

Cabinet Member for Adults and Health	Ref No:
December 2018	Key Decision:
Detailed Results of the Consultation for the Proposal for the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) for Working Age Adults	Part I or Part II: Part 1
Report by Executive Director Children, Adults, Families, Health and Education and Interim Director of Adults' Services	Electoral Division(s): All

1. Introduction

1.1 This report provides an overview of the findings from the public consultation on the proposed change to the Minimum Income Guarantee for working age people.

1.2 The consultation period ran from 1 October to 3 December 2018. It was principally conducted through an online and postal survey and focus groups. Additional submissions were also received during the engagement period, by letter, telephone and email.

2. Online and postal survey

2.1 2,217 people potentially affected by the proposed change were contacted by post with a survey asking them for their views. This included an Easyread version of the letter and survey for people with learning disabilities. All postal surveys included a pre-paid envelope enabling them to be returned at no cost to the respondent.

2.2 An online version of the survey was also issued on the County Council's 'haveyoursay' platform. This also included links to an Easyread version.

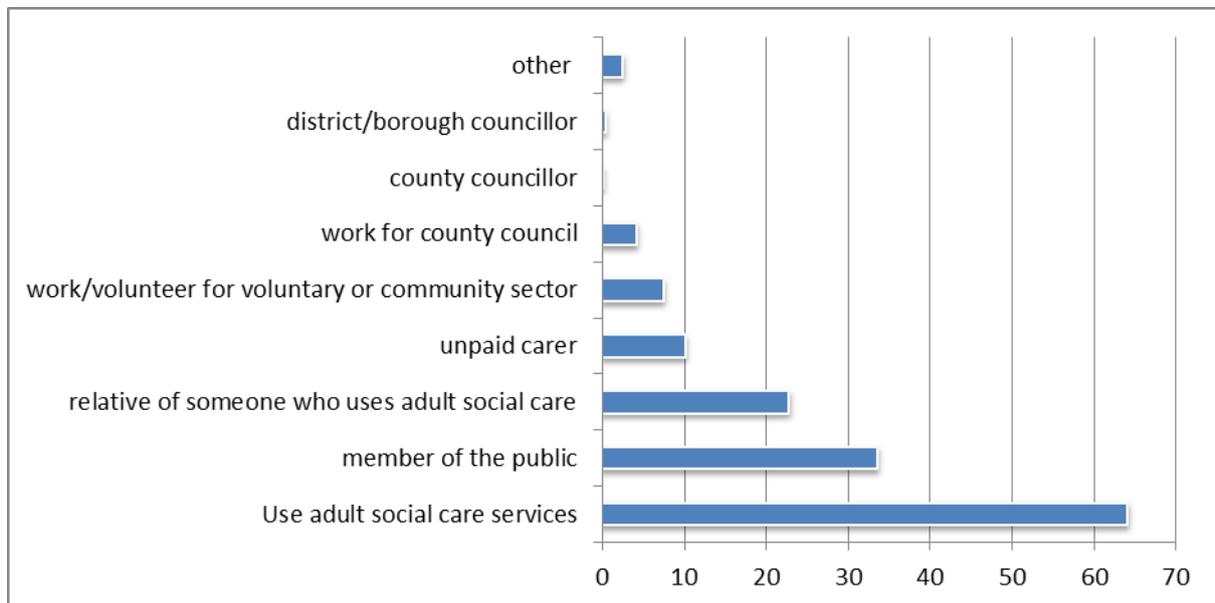
2.3 Of the 727 survey responses received, 167 were completed online and 560 were returned via post, giving a strong postal response rate of 25%.

3. Overview of people responding to the survey

3.1 As per **Fig 3.1**, nearly two thirds of respondents (64%) used adult social care services, whilst just under one quarter (23%) were a relative of someone

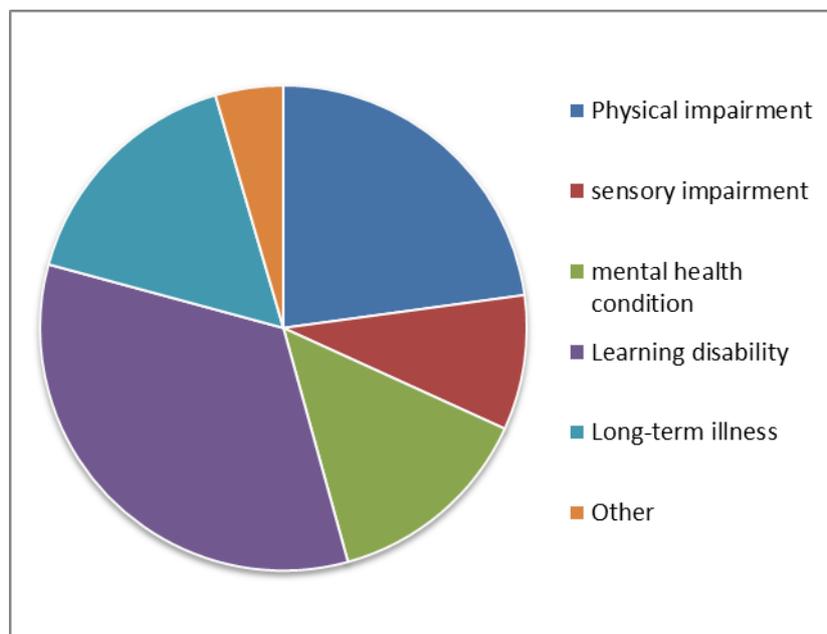
who used adult social care. This total included 8% of people who also personally used adult social care services.

Fig 3.1 Which of the following describes you? Select all that apply (%)



3.2 73% of respondents defined as having a disability. As **Fig3.2** shows learning disability (33%), physical impairment (23%) and long-term illness (16%) were the most frequently reported disabilities.

Fig 3.2 Please state what your disability is, select all that apply (%)



3.3 43% of respondents were male, 50% were female and 3% preferred not to say. 4% did not provide a response. **Table 3.1** provides a breakdown of respondent age group.

Table 3.1 Which of the following age groups best describes you?

Age Group	%
16-24	7
25-34	17
35-44	14
45-54	20
55-64	22
65-74	9
75-84	1
85+	0
prefer not to say	3
not answered	9

3.4 Of those who responded to the question on ethnicity, 91% were white British. All other ethnicities comprised 5% of responses, with only 'white and Asian' and 'Any other white background' reaching 1%. 4% of people preferred not to give their ethnicity and 5% did not answer the question.

3.5 58% of respondents were heterosexual, whilst 2% were gay or lesbian and a further 2% were bisexual. 6% defined as 'other', 10% preferred not to say and 23% did not answer the question.

3.6 One respondent was currently serving in the armed forces, whilst 2% had previously served. 91% had never been in the armed forces and 6% did not answer the question.

3.7 Responses were received from across the County, as shown by respondent postcode areas given in **Table 3.2**. 4% of people chose not to answer this question.

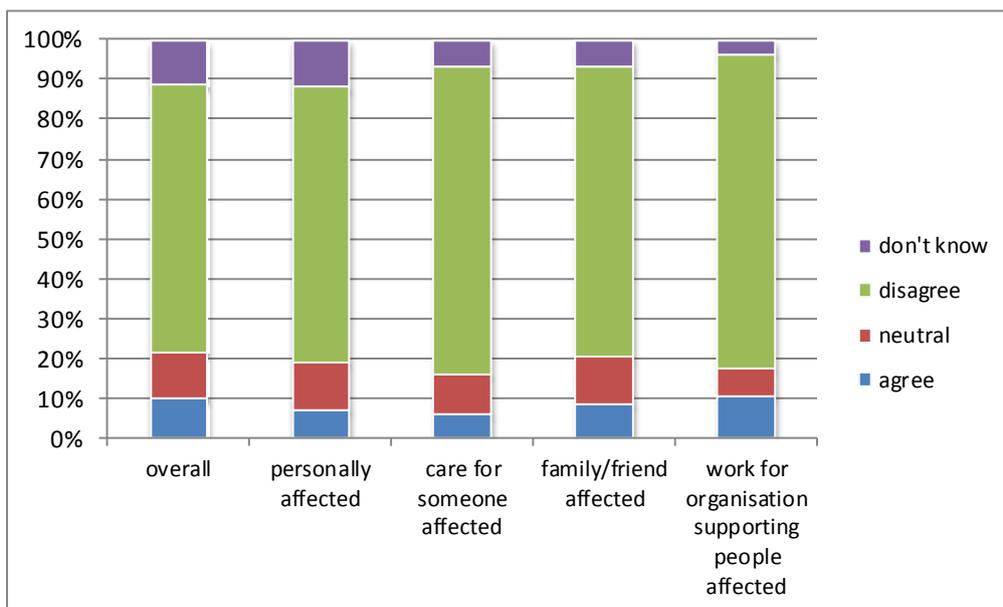
Table 3.2 Respondent post code areas and numbers responding (West Sussex post codes only)

BN6 3	BN16 31	PO10 6	RH10 37	RH16 15	GU29 10
BN11 38	BN17 31	PO18 3	RH11 37	RH17 4	
BN12 15	BN18 9	PO19 46	RH12 55	RH19 12	
BN13 27	BN42 2	PO20 29	RH13 28	RH20 11	
BN14 46	BN43 9	PO21 65	RH14 11	GU27 2	
BN15 20	BN44 5	PO22 35	RH15 30	GU28 4	

4. Views about the proposed changes

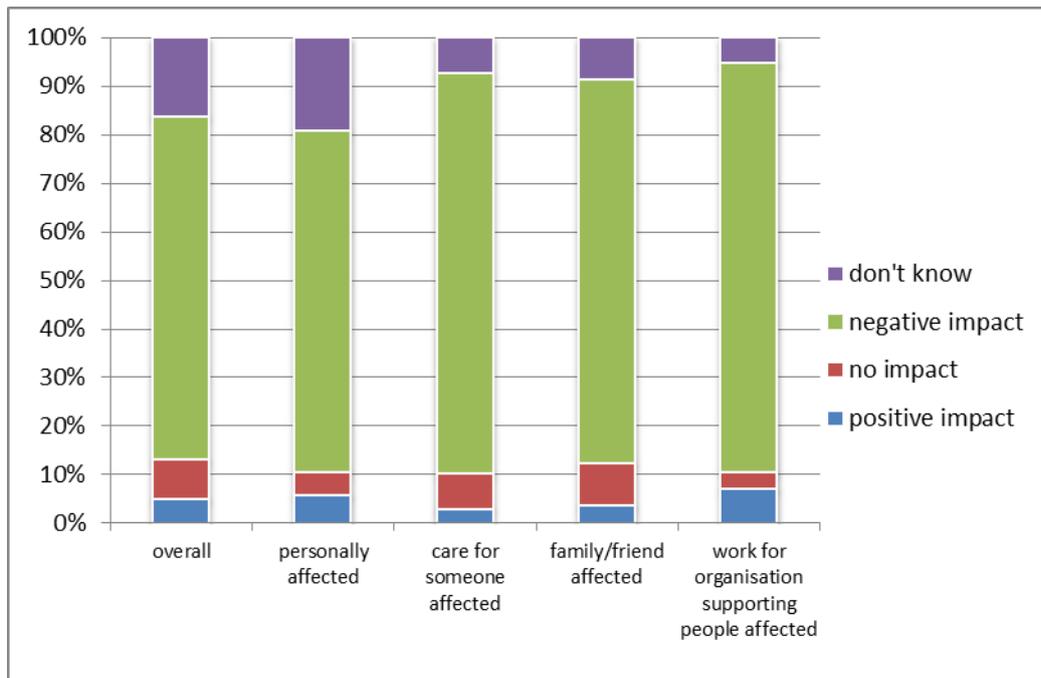
4.1 As **Fig 4.1** shows, 67% of people overall who responded to the question disagreed with the proposal, whilst 10% agreed. There was a high level of disagreement with the proposal in all responder groups.

Fig 4.1 Which of the following statements best described your view of the proposal? By responder group (%)



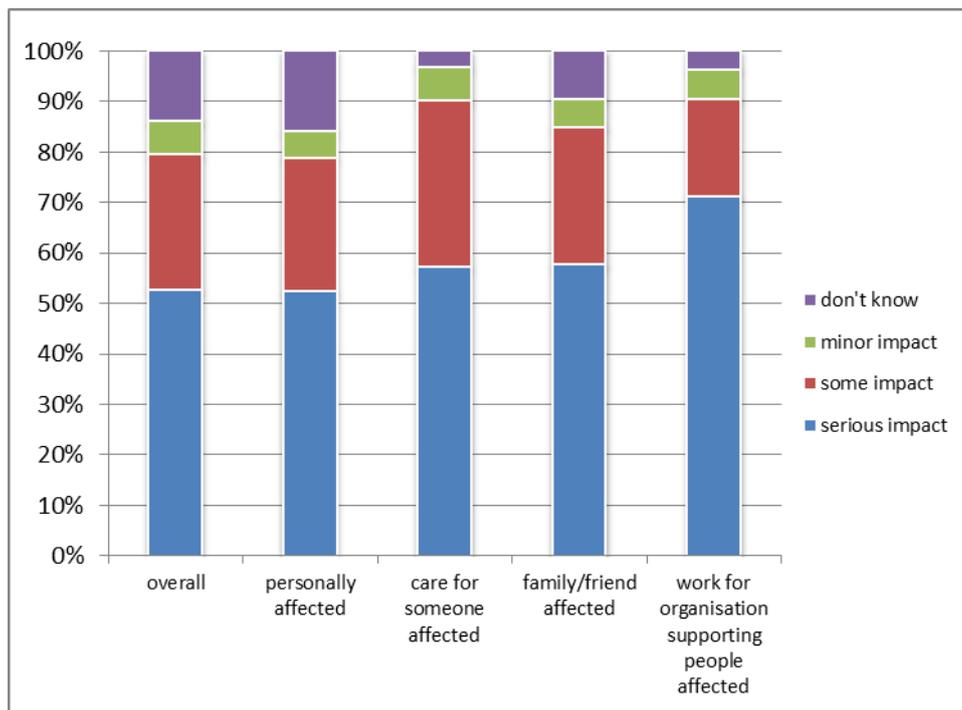
4.2 Similarly, as shown in **Fig 4.2** a large majority (71%) of people responding to the question felt the proposal would have a negative impact, whilst only 5% felt it would have a positive impact. People personally affected were slightly less likely to view the impact as negative (70%) than other groups as 19% did not know how it would personally impact them.

Fig 4.2 How do you think the proposal will impact on you, the person you care for or represent? By responder group (%)



4.4 As **Fig 4.3** illustrates, people responding to the question were concerned as to the potential severity of the proposal, with 53% overall believing it would have a serious impact, with only 7% believing that it would have a minor impact. At 52%, people personally affected were the only group lower than the overall figure. This is a result of the relatively high proportion of within that group who did not know how the proposal would impact them personally (16%).

Fig 4.3 If you think the proposal will have a negative impact, how serious do you believe this will be? By responder group (%)



5. Text box comments on the proposal

5.1 Some people supported the proposal and viewed it as a relatively modest reduction. Some argued that it made sense to bring the level into line with the nationally-set minimum or felt it was reluctantly justifiable given the ongoing funding constraints within public services.

"I believe that in the current financial climate the impact will be no more than the impact felt by others in need and is therefore sad but justifiable"

5.2 Some also agreed that there should be parity between people of working and pensionable ages and felt that it was wrong to assume that pensioners had lower costs.

5.3 A far greater proportion of comments focussed on the perceived injustice of the proposal. A recurrent theme was that people with disability did not choose to have their conditions or to need benefits and welfare support in order to live independently. One respondent felt that the proposal was a 'tax on disability' and many felt it offered an uncomfortable judgement on contemporary society:

"What does it say about our society that we can so penalise those who are among the least affluent in our society and have very real needs?"

5.4 It was noted that although the minimum income for people of pensionable age was currently set at a lower rate, owing to the nationally-set 'triple-lock', which guarantees that the state pension will rise annually by a minimum of 2.5%

meaning that pensioners actually received a higher minimum income than working age people, even though the latter was currently set 5% higher.

Quality of life

Cost of Living

5.5 By a considerably margin, the most frequent comments focussed upon the practical impact of a £5 a week reduction in available funds and how difficult this would be to manage within already very tight, inflexible budgets.

"I don't have enough money to live on now. I am totally hand to mouth every week & never have any money left if there is any problems or repairs etc. needed."

"It would be the difference between eating or heating and lighting the house"

"The church I attend often gives me a food parcel as I already struggle on existing income"

5.6 People were greatly worried about increased costs and their inability to cover them and in particular the risk that the proposal would lead to increased hardship. This worry had been exacerbated by the cumulative impact of previous reductions in eligibility, benefits and support alongside the high cost of living in West Sussex.

"If you squeeze any more money it would cause me great financial hardship"

5.7 As a result of these pressures, there was considerable anxiety about increasing risk of debt, or becoming unable to service existing debt. Similarly, people feared they would lose any, already slim, chance of saving any money.

"I am already challenged more than enough with my disability/illness. I work hard to manage my finances. This will put me in debt which would be incredibly depressing. It will push me over the edge"

Accessing support

5.8 People were also concerned that they would have less money to pay their contribution for the services they had been assessed as eligible for and would therefore take these up at a lower level, or stop them altogether.

"If this contribution is increased by £5 per week the numbers of vulnerable people with eligible needs not taking up support services will increase. This would result in needs, assessed as eligible, not being met; an increased burden on unpaid carers; an increase in reliance on informal support networks where vulnerable people at risk of abuse are not monitored by the local authority"

Wellbeing

5.9 As the above comment illustrates, respondents feared that the proposal would risk a considerable reduction in people's wellbeing. This was exacerbated as they would likely no longer be able to afford social and leisure activities or transport costs. This would lead to greater risk of isolation and loneliness.

"my eye-sight affects what I do as I am registered as partially sighted. I rely on taxis to attend a group at Buddy's. If you implemented this I would be unable to attend, leaving me socially isolated"

5.10 Overall, there was concern over the potential increase in stress and anxiety for people affected by the proposal and potentially deeply negative impacts on people's mental health and wellbeing.

"Already on low income, no other finances available. Would mean less day centre which could result in more isolation which will lead to being a mental health issue. (Self harming et.) And other health issues due to learning disability and mobility issues. Would impact all areas of life not in a good way. If I did live at home with parents I could not survive"

Impact on families and unpaid carers

5.11 Alongside the impact on people directly affected by the proposal, the potential impacts upon their families were also raised. People feared that there would be increasing care demands upon the family, as affected individual's lives were further constrained.

It would also be extremely stressful for me, as my daughter who is already suffering from depression, will become more unhappy and anxious if her options are reduced even further. She is likely to start her seizures and anxiety attacks again. I am in remission from cancer, and this will obviously impact on my health as well as hers, I already do a lot of support for her, due to lack of funds.

5.12 As the above quote illustrates, this risk was particularly great given the fragility of some families, as parents managed their own disabilities or additional needs. These families also often had limited overall incomes and would struggle to cover any reduction in weekly finances.

5.13 The proposal was also a source of anxiety for some elderly parents as it increased their worry as to how their child could maintain independence when they could no longer support them.

"as someone who has been caring for my son for going on 4 years and he is getting worse by the day there will come a point bearing in mind the fact I am 69 and ALSO DISABLED. I won't be able to care for him or worse case scenario I die and he has no one to help him or take over his care causes me great worry"

(Emphasis in original)

5.14 A recurrent theme was that the relatively small saving derived from this proposal was a false economy. This was largely as a result of its potential impact on the fragile balance many families struck in providing support to their relatives. Any disturbance of this could have costly ramifications for the whole social care system.

My son at 20 needs constant care + support 24/7. It is an arduous task + takes a strain on us all as a family. If the financial support is also cut then this will put further strain on us and if we cannot cope then this could jeopardise his life at home and if he were handed over to the authorities to care for then this would be at a very much higher cost than the contribution that is currently provided towards his care"

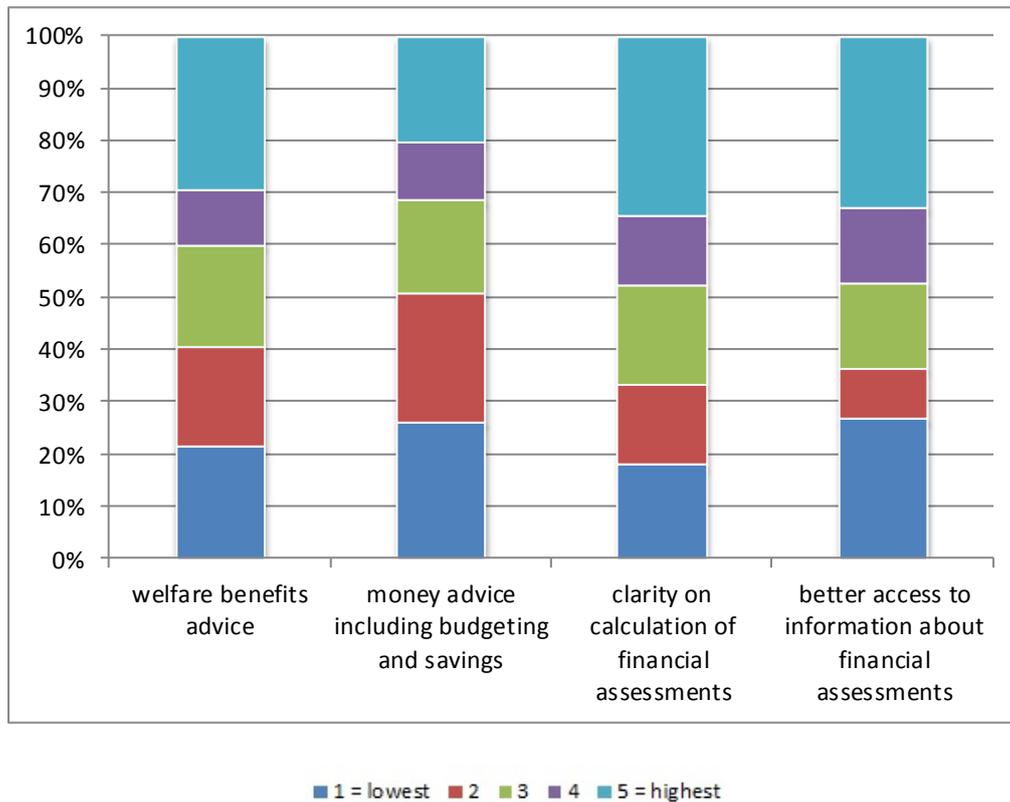
Alternative options

5.15 A number of alternative options were suggested for consideration in order to cover the saving covered by the proposal or to less its impact for affected people.

- Building in a transition period for existing claimants. That the new rate should be bought in for new claimants and existing claimants should remain on the old rate, but not increased each year until the new rate was higher than the old rate due to inflation etc. This would reduce the immediate impact of a cut for existing claimants.
- Means testing to exempt those on a low income from any change in the minimum level.
- Reduce spending on other council services, such as road repair or community building projects, to maintain the funding.
- Reduction in Council management costs
- Council to lobby the government for extra funding in order to avoid cuts on disabled people or to remove the restrictions on raising council tax.
- Cost of the saving should fall on residents more able to pay, this included raising council tax, or wealthier pensioners forgoing their winter fuel allowance.

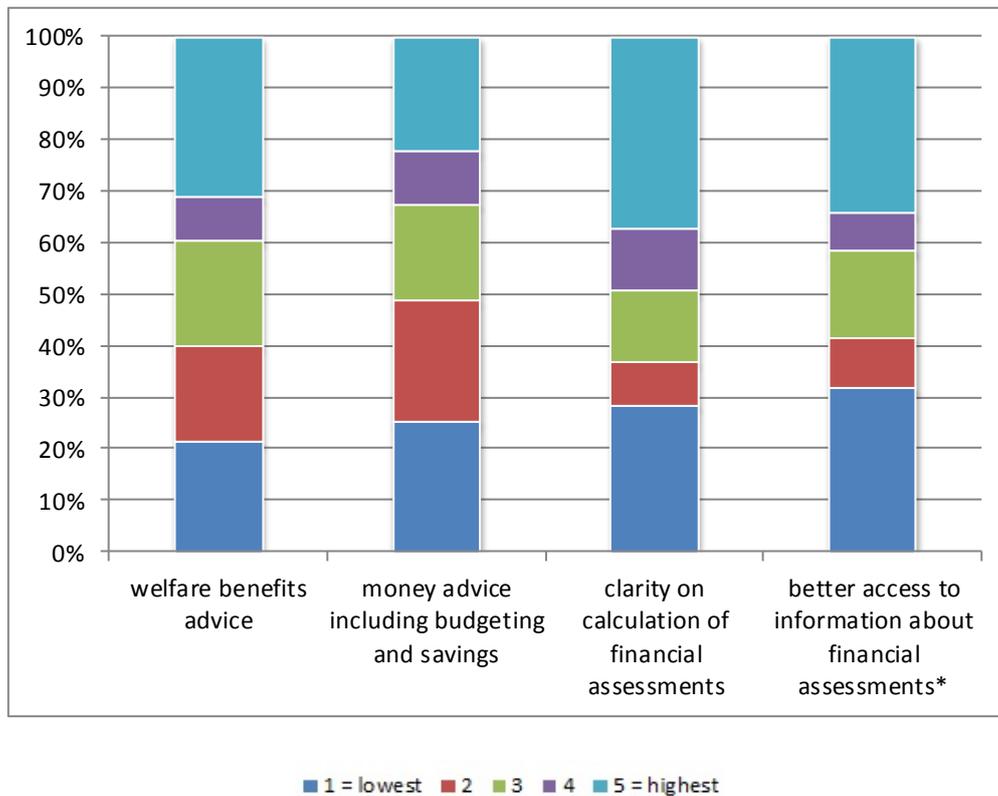
6. Potential Mitigations

Fig 6.1 On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being lowest and 5 being the highest, for far do you believe any of the following could reduce the potential impact of the proposal? Overall (%)



6.1 **Fig 6.1** shows that of all those responding, clarity on the calculation of financial assessments and better access to information about financial assessments were viewed as most potentially helpful with 48% of respondents selecting options 4 or 5 for both. As per **Fig 6.2**, people affected by the proposal reported broadly similar views of the suggested mitigations.

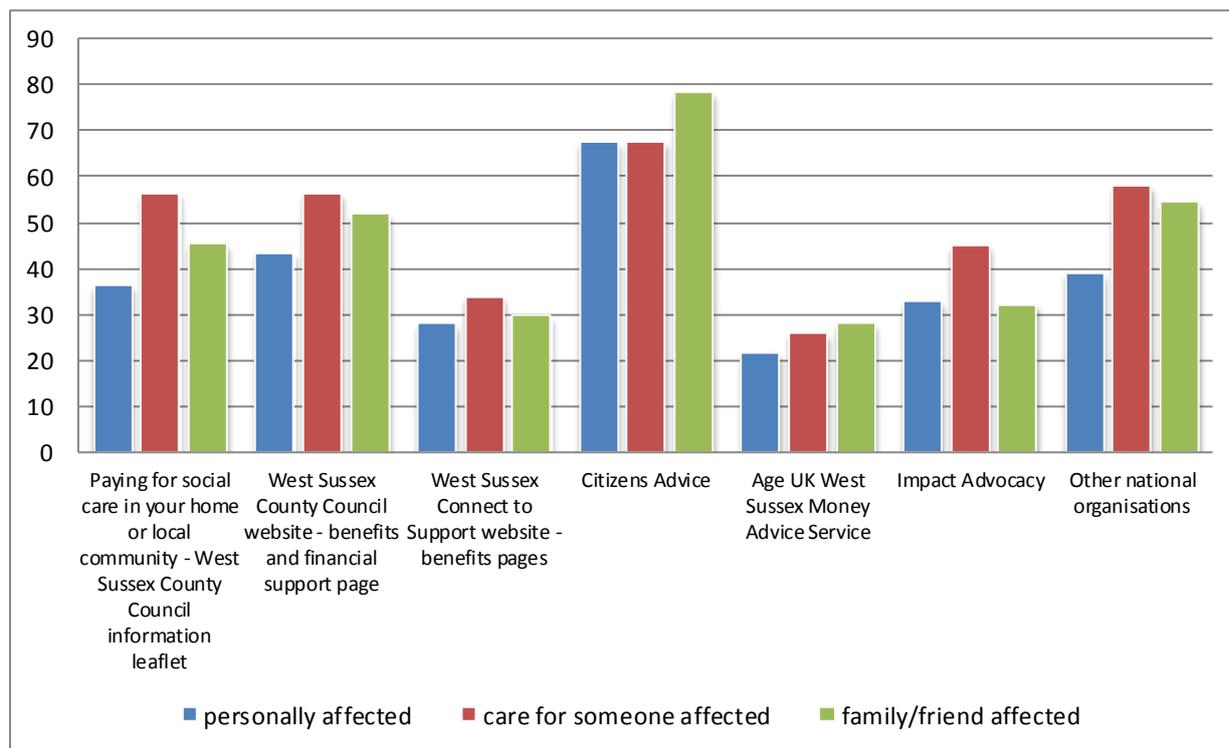
Fig 6.2 On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being lowest and 5 being the highest, for far do you believe any of the following could reduce the potential impact of the proposal? People personally affected by the proposal (%)



* The Easyread version of the survey asked only the first three questions about potential mitigations. The data given in this column is drawn from users of adults' services who completed the standard survey only.

6.2 As **Fig 6.3** shows, in general people who would be personally affected by the decision were less likely than those caring for someone potentially affected or a family member or friend to be aware of local information channels. On average, 38% of people who were personally affected were aware of a channel, compared to 49% of carers and 46% of family members or friends.

Fig 6.3: Are you aware of the following local channels of information and advice about welfare benefits and finances? Please tick all that apply. (% , by group)



7. Comments about potential mitigations

7.1 The most frequent comment was that the only way to mitigate the proposal was for it not to proceed. For some it was *'insulting to assume advice will replace funds'*.

7.2 Similarly, many people felt that even if the suggested mitigations may potentially be beneficial, they could not cover the impact of losing around £5 per week.

"none of these would (make) any difference what so ever to my financial impact. I already am struggling financially. I am already in receipt of relevant benefit which are not going to better in fact if anything these will be reduced + make the situation even worse"

7.3 Some people noted that the suggested mitigations already existed and a number reported that that they had already fully accessed them. Others argued that improvements to the effectiveness of existing support and advice should not be contingent on cutting people's support.

7.4 The financial assessment process currently used by the Council and its administration of Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) were also highlighted by a number of respondents as being overly complex and opaque. Some people strongly felt that it could be difficult to understand the reasons for decisions, or for staff to be able to explain them.

"In addition to regular, inexplicably varying contributions we are currently paying for an 'underpayment' which I had been unaware of and could not have known about. In fact I do not even know if this so-called debt is accurate as no explanation or apology has ever been offered."

"My son with significant learning difficulties has been assessed more than once in relation to making contributions to his care. He paid his contribution until he went to residential college then – despite writing twice – I have had no reply or transparent reason why or what his contribution should be from then on. I have stopped his contribution and emailed WSCC to say he would pay no more until we have had a new assessment – the silence has been deafening!"

7.5 Issues relating to the administration of financial assessments and disability related expenditure undermined the confidence of some people in the ability to roll out the proposal accurately and transparently. Issues relating to assessments and DRE were also discussed in the focus groups, at para 11.1.

7.6 Whilst some people did agree that the mitigations could potentially be useful, suggestions were also made to improve their effectiveness, these included:

- specialist support for the families of people unable to claim for themselves
- ensuring information was fully accessible
- delivery of information and support services through community groups that people already attended, rather than requiring them to undergo a second conversation with Council staff.
- Ensuring there is ongoing support for the people who would need help to maintain their finances over time.

7.7 One respondent argued that ensuring services were fully accessible and consistent for every disabled person across West Sussex *'would cost far, far more than the proposed saving'*.

8. Focus Groups

8.1 Focus groups were held by nine organisations and groups over the consultation period, with a total of 11 sessions involving 189 participants. An overview is given in **Table 8.1** below.

Table 8.1 Focus Group Overview

Organisation	Date	Number of participants
Asperger's Voice Asperger's self-advocacy group.	25 October 2018	7
Asperger's Syndrome Self Advocacy West Sussex (ASSA)	14 November 2018	7
West Sussex County Council Adults' Services Customer and Carer Group	19 November 2018	6
Outreach 3-Way Learning disability and autism charity	21 November 2018	5
Aldingbourne Country Centre x 3 Learning disability charity	21-23 November 2018	60 (total)
Worthing Speakabout Learning Disability self-advocacy group	22 November 2018	15
West Sussex County Council Adults' Cabinet Member Roundtable – workshop held at the Aldingbourne Country Centre learning disability charity	26 November 2018	70
Minorities Health and Social Care Group	29 November 2018	3
Capital Project Mental Health Trust	30 November 2018	16

9. Key themes

Views on proposal

9.1 Many people felt that they were being targeted as a result of their disability, and that this was unfair as this was outside of their control. It also meant that they were amongst the least able to absorb the impact of a higher contribution and were unlikely to be able to work to make up the loss

"It's wrong to take money from vulnerable people and make their lives more difficult and make them even more vulnerable"

9.2 Whilst the impact was generally viewed as negative for all those affected, it was also argued that it would not be felt equally and that people on smaller packages of care and with a higher degree of independence, would be most affected.

9.3 Overall, participants who were potentially affected by the proposal argued that those of working age had higher weekly costs than pensioners and the higher MIG level was justified. Some of those not directly affected disagreed and felt that it was discriminatory to assume that older people didn't need as much.

9.4 It was noted that pensioners benefited from the 'triple lock' which effectively guaranteed their income and meant that although their MIG was set at a lower level, the amount of income they retained was higher. Some argued that the pensioner MIG should be increased to 30% to ensure equity, rather than reducing the working age level.

9.5 It was also noted that whilst the MIG was calculated nationally, West Sussex was an expensive place to live and therefore people's living costs were higher than the national average and it was already a struggle for some to manage on their limited budgets.

Impact of the proposal on yourself or the person you care for

Budgeting, hardship and debt

9.6 It was consistently emphasised that £5 per week was a significant amount of money for those potentially affected and that loss of this would represent a considerable challenge when managing an already very tight budget.

"£5 may not sound much to you, but it's a lot of money to us, it might be half our total spending money for the week"

9.7 Further reductions to weekly budgets would mean that some people would have to make choices about whether to pay for food, heating or their support. Some equated the loss of £5 per week with the choice between having a meal or not.

9.8 The risk of incurring debt or becoming unable to manage repayments on existing debt was cited. Further, a potential increase in the use of foodbanks was also cited, as people may no longer have enough money to pay for all their food.

Accessing support and maintaining independence

9.9 Already, some people were not accessing support because they could not afford their required contribution and this situation would be further exacerbated by any increase in the amount people would have to pay. Some providers stated that this was already happening as a result of the proposal.

"It might stop people getting the training and support they need to get work, be happy or be more independent at home"

9.10 People worried that they would no longer be able to pay for transport to access social groups and activities and also that they would no longer have enough money to pay for social activities to meet their friends and attend the groups they relied on

"social activity settings are also vital for people to express themselves and relax and to talk to people about sensitive issues such as sexual health"

9.11 It was noted that this proposal was just one change amongst many, including changes to In House day services and Universal Credit and that the cumulative impact of these represented a significant challenge for many people's independence and wellbeing.

Personal safety and anxiety

9.12 Some people feared that if they could no longer afford to attend social groups and activities then they may have to 'wander the streets'. This led to concern over personal safety, with fears of being attacked or taken advantage of.

9.13 Fears over personal safety were a further example of the general anxiety expressed by people potentially affected by the proposal. This had been considerably aggravated owing to the layer of 'upset, anger and distress' which had resulted from the cumulative impact of previous reductions in support and changes to benefits. This had been further exacerbated by concerns over the potential impact of Universal Credit which, in combination with the MIG proposal, was very unsettling for a number of people.

"I was stressed, angry, depressed and upset last time you cut my support and benefits; I don't want it to happen again"

9.14 The change, and the stress of dealing with it, would also be particularly challenging for people with Autism and those with mental health issues.

10. Mitigations

10.1 Whilst more advice about benefits, budgets and savings and debt recovery could be helpful, as would information about the benefits process, for many people this would not be able to cover the practical impact of losing £5 a week.

10.2 A provider supporting people with learning disabilities noted that the Council provided some people with more support than their assessed hours of need and recommended that the assessment process was reconfigured to address this. They also suggested greater flexibility in support planning and funding in order to increase/reduce levels of support over time, as necessary.

10.3 Engaging with local businesses, through their corporate social responsibility, to provide equipment and create jobs and training opportunities for people with disabilities was also suggested. An appealing, mutually beneficial proposal would be needed to support any approach to businesses. One potential option was the creation of an ethical/social business award or mark that local businesses could sign up to.

10.4 Commissioning was also highlighted as a potential mitigation. The Council could use this as a tool to create a new market with business and the voluntary sector to integrate people into their local communities and employment, where appropriate.

10.5 If the proposal was approved then information should be made available to all in the wider system who provide advice and support to people affected. This included local social prescribing teams as this would assist GPs in advising patients with associated stress and anxiety.

10.6 Some queried why other groups with more money were not being asked to contribute more instead. Alongside wealthier residents, this also included Members and officers of the council, and it was suggested that their remuneration should be considered.

10.7 It was also suggested that a 'means test' should be applied on a case-by-case basis to determine who could afford to pay the higher rate.

11. Other comments

11.1 A persistent theme in the focus groups was the lack of clarity as to how the Council managed Disability-Related Expenditure. It was also felt that the assessment process was unclear, it was not certain how long the process would take, what the outcome might be, or that the outcome would be correct.

11.2 It was noted that the draft Adults' Services Vision and Strategy emphasised the importance of community-based services for its future sustainability, yet the MIG proposal could undermine people's ability to access support in the community.

12. Additional submissions

12.1 A number of additional submissions were received via post, telephone and via email during the period of engagement. These were taken into account in the findings analysis. These are summarised in **Table 12.1**.

Table 12.1 Overview of additional submissions

Individual or organisation making submission	Method of submission	Submission overview
Parent of person potentially affected by the proposal	Undated submission	Highlighting potential issues related to the application of the Minimum Income Guarantee by the County Council.
Person working with vulnerable adults	Via email, 3 October 2018	Outlining the current financial difficulties and their impacts on vulnerable people.
Parent of person potentially affected by proposal	Via email, 15 October 2018	Representation outlining opposition to the proposal and a number of alternative recommendations. Representation submitted on behalf of their child.
West Sussex resident	Via email, 16 October 2018	Comments regarding the application of the cost living to the MIG calculation.
Parent of person potentially affected by proposal	Call to CarePoint Contact Centre, 22 October 2018	To register opposition to the proposal
Individual completing the Easyread survey	Call to CarePoint Contact Centre, 24 October	Feedback on the negative impacts of the proposal on affected people. Also, queried the cost of producing Easyread materials.
Parent of person potentially impact by decision	Call to CarePoint Contact Centre, 25 October 2018	Suggestion to make savings by ensuring that people given housing owing to disability are eligible Also, discussed negative impact of demographic survey questions for some people and questioned whether they were necessary

Member of the public	Via email, 2 November 2018	Suggestion to increase council tax to meet required saving
On behalf of an organisation supporting people with learning disabilities	Letter to Cabinet Member for Adults and Health, 26 November 2018	Outlining a series of objections to the proposal, relating to its negative impacts on those potentially affected.
Learning disability charity trustee	Letter to Cabinet Member for Finance, 29 November 2018	Various comments regarding the potential negative impacts of the proposal on affected people
Parent of person potentially affected by the proposal	Via email, 30 November 2018	Outlining three reasons why the proposal should not be implemented and providing justification for an increase in the minimum income level for all adult social care service users.
Managing Director of Aldingbourne Trust	Letter to Cabinet Member for Adults and Health, 26 November 2018	Outlining a series of objections to the proposal, relating to its negative impacts on those potentially affected.
On behalf of Aspens Charities	Letter to Cabinet Member for Adults and Health, 26 November 2018	Outlining a series of objections to the proposal, relating to its negative impacts on those potentially affected.
Parent of person potentially affected by the proposal	Via letter, 28 November 2018	Outlining a series of objections to the proposal, on behalf of their child.
Parents of a person who may be affected by the proposal.	Via email, 2 December 2018	Representation outlining opposition to the proposal and its potential impact on their family member.