' will fall within a specified range. As of the 14th October the scheme had received 482 responses, which is sufficient to provide a representative sample of the residents' views on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme proposals with a confidence interval of  $\pm 4.5\%$ . So for example if 47% of our sample picks an answer you can be 'sure' that if the entire population had been asked that between 42.5% ( $-4.5\%$ ) and 51.5% ( $+4.5\%$ ) would have also picked that answer.

Once the consultation process is completed the total number of responses can be analysed with regards to other characteristics. To rebase slightly underrepresented or overrepresented demographic groups in line with the Medway population, the survey results will be weighted to ensure that it accurately reflects the profile of Medway. This helps to reduce sampling error further and to ensure different types of residents are included within the survey. Weighting is already applied to adjust the Citizens' Panel responses for 'harder to hear groups' and is accepted practice.

To enable officers to differentiate between Council Tax Reduction and non-Council Tax Reduction recipients an additional 2,560 Council Tax Reduction recipients are to be sent the survey to complete, with a code added to the survey to identify that the recipient is a Council Tax Reduction claimant. This is to ensure that the direct impact on Council Tax Reduction Scheme recipients can be measured and would provide a greater understanding of the different views held by stakeholders and should provide a sufficient sample size to explore the different responses to each question made by this specific stakeholder sub-set.

*Further Information - Anthony Lewis, Corporate Performance and Intelligence Manager ext. 2092.*