



Local Council Tax Support Scheme

Research Report

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Prepared For: Stroud District Council

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1. Introduction

This report details the findings from the research carried out by Future Focus Research regarding the views of local residents on local council tax support scheme reform in the 6 District Councils in Gloucestershire.

This report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2	Approach to research
Chapter 3	Gloucestershire County Council (and the six District Councils)
Chapter 4	Cheltenham Borough Council
Chapter 5	Cotswold District Council
Chapter 6	Forest of Dean District Council
Chapter 7	Gloucester City Council
Chapter 8	Stroud District Council
Chapter 9	Tewkesbury Borough Council

2. Approach to research

2.1 Approach

Telephone interviews were conducted with residents across the Gloucestershire County Council area. A total of 1,170 interviews were conducted, distributed as follows:

- Cheltenham Borough Council (200)
- Cotswold District Council (170)
- Forest of Dean District Council (200)
- Gloucester City Council (200)
- Stroud District Council (200)
- Tewkesbury Borough Council (200)

In addition to the target of achieving 200 interviews in each district, within each district we aimed to achieve the following:

- 50/50 distribution in terms of gender
- One third of interviews in each of the following age categories (44 and under, 45-64 and 65 and over).

The surveys lasted a maximum of 10 minutes. The following survey introduction was used:

Good morning / afternoon / evening. My name is ... and I'm calling from Future Focus Research. We have been commissioned by all of the six councils in Gloucestershire to undertake a survey with local residents to understand your opinions on the proposed changes to Council Tax. I would be grateful if you would spare a little of your time to answer some questions. The interview will take less than 10 minutes to complete.

Once a respondent had agreed to take part and the relevant quota information had been obtained, the following statement was read out to respondents by way of setting the context for the research:

Firstly I need to read out some information to you which will assist you with answering the questions in the survey. Council Tax Benefit helps people on low income to pay their council tax and the local council receives a grant from the Government to cover the cost of this in full. In April 2013, each council is required to implement a new local scheme to replace the current council tax benefit system. The Government grant will only fund 90% of the cost of the scheme and local Councils will have to fund the 10% shortfall. This reduction in funding is estimated to be approximately £3.8m across Gloucestershire. Councils are required to consult with residents on their draft local scheme. Given the impact of any cuts in benefits on vulnerable people and the short time the councils have to implement this scheme, the six local councils in Gloucestershire are proposing to maintain the same level of council tax support for year 1 (2013/14) and then make changes in year 2 to try and reduce the cost of support for council tax. This means those people in receipt of council tax benefit will continue to receive the same level of help as they currently do for next year.

2.2 Presenting the results

The charts and reporting have been structured so that the results are illustrated both with and without the 'don't know' responses included in base size and therefore calculation of percentages. Often, the inclusion of the 'don't know responses' can make understanding the data more difficult, particularly when seeking to compare responses from different sub-groups (in this case the comparisons between each district council). However, a 'don't know' response is still valid and can provide interesting findings in research.

Therefore, to ensure that this report provides maximum output, for each question we have provided the results with 'don't know' responses included and then additionally looked at the results where 'don't know' responses have been excluded. For those charts where 'don't know responses have been excluded, we have ordered the chart according to the strength of a particular opinion from one district to another, enabling easier comparisons of the range of opinions between districts and how this compares at a Gloucestershire wide level.

3. Gloucestershire

3.1 Council tax support for 2013/14

This section examines respondent answers to the following question:

Q3 To what extent do you agree or disagree that council tax support for 2013/14 should be broadly the same as the current council tax benefit scheme?

Figure 3.1

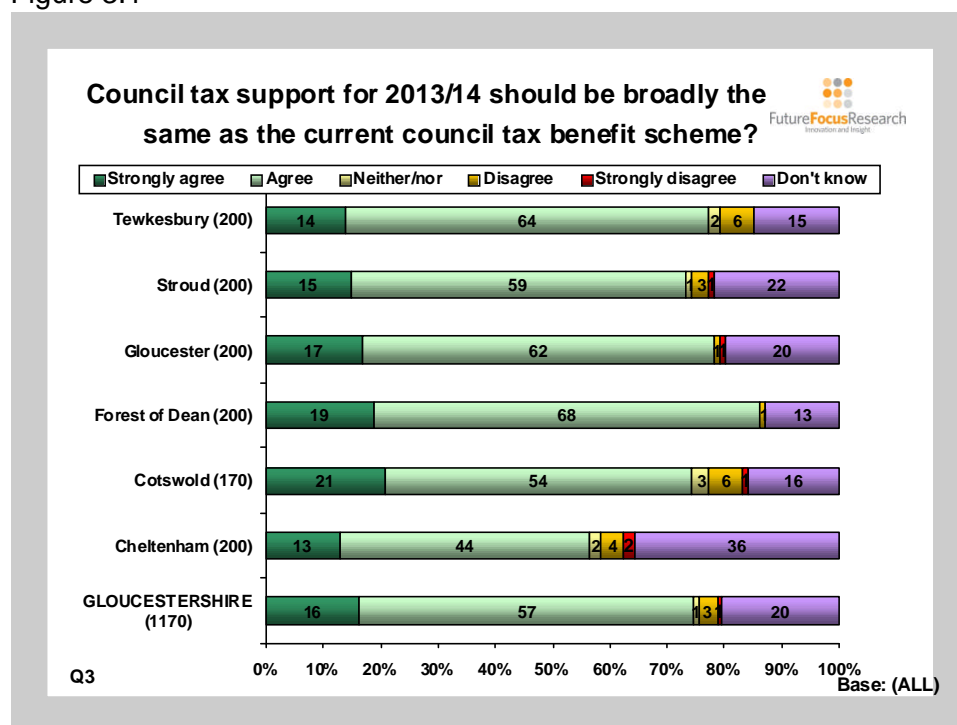
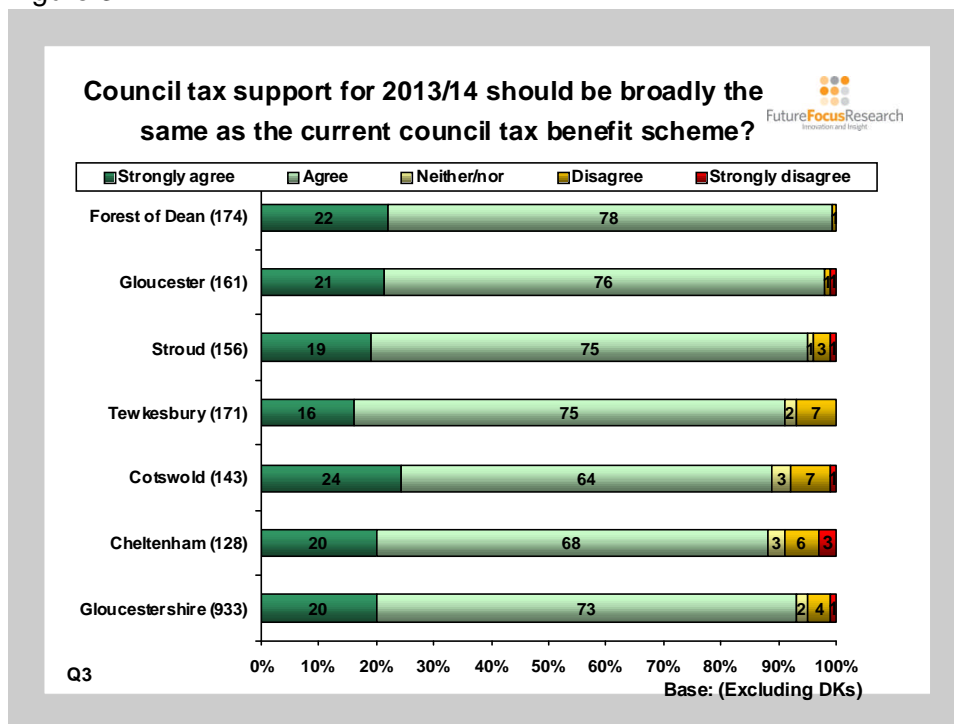


Figure 3.2



As illustrated in Figure 3.2, a majority of respondents across all 6 district council areas agreed that council tax support for 2013/14 should be broadly the same as the current scheme.

3.2 Keep benefit reductions as low as possible?

The following two charts examine respondent answers to the following question:

Q4 If the Council makes changes to the local scheme in the future, to what extent do you agree or disagree that they should aim to keep the benefit reductions as low as possible to protect vulnerable and working age people on the lowest income?

Figure 3.3

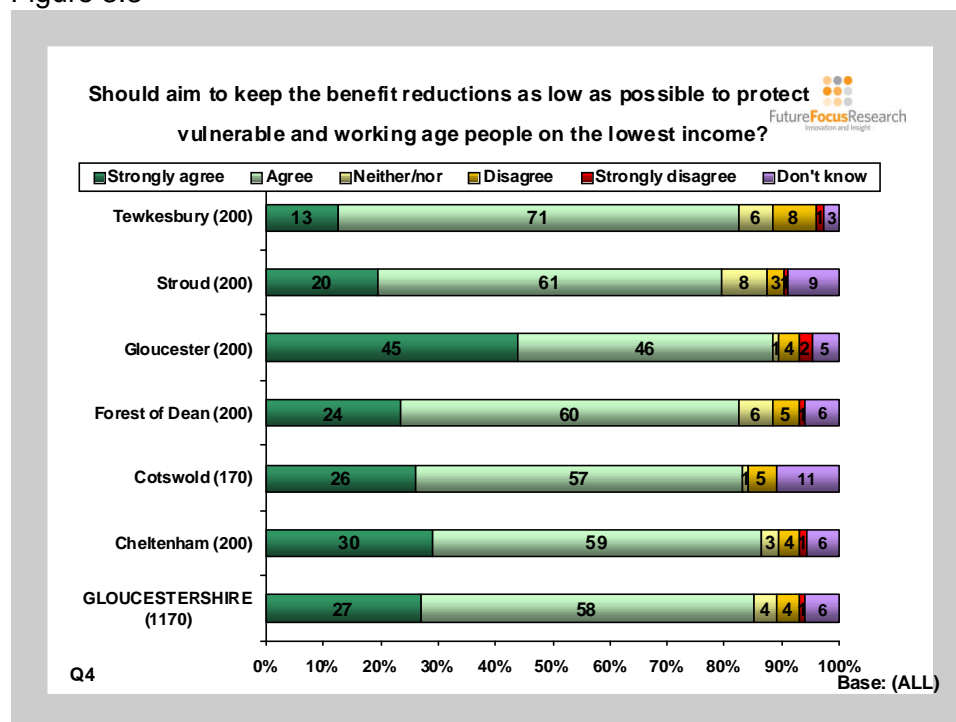


Figure 3.4

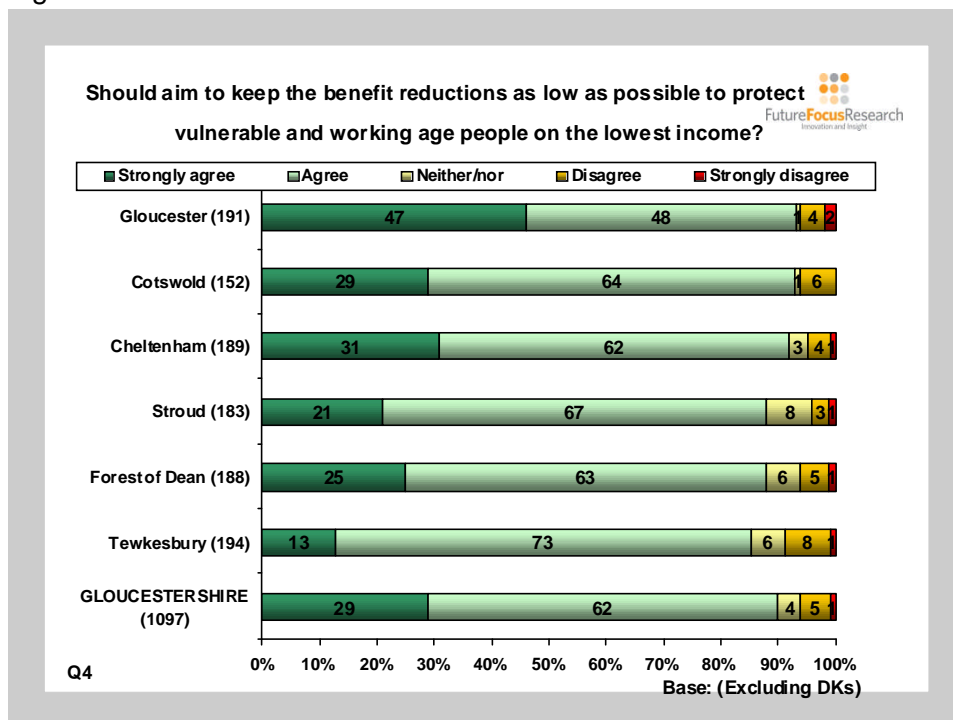


Figure 3.4 demonstrates that similar opinions were held across all 6 district council areas regarding the need to protect vulnerable and working age people on the lowest when assessing any potential benefit reductions.

3.3 Protection of people of pension age?

This section examines responses to the following question:

Q5 To what extent do you agree or disagree that people of pension age should be protected from any of the proposed changes?

Figure 3.5

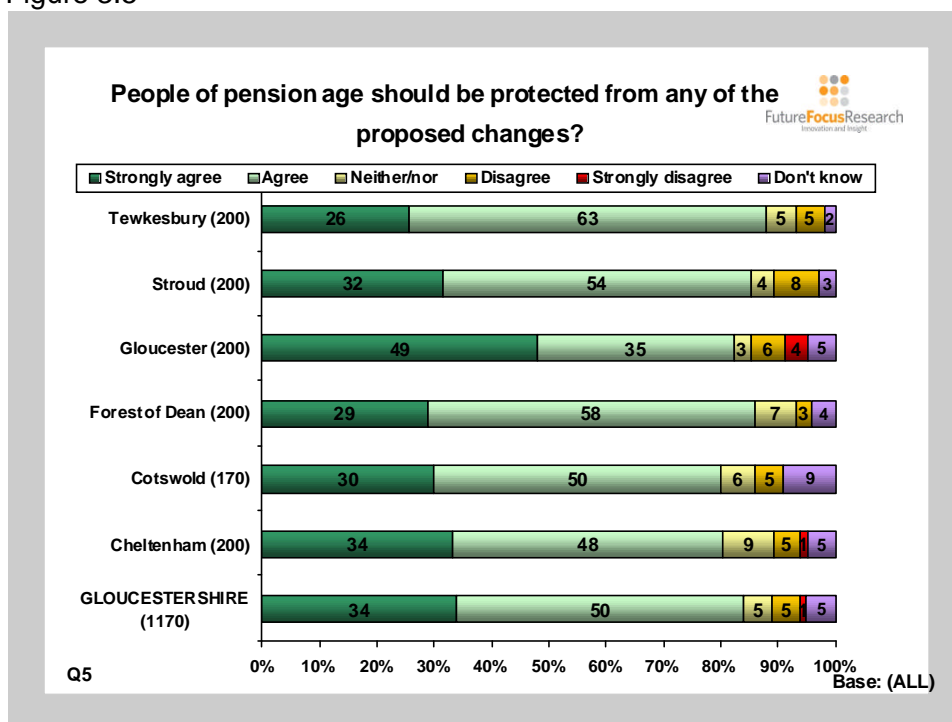


Figure 3.6

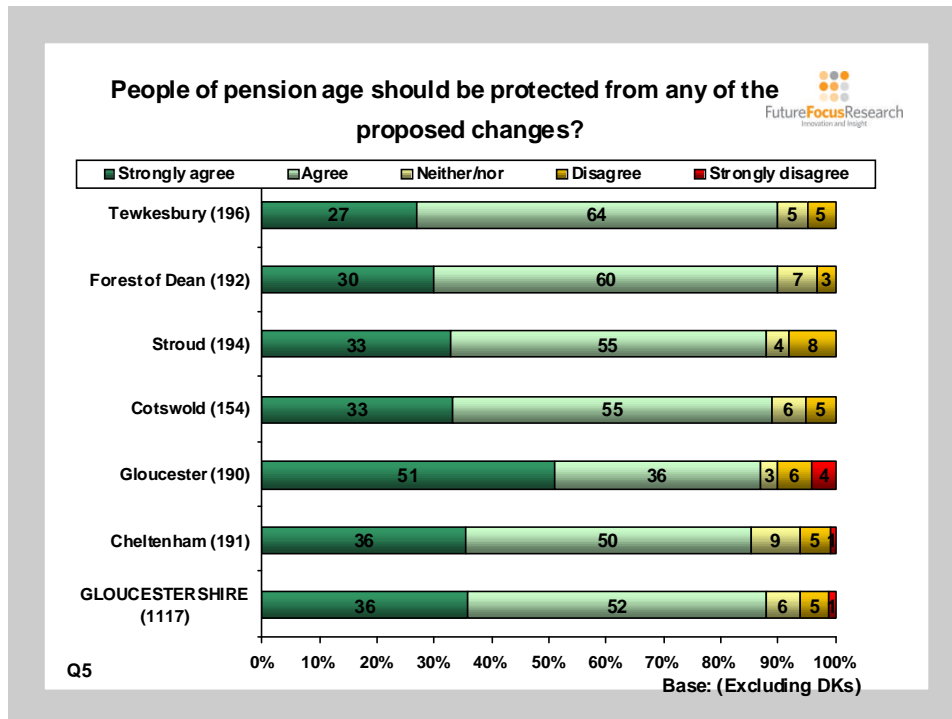


Figure 3.6 shows that across all 6 district council areas, respondents felt that people of pension age should be protected from any of the proposed changes.

3.4 Single person discount

This section examines responses to the following question:

Q6 A single person living in a property is currently entitled to receive a 25% discount regardless of their income. The Council is not currently able to vary this discount under a local scheme but to what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council should be able to reduce this discount in the future if we could?

Figure 3.7

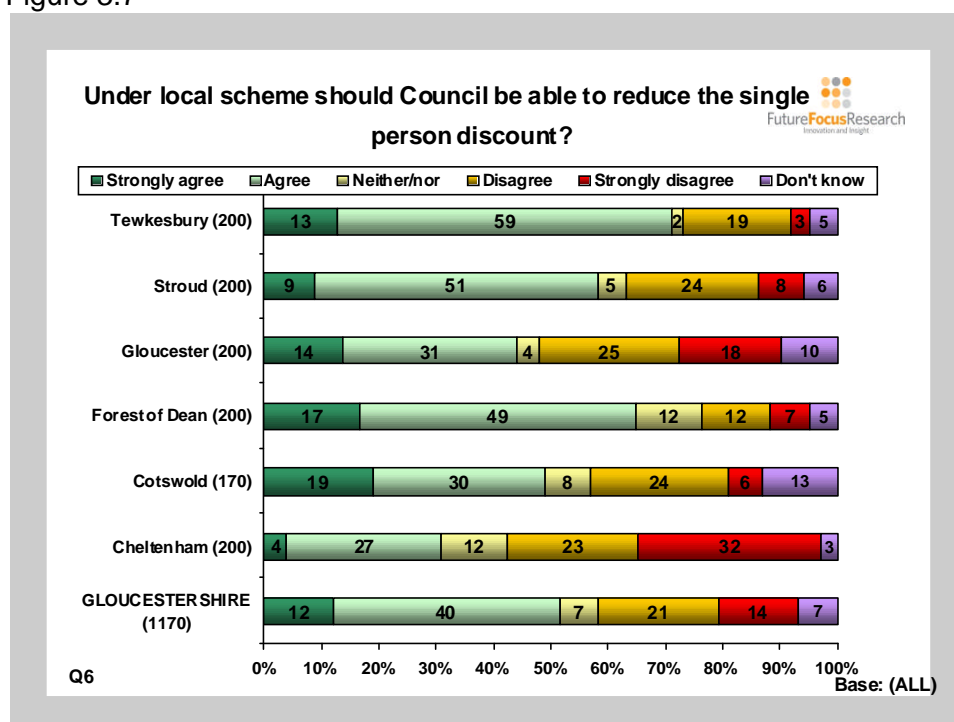


Figure 3.8

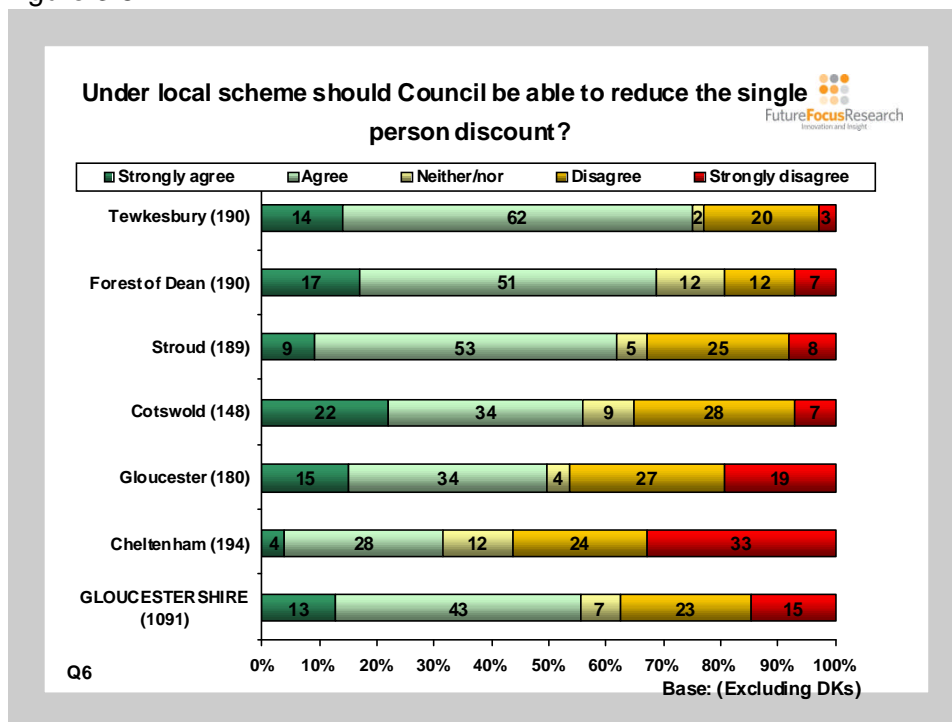


Figure 3.8 illustrates that there were contrasting views between the 6 district councils regarding the ability of the council to reduce the single discount should it wish to under a new local council tax scheme. In Tewkesbury, 76% agreed that the council should have such control; whilst in Cheltenham 57% disagreed with this suggestion. At an overall level, 56% of respondents across Gloucestershire were in agreement, whilst 38% disagreed.

3.5 Backdating benefits

The following two charts illustrate respondent answers to the following question:

Q7 At the moment a person can get their council tax benefit backdated for up to six months, if they had a valid reason for not claiming on time. Do you think this should be the same in the Council's local scheme or should it be a shorter period?

Figure 3.9

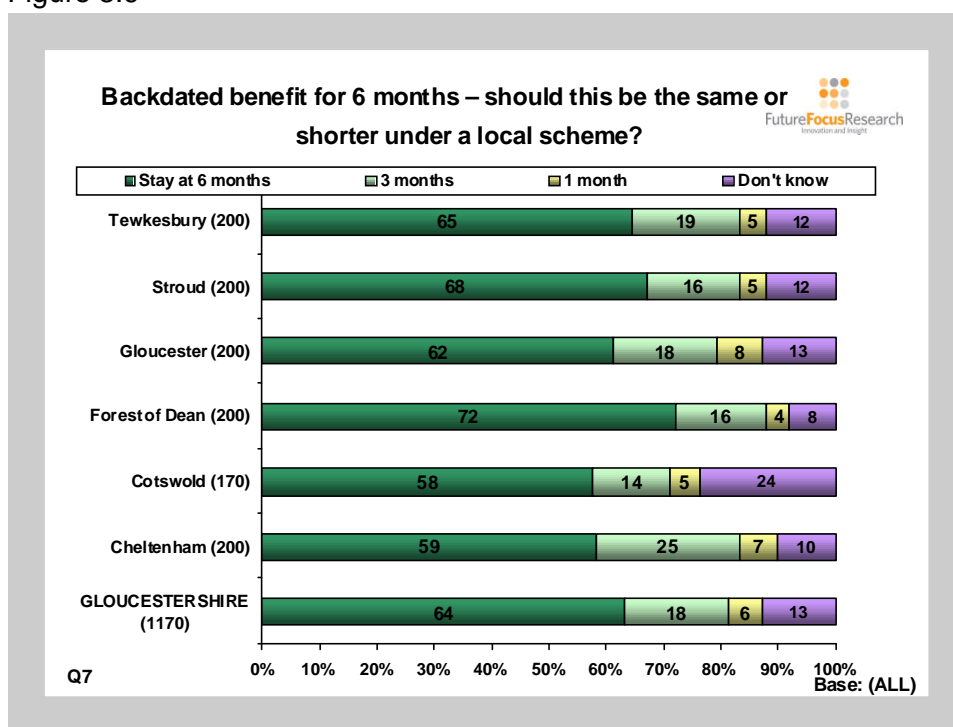
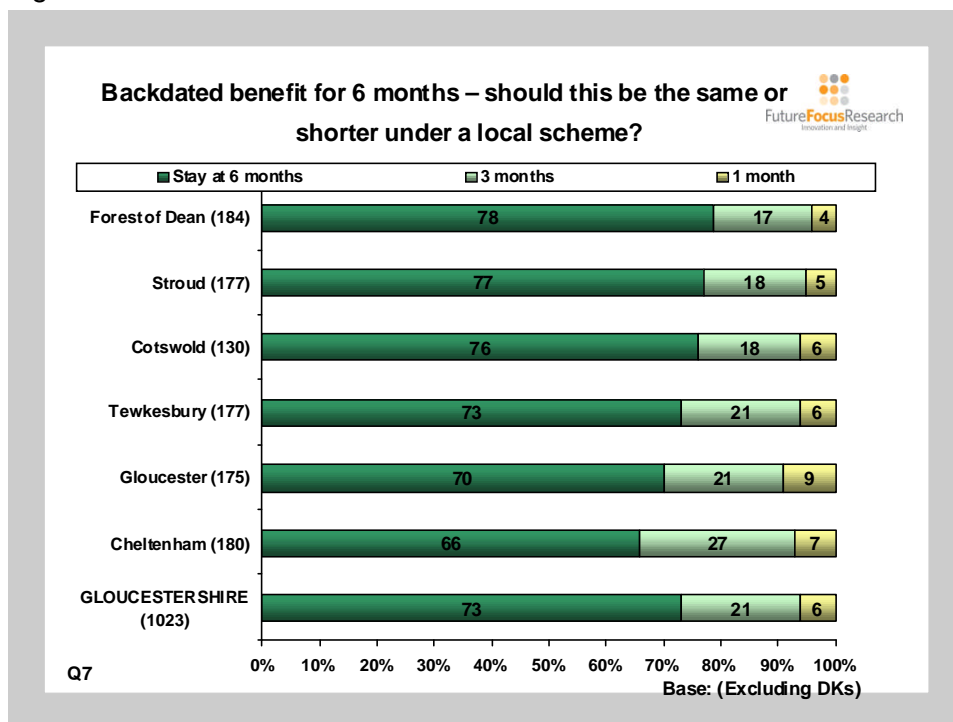


Figure 3.10



At a Gloucestershire wide level, 73% of respondents felt that benefits should remain backdated at 6 months, whilst 21% felt it should be reduced to 3 months. Similar trends were found across each of the 6 districts.

3.6 Benefits and starting work

This section examines how respondents answered the following question:

Q8 At the moment a person can get four weeks council tax benefit after they start work. Do you think this should be the same in the Council's local scheme or should it end as soon as they start work?

Figure 3.11

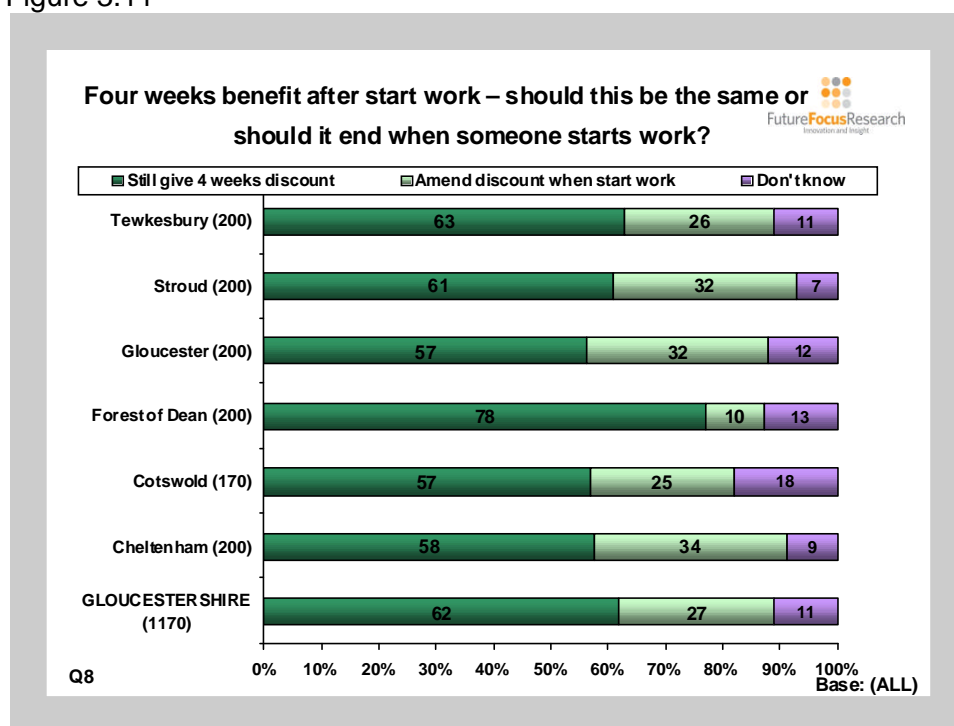


Figure 3.12

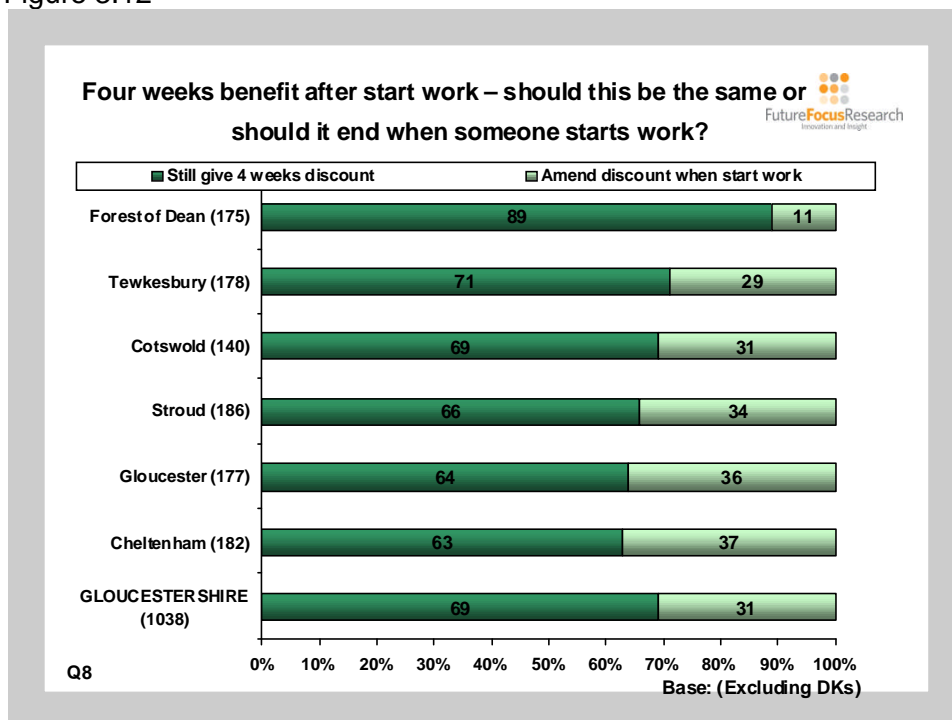


Figure 3.12 illustrates that 69% felt that a 4 week discount should still be given after an individual starts work; whilst 31% felt it should be amended when the individual starts work. Whilst similar trends were found in each of the 6 district areas; 89% of respondents in Forest of Dean felt the 4 week discount should remain compared to 63% in Cheltenham.

A review according whether a respondent was in receipt of benefit or not illustrated the following: Those in receipt of benefit (81%) and those only in receipt of benefit (91%) were more likely to agree that the 4 weeks discount should still be provided compared to an average of 70%.

3.7 Savings limit

This section examines responses to the following question:

Q9 At the moment a person can still get council tax benefit (subject to any other income) if they have savings of up to £16,000. Do you think this should be the same in the Council's local scheme or should there be a lower savings limit?

Figure 3.13

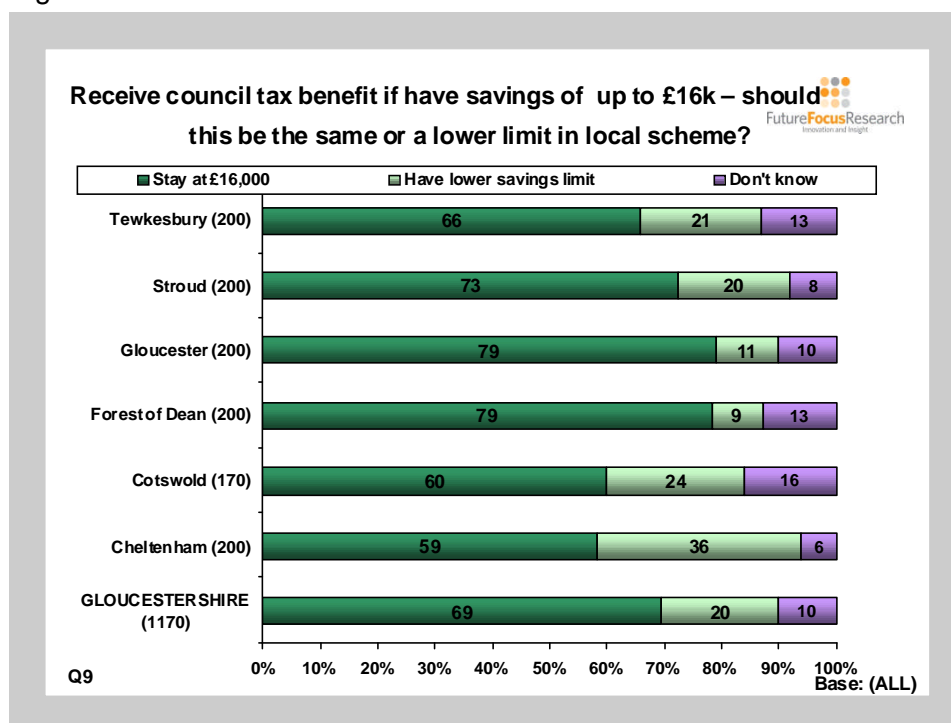
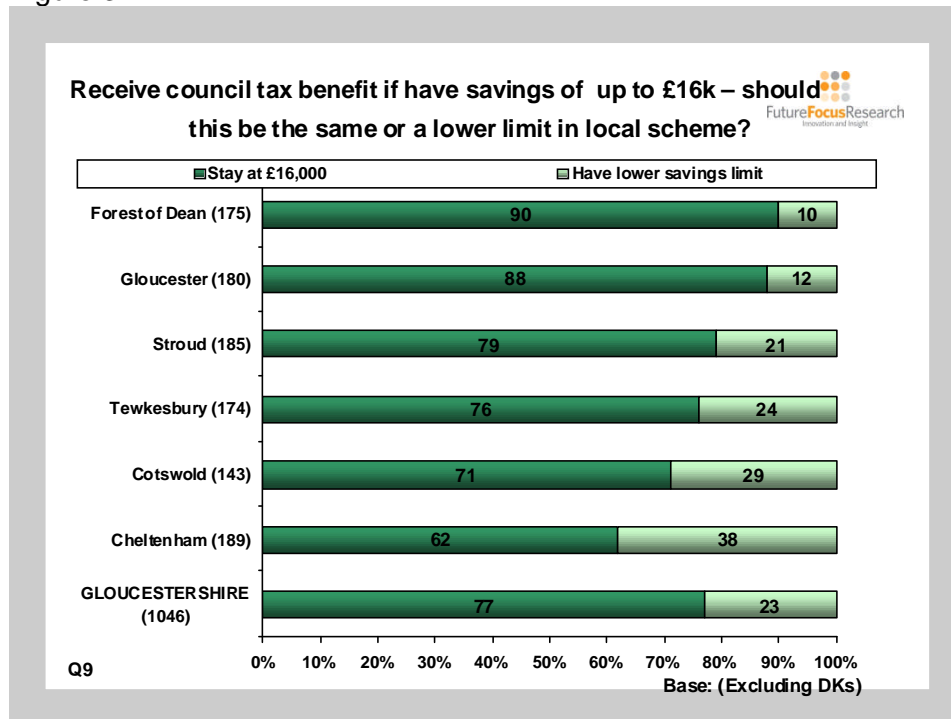


Figure 3.14



Whilst a majority of respondents in each district council area felt that the savings limit should remain at £16k, there was some variation in the strength of opinion: 62% of respondents in Cheltenham Borough Council area felt it should remain at £16k compared to 90% in the Forest of Dean District Council area.

3.8 Low income household support

The following two charts detail responses to the following question:

Q10 At the moment the Council give council tax benefit to people on low income in all council tax bands from A to H (these bands reflect the value of the property). In future, the Council could give support only to people living in lower banded properties. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this?

Figure 3.15

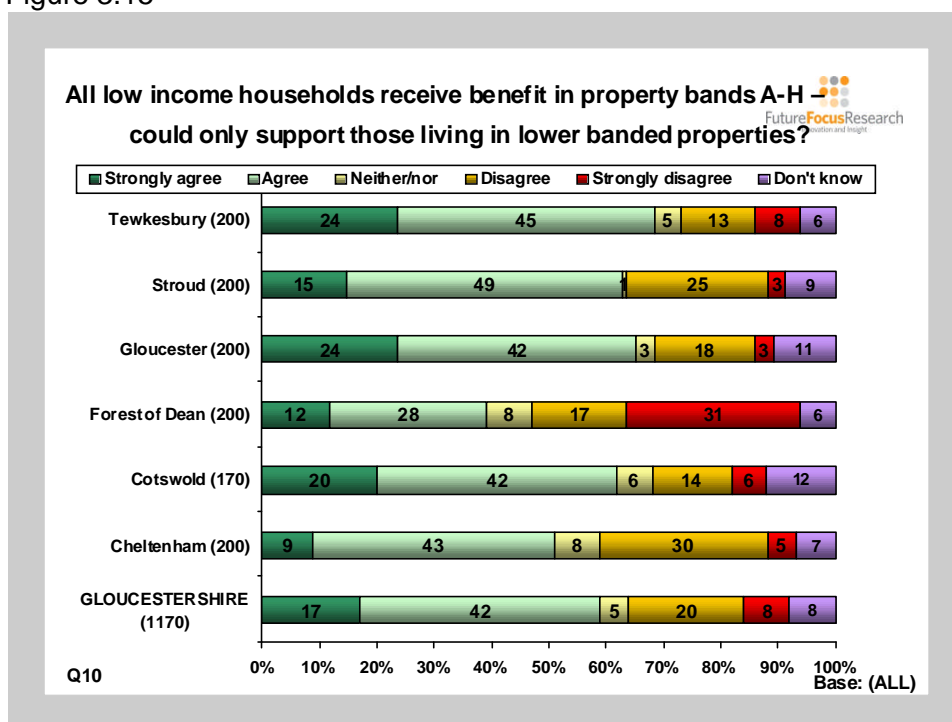


Figure 3.16

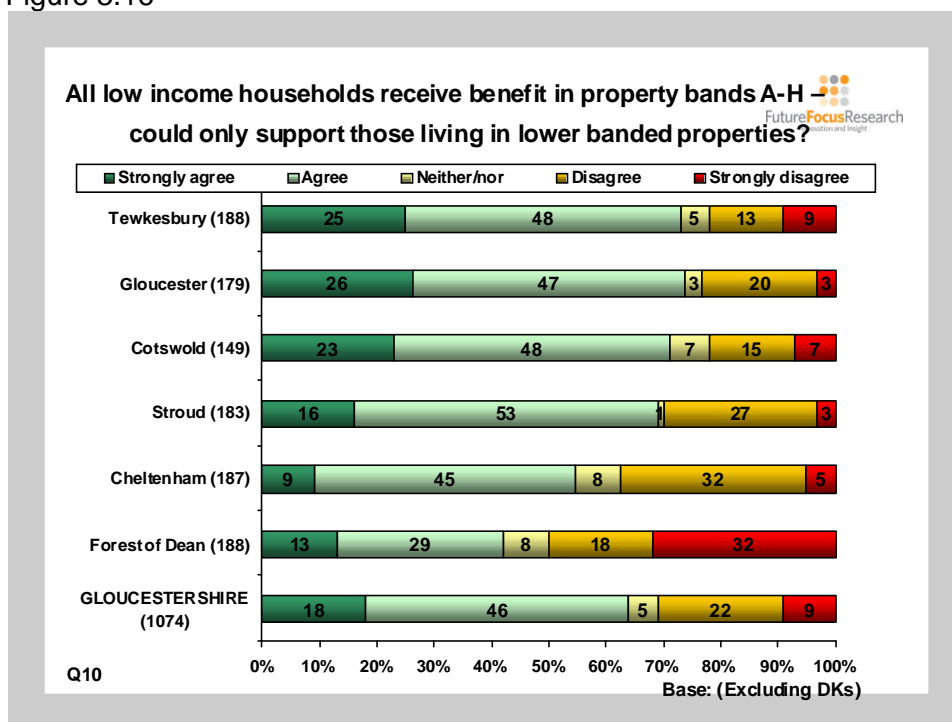


Figure 3.16 illustrates that a majority (64%) agreed that support could only be given to those in lower banded properties. However, there were variations in the level of agreement with this assertion between the 6 district council areas. This ranged from 73% agreement in Tewkesbury to 42% agreement in Forest of Dean.

3.9 Other household members

This section examines responses to the following question:

Q11 If any adult, other than a partner, lives with someone on benefit, the Council expect them to make a contribution towards the council tax bill. (e.g. adult son/daughter who is working) Do you think this should continue in the Council's local scheme?

Figure 3.17

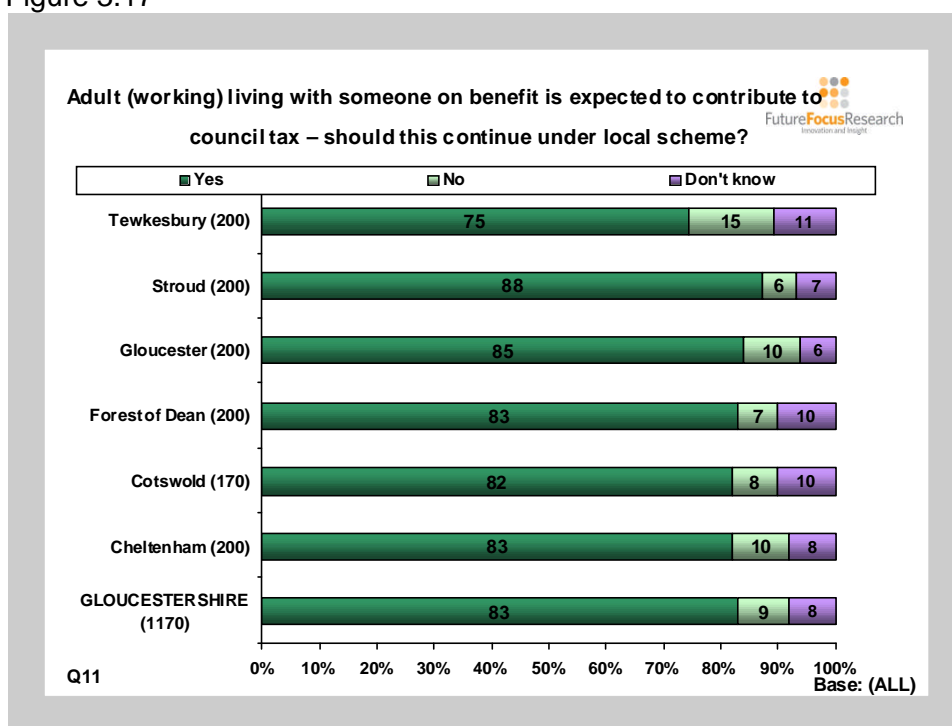


Figure 3.18

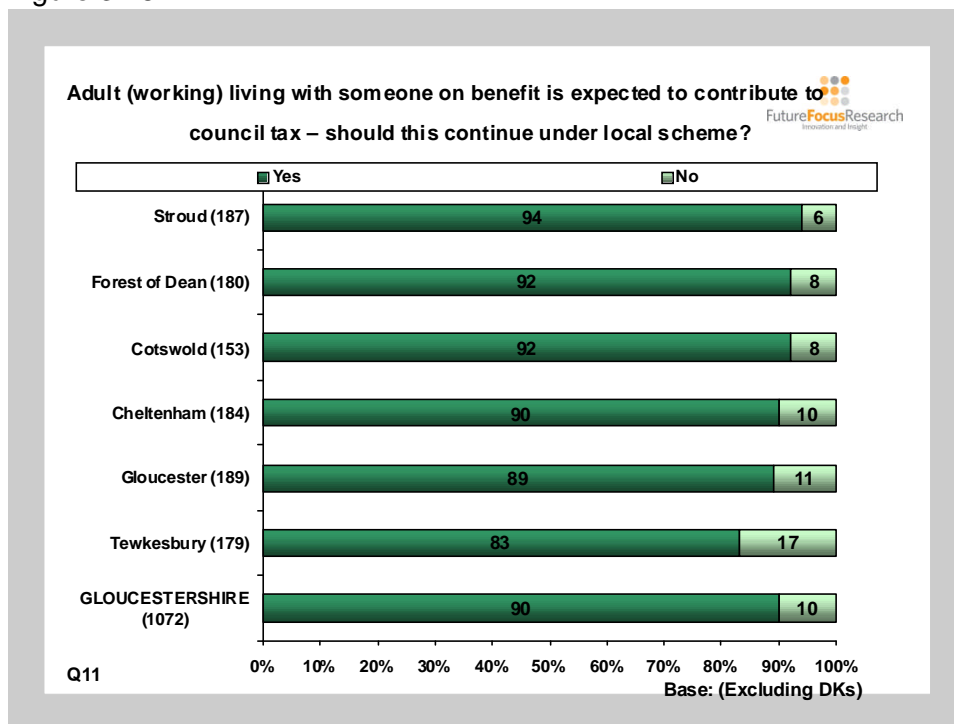


Figure 3.18 illustrates that in each district a majority of respondents felt that in households where there is an adult (working) living with someone on benefit, that adult should continue to contribute to council tax.

3.9 Visits and spot checks

This section examines responses to the following question:

Q12 The Council are planning to introduce more visits and spot checks to make sure people are paying the right amount of council tax. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this?

Figure 3.19

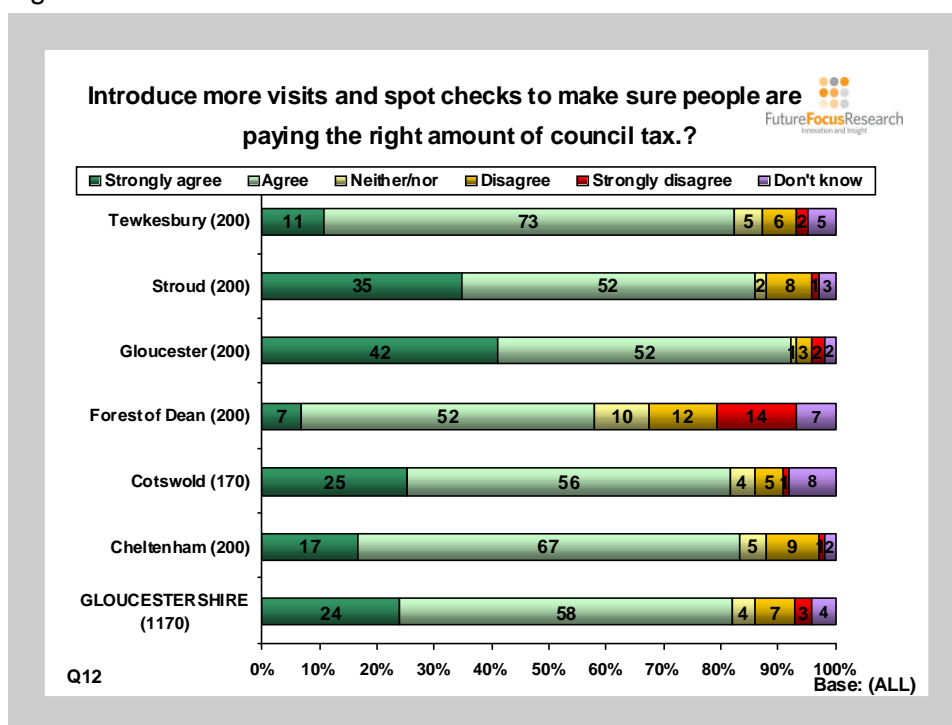


Figure 3.20

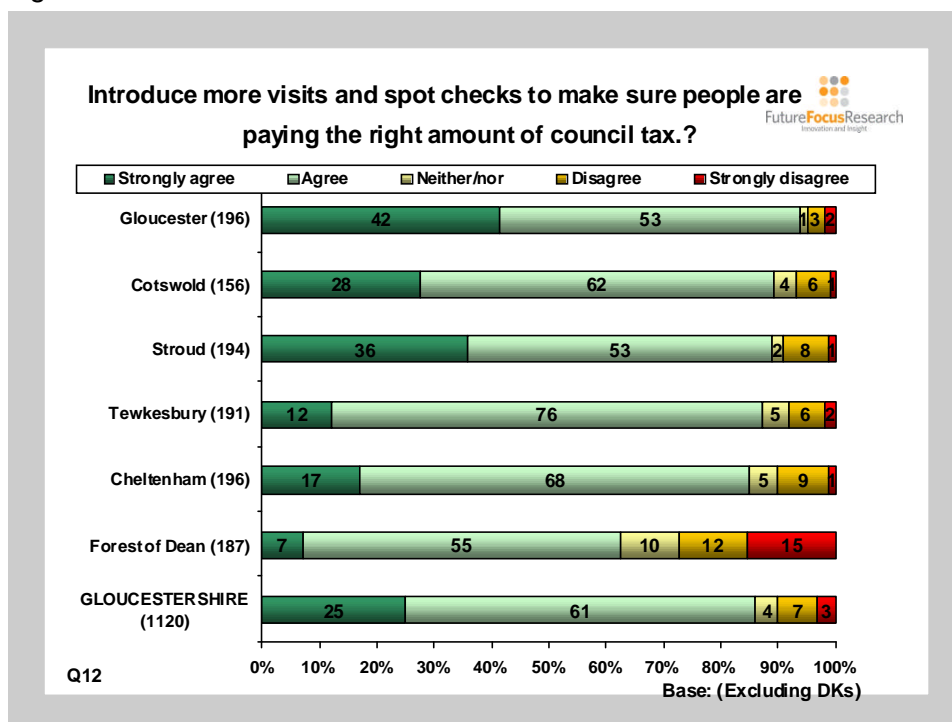


Figure 3.20 illustrates that 86% of respondents agreed that more spot checks and visits should be undertaken to ensure people are paying the right amount of council tax. Whilst respondents in all areas were in agreement with this suggestion, 27% of respondents in Forest of Dean District Council area did not agree with it compared to an average disagreement of 10%.

3.10 Anything else that should be considered?

Respondents were then asked to respond to the following question:

Is there anything else you think the Council should consider when designing a local council tax support scheme?

The following answers were given:

- Nothing: 87%
- Fairer means testing needed: 6%
- Improve the services that we pay for: 1%
- Pensioners need help: 1%
- More communication needed: 1%
- Everyone should have to pay Council Tax: 1%
- Reduce Council tax charges: 1%
- Help for the disabled/ill/vulnerable: 1%

3.11 Summary

The following table provides an overview of the results from this survey.

Question	Survey feedback
Q3 To what extent do you agree or disagree that council tax support for 2013/14 should be broadly the same as the current council tax benefit scheme?	93% agree 5% disagree
Q4 If the Council makes changes to the local scheme in the future, to what extent do you agree or disagree that they should aim to keep the benefit reductions as low as possible to protect vulnerable and working age people on the lowest income?	91% agree 5% disagree
Q5 To what extent do you agree or disagree that people of pension age should be protected from any of the proposed changes?	88% agree 6% disagree
Q6 A single person living in a property is currently entitled to receive a 25% discount regardless of their income. The Council is not currently able to vary this discount under a local scheme but to what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council should be able to reduce this discount in the future if we could?	55% agree 38% disagree
Q7 At the moment a person can get their council tax benefit backdated for up to six months, if they had a valid reason for not claiming on time. Do you think this should be the same in the Council's local scheme or should it be a shorter period?	73% 6 months 21% 3 months 6% 1 month
Q8 At the moment a person can get four weeks council tax benefit after they start work. Do you think this should be the same in the Council's local scheme or should it end as soon as they start work?	69% still provide 31% amend as start work
Q9 At the moment a person can still get council tax benefit (subject to any other income) if they have savings of up to £16,000. Do you think this should be the same in the Council's local scheme or should there be a lower savings limit?	77% stay the same 23% lower limit
Q10 At the moment the Council give council tax benefit to people on low income in all council tax bands from A to H (these bands reflect the value of the property). In future, the Council could give support only to people living in lower banded properties. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this?	64% agree 31% disagree
Q11 If any adult, other than a partner, lives with someone on benefit, the Council expect them to make a contribution towards the council tax bill. (e.g. adult son/daughter who is working) Do you think this should continue in the Council's local scheme?	90% yes 10% no
Q12 The Council are planning to introduce more visits and spot checks to make sure people are paying the right amount of council tax. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this?	86% agree 10% disagree

4. Cheltenham Borough Council

Figure 4.1

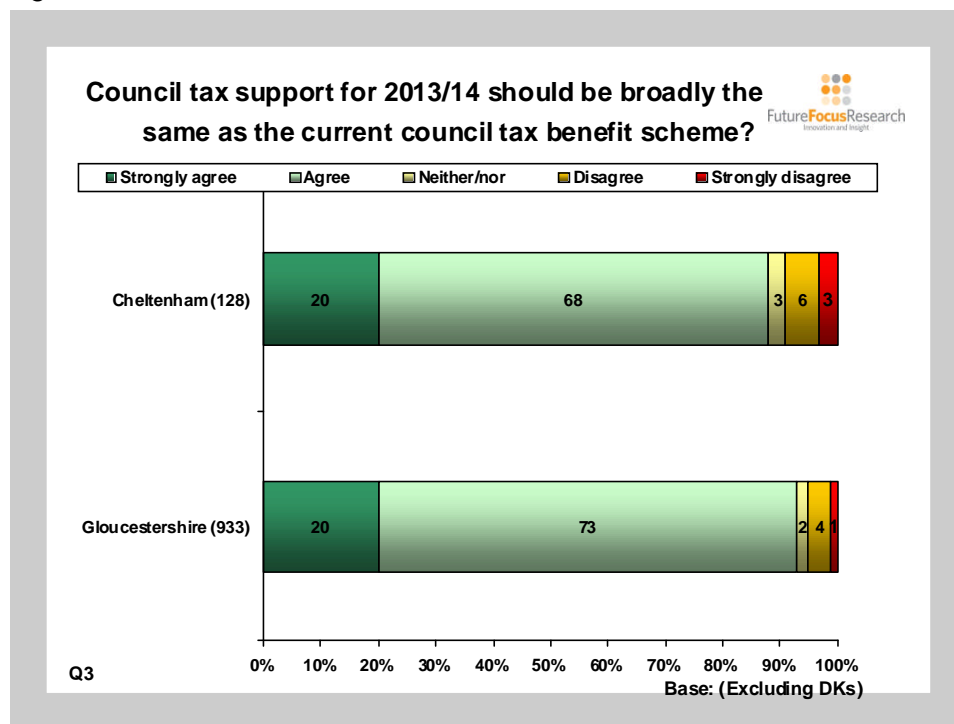


Figure 4.2

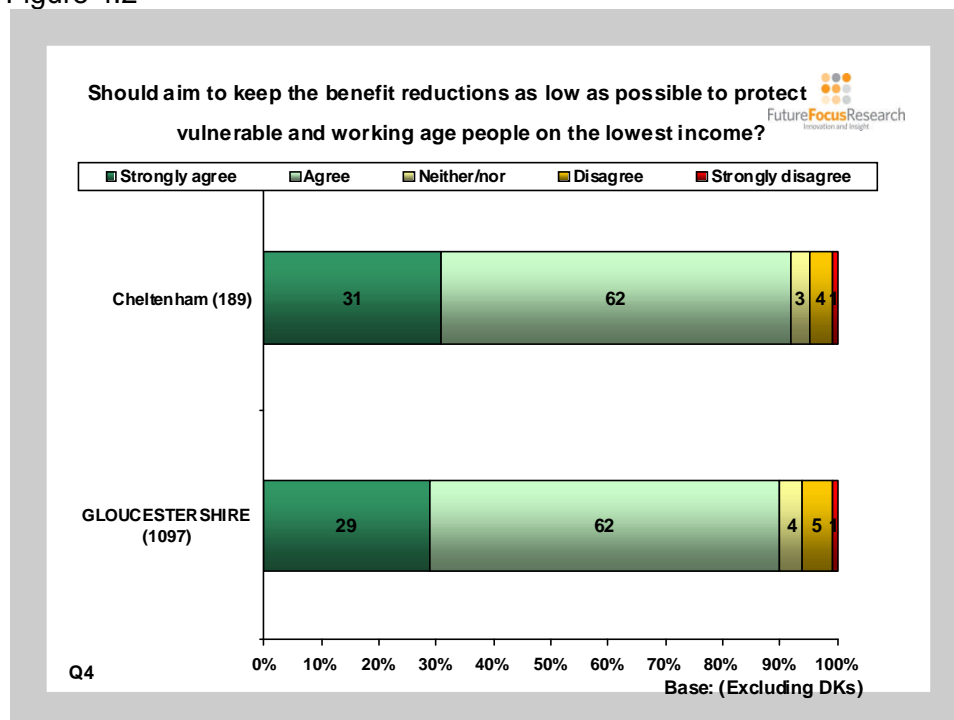


Figure 4.3

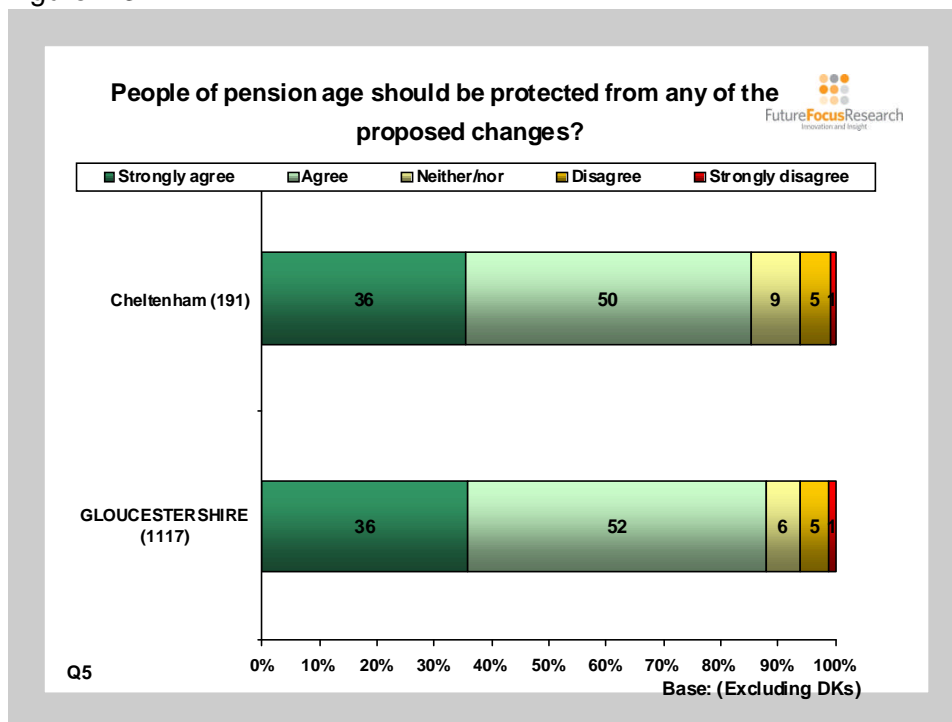


Figure 4.4

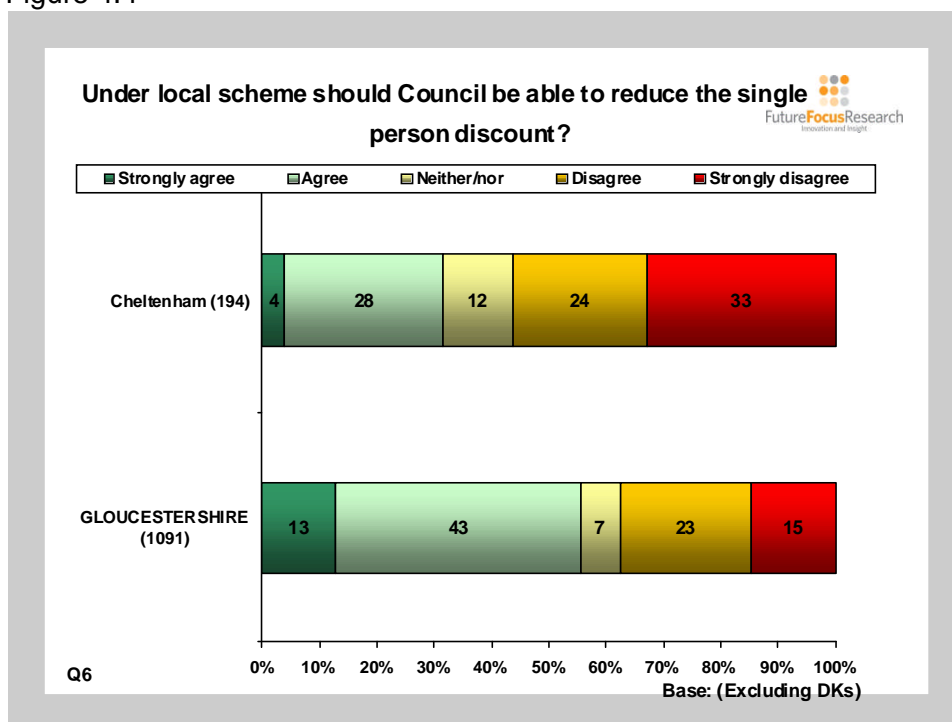


Figure 4.5

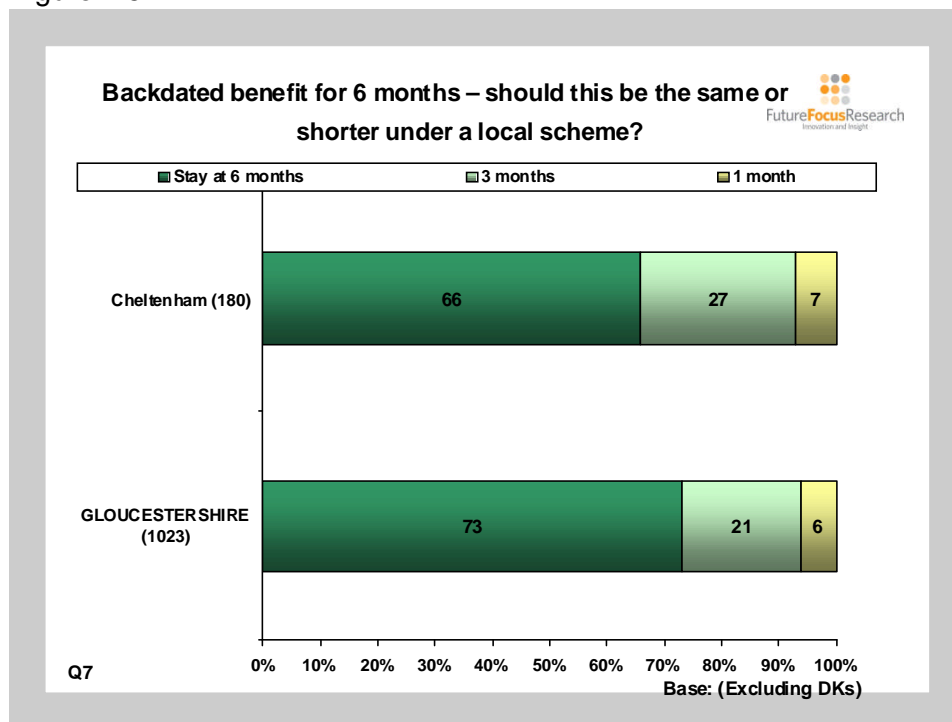


Figure 4.6

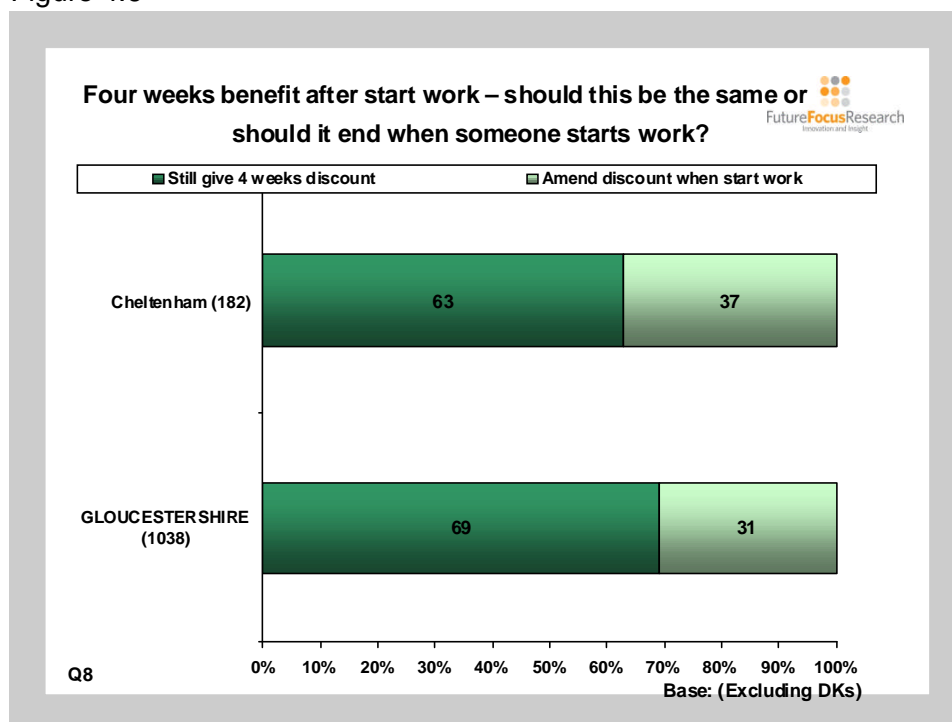


Figure 4.7

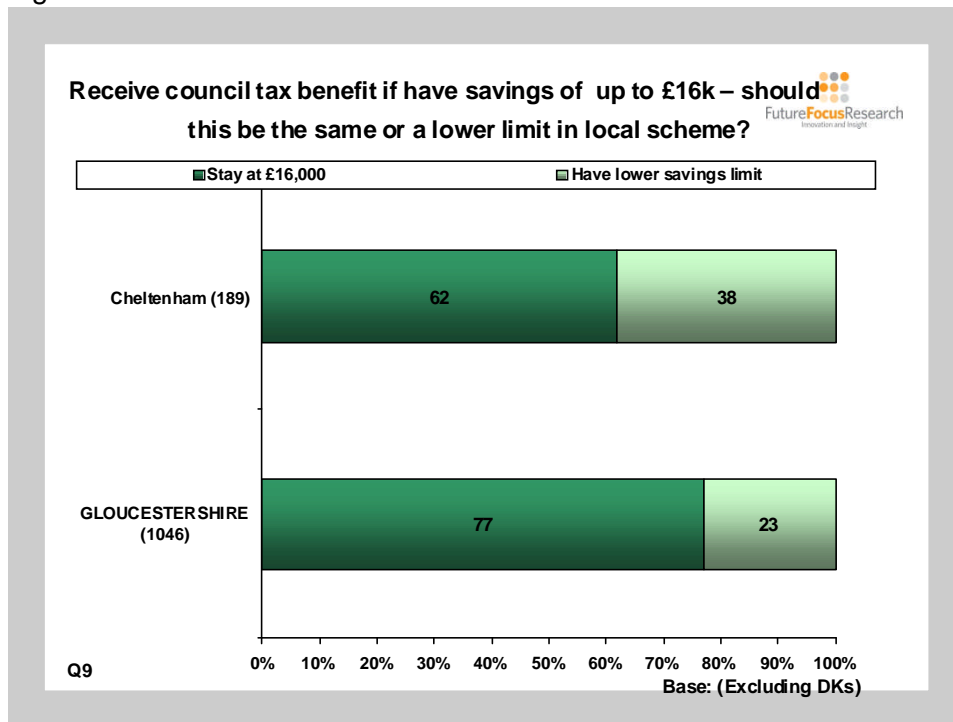


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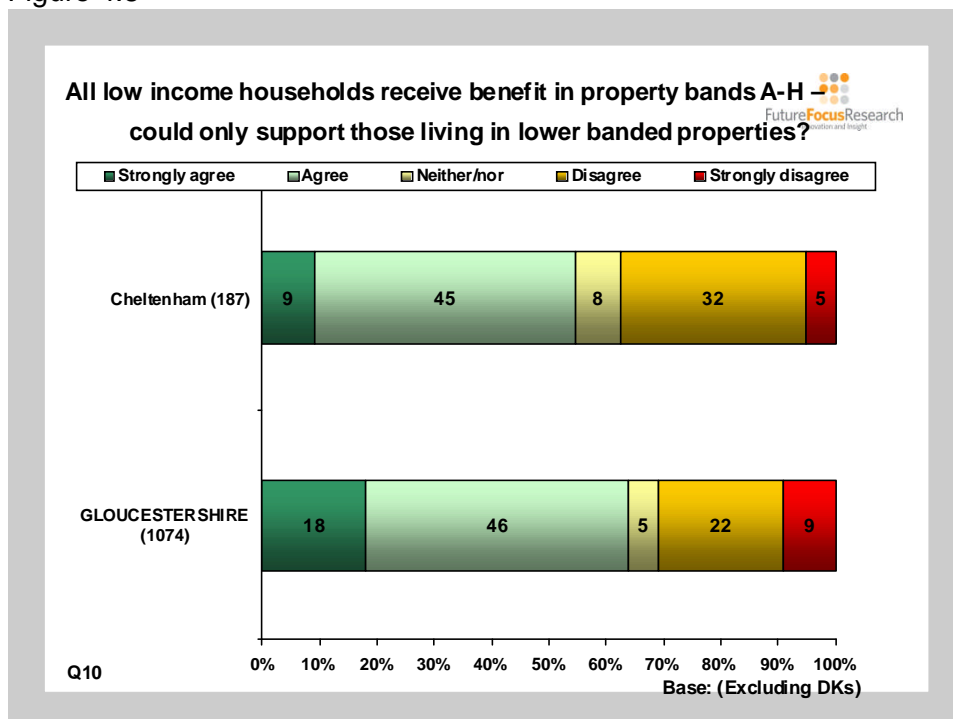


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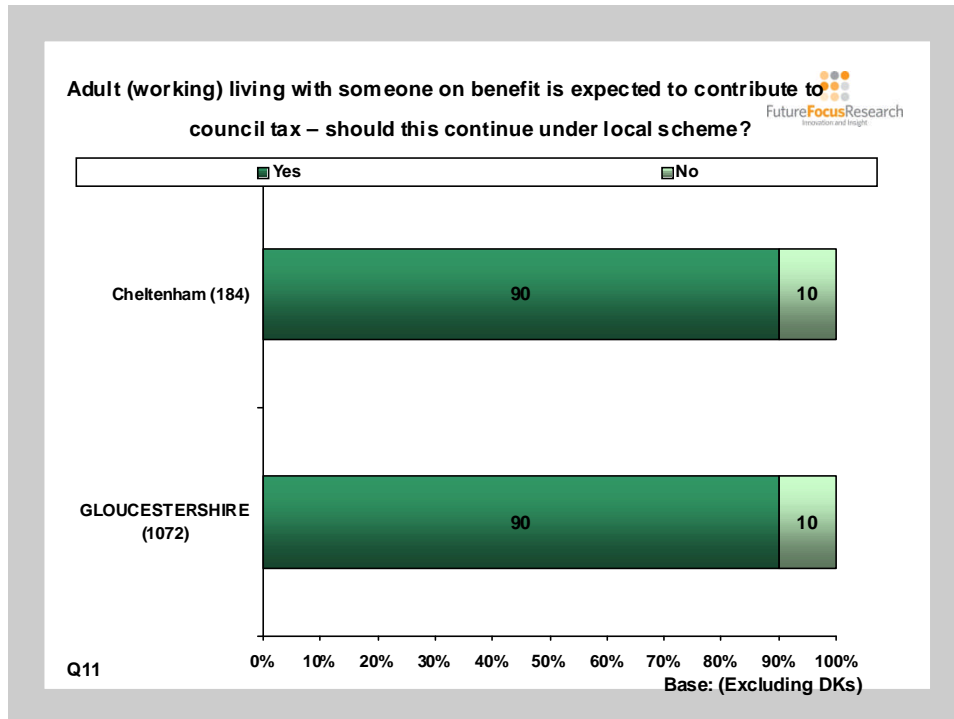
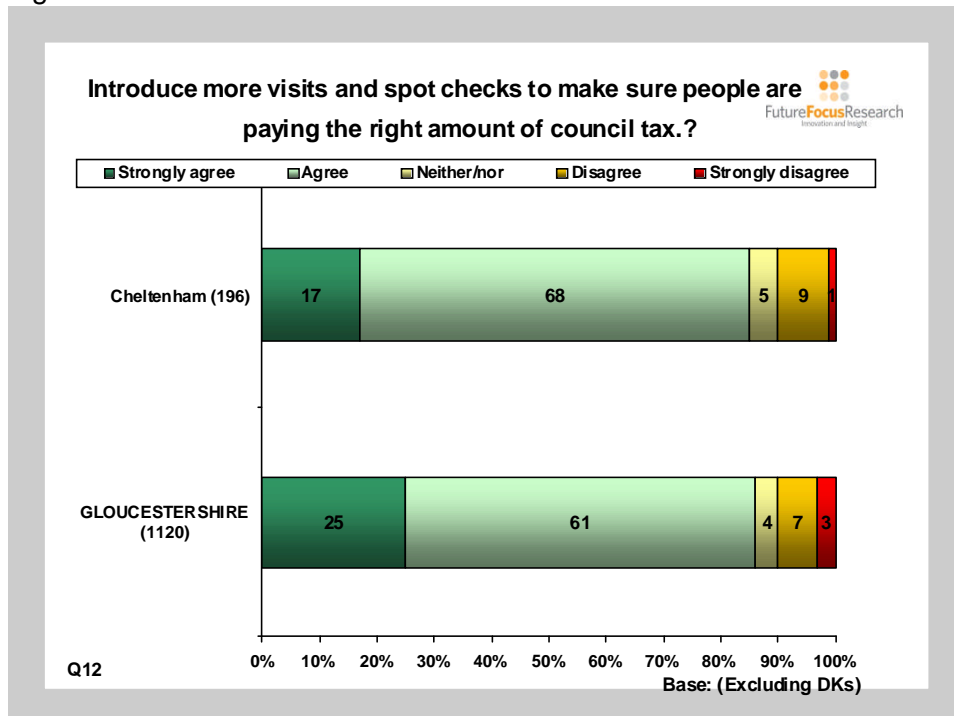


Figure 4.10



5. Cotswold District Council

Figure 5.1

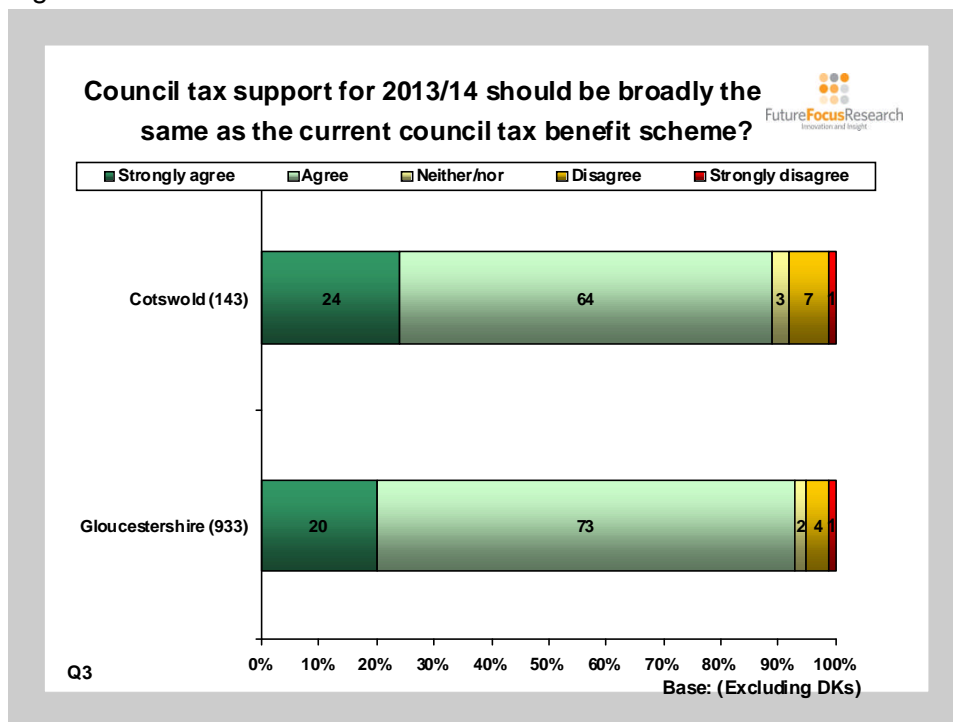


Figure 5.2

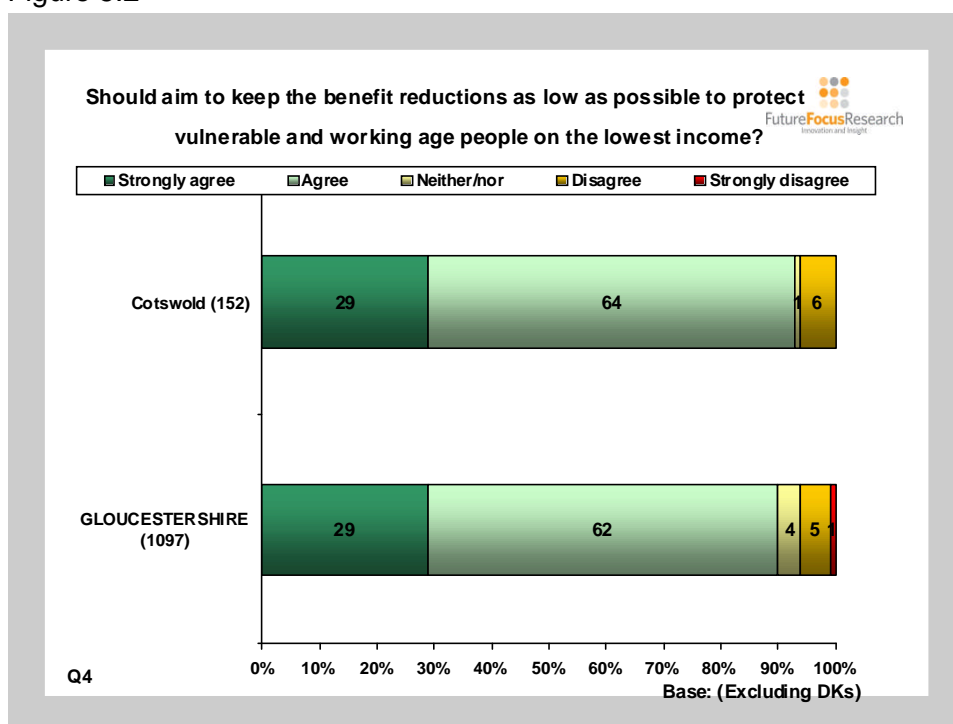


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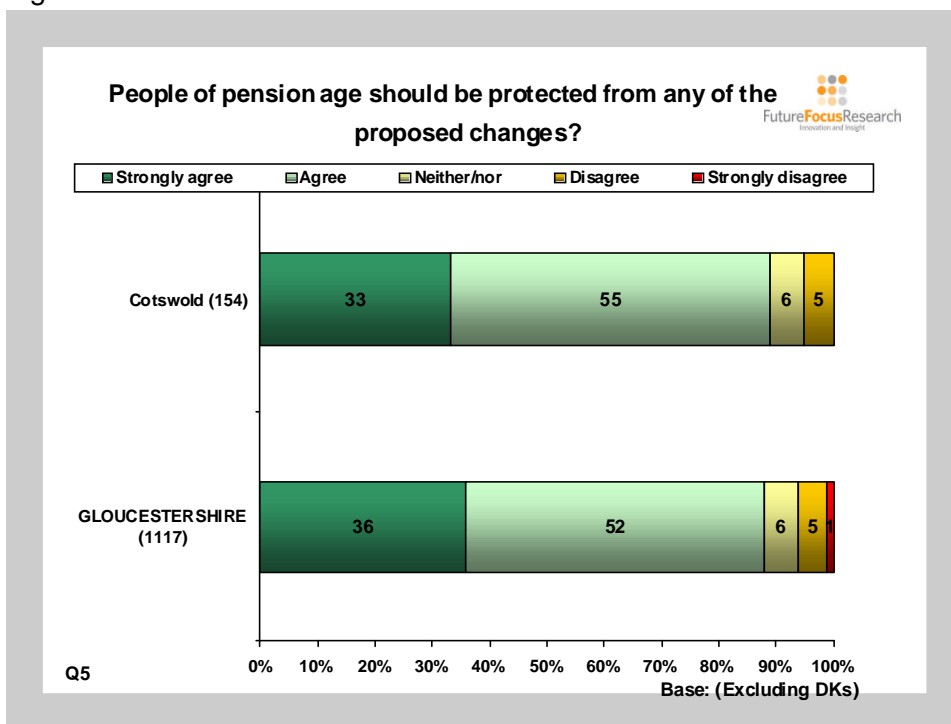


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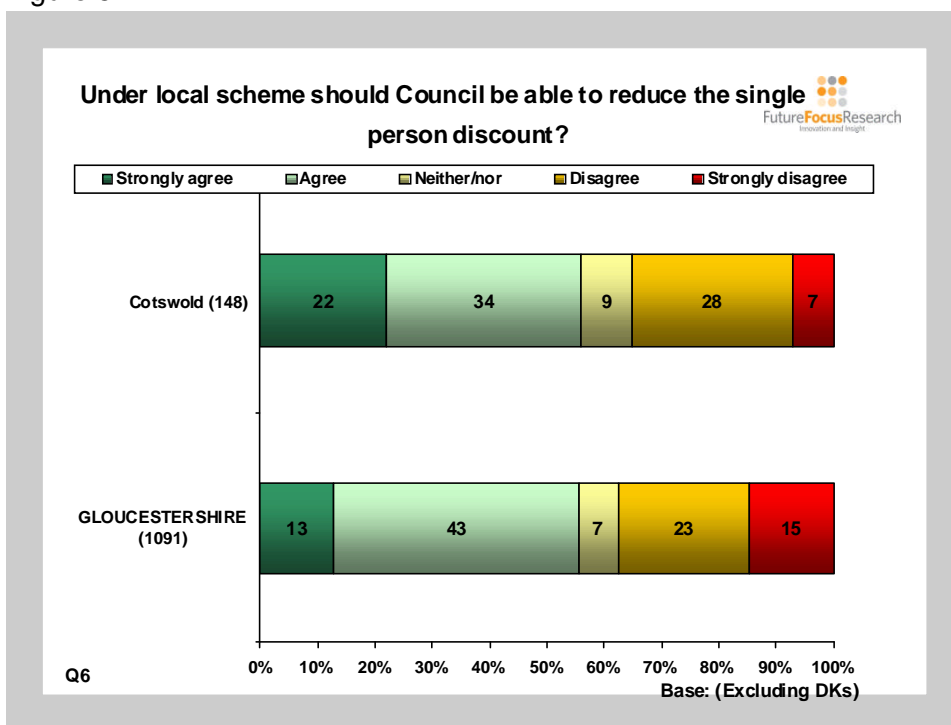


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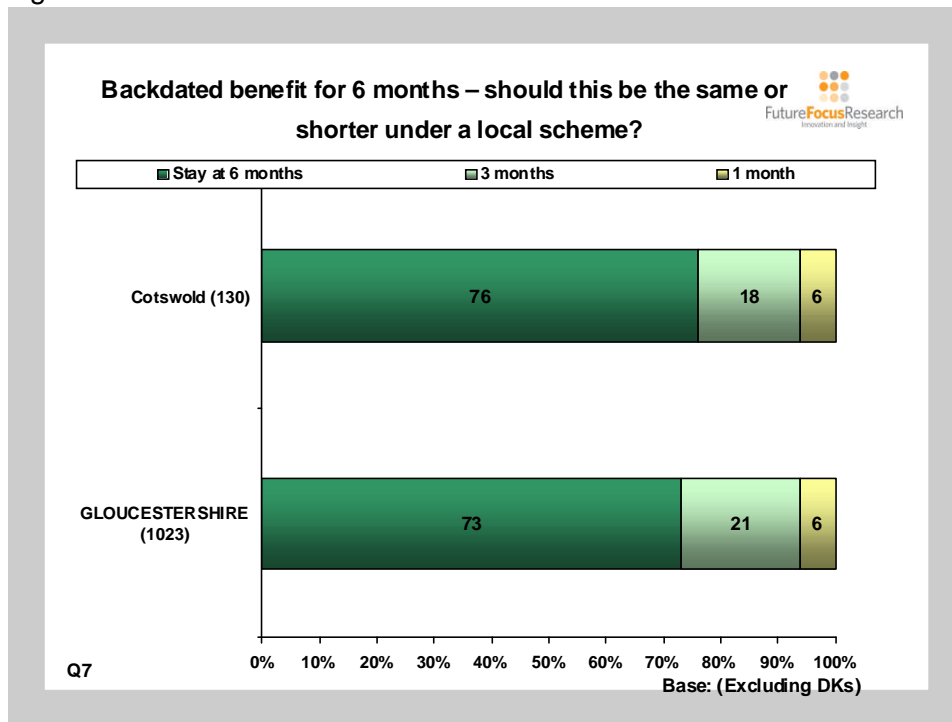


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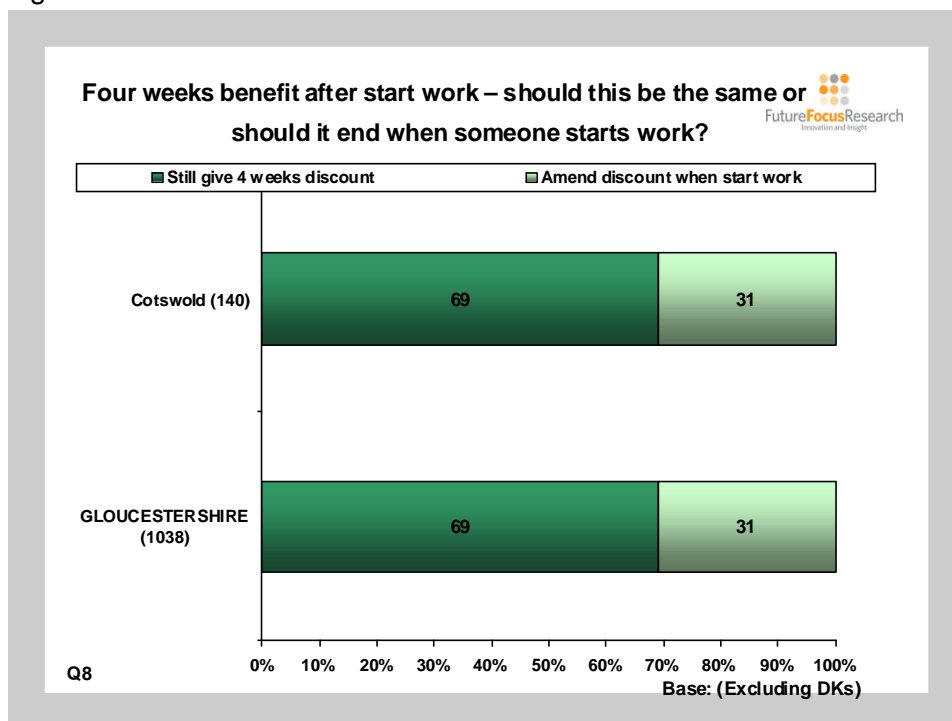


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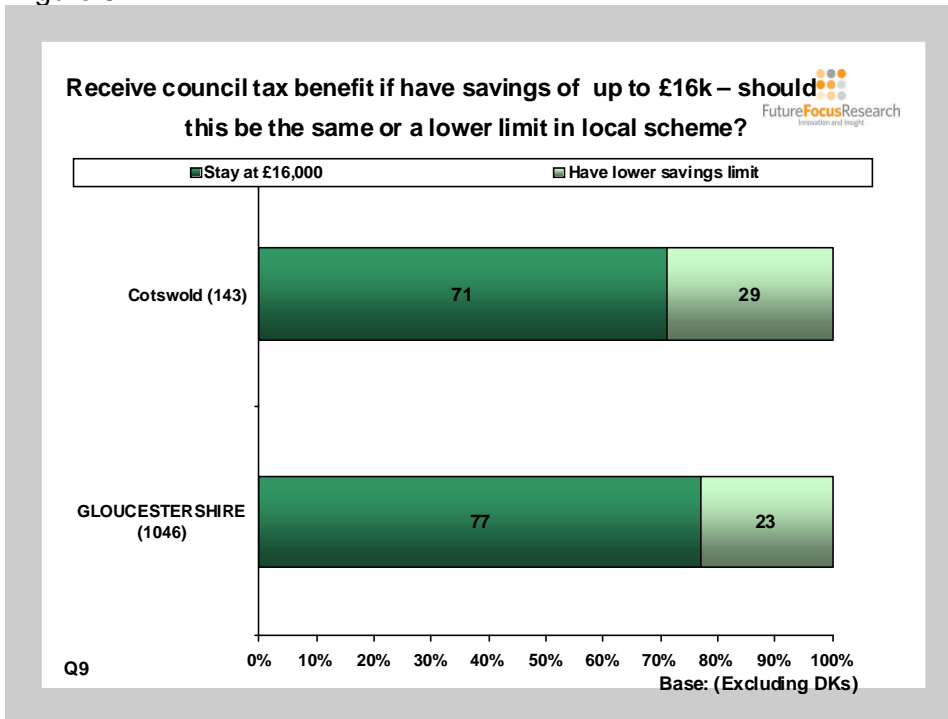


Figure 5.8

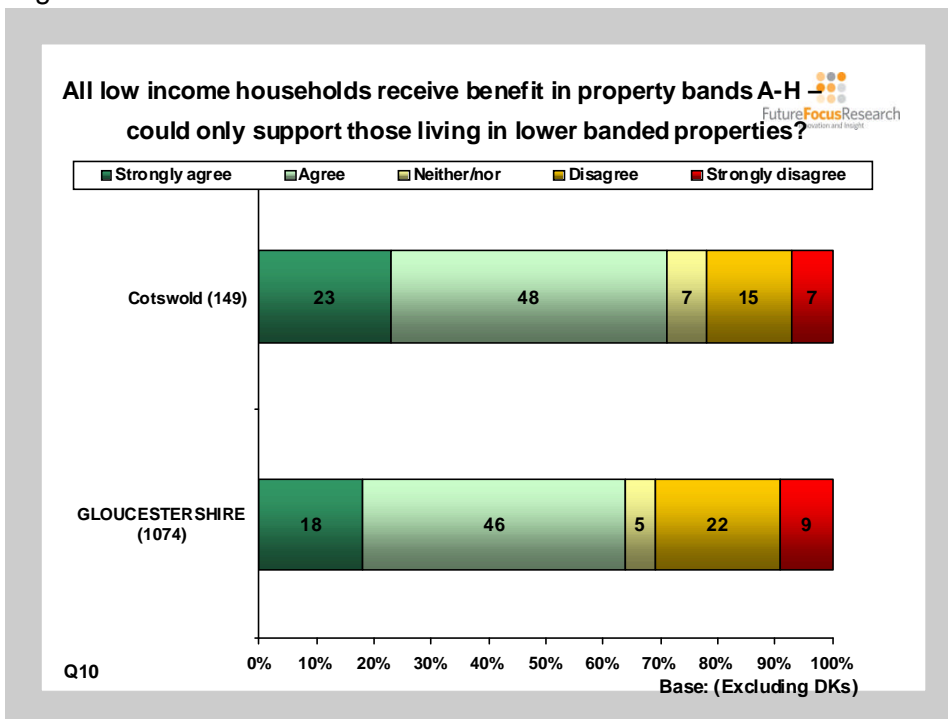


Figure 5.9

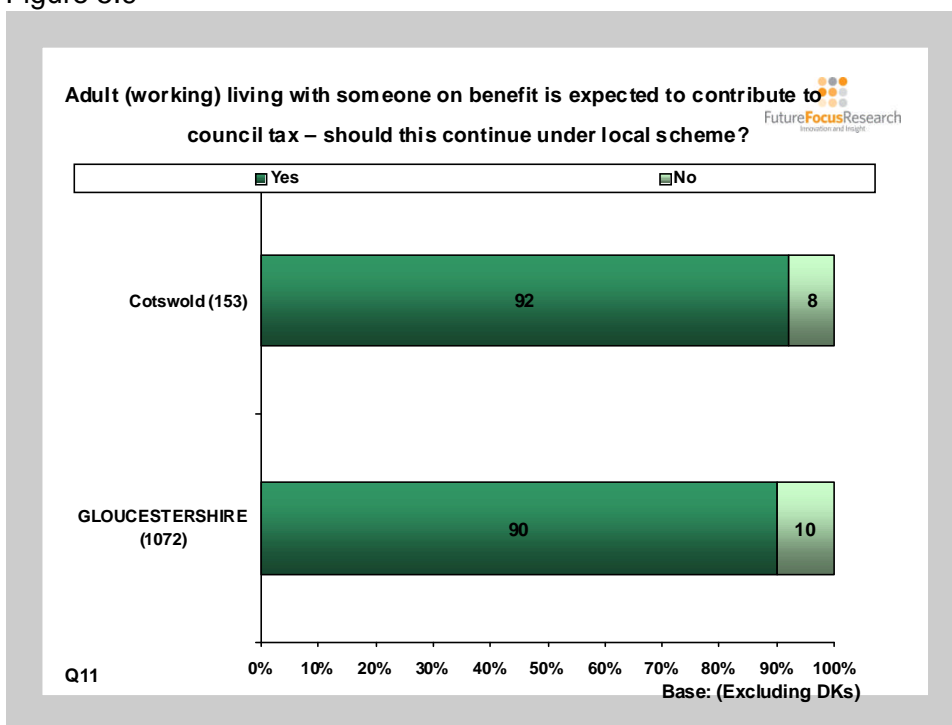
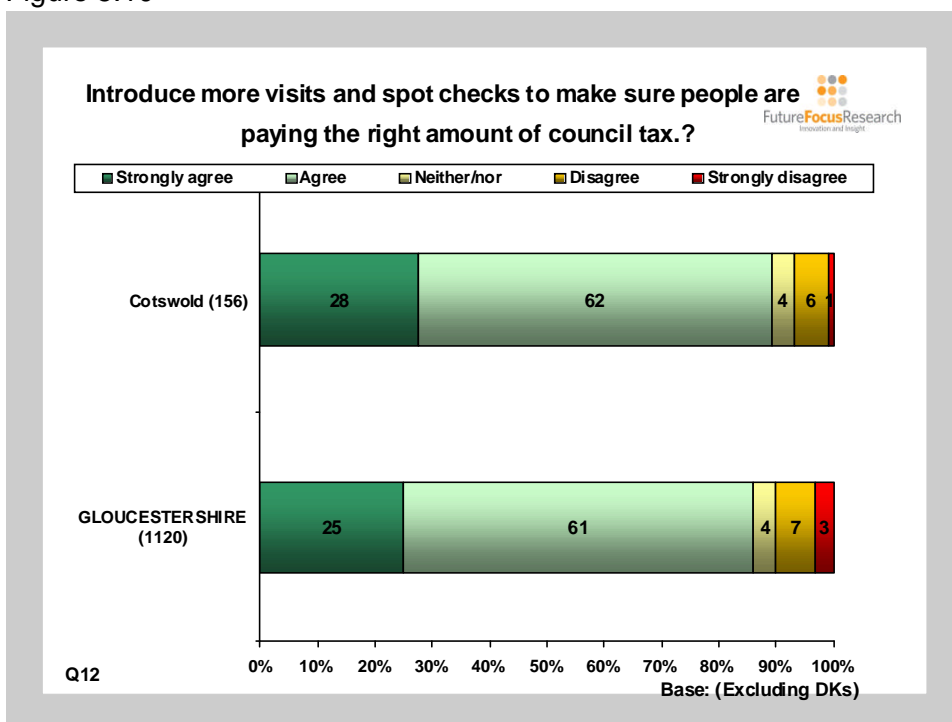


Figure 5.10



6. Forest of Dean District Council

Figure 6.1

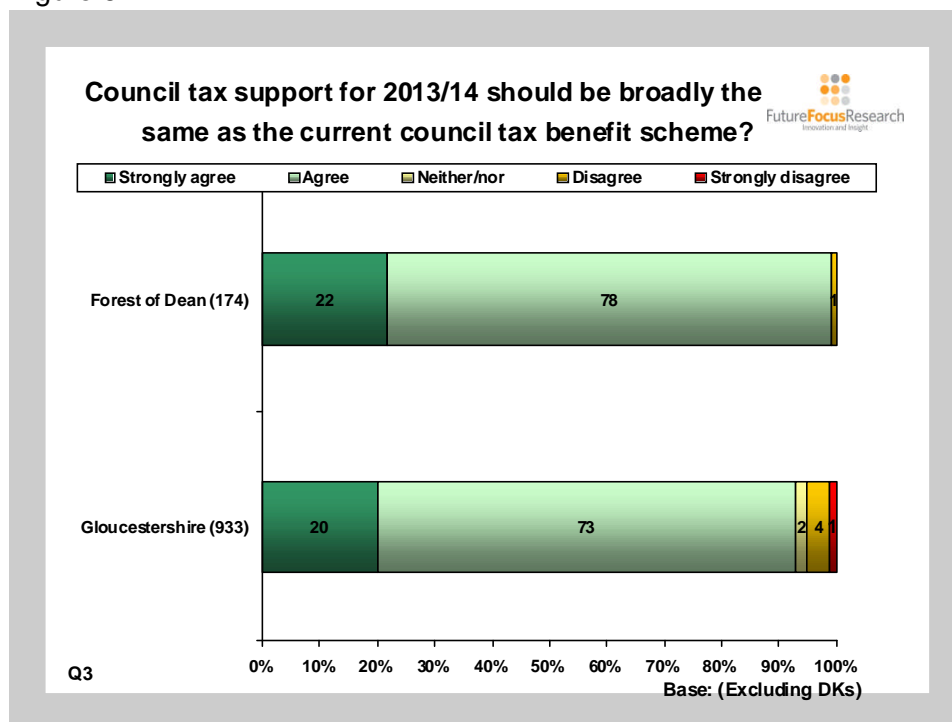


Figure 6.2

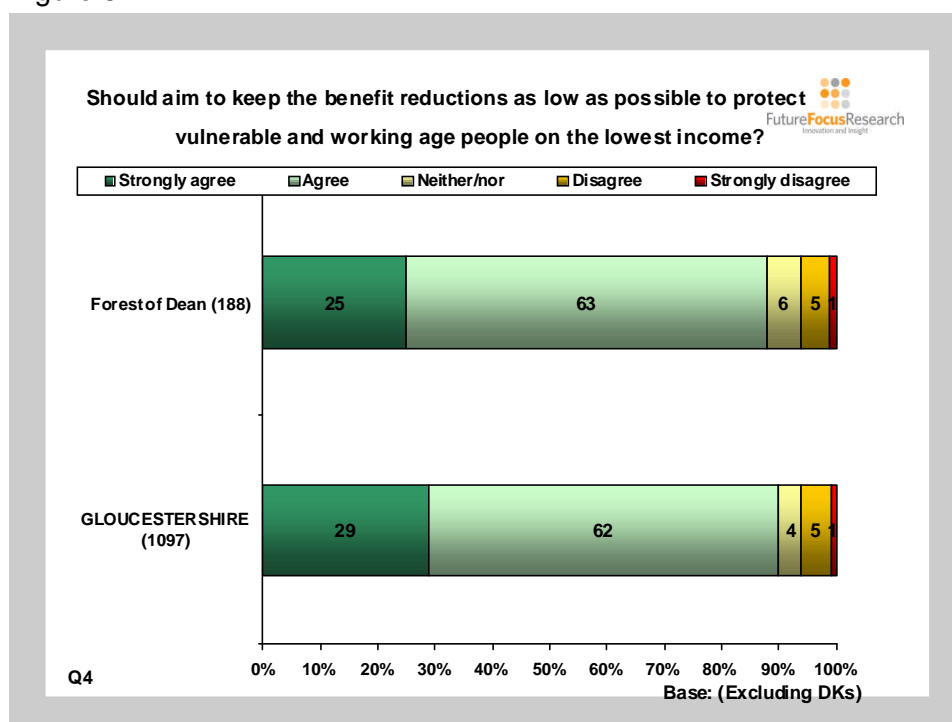


Figure 6.3

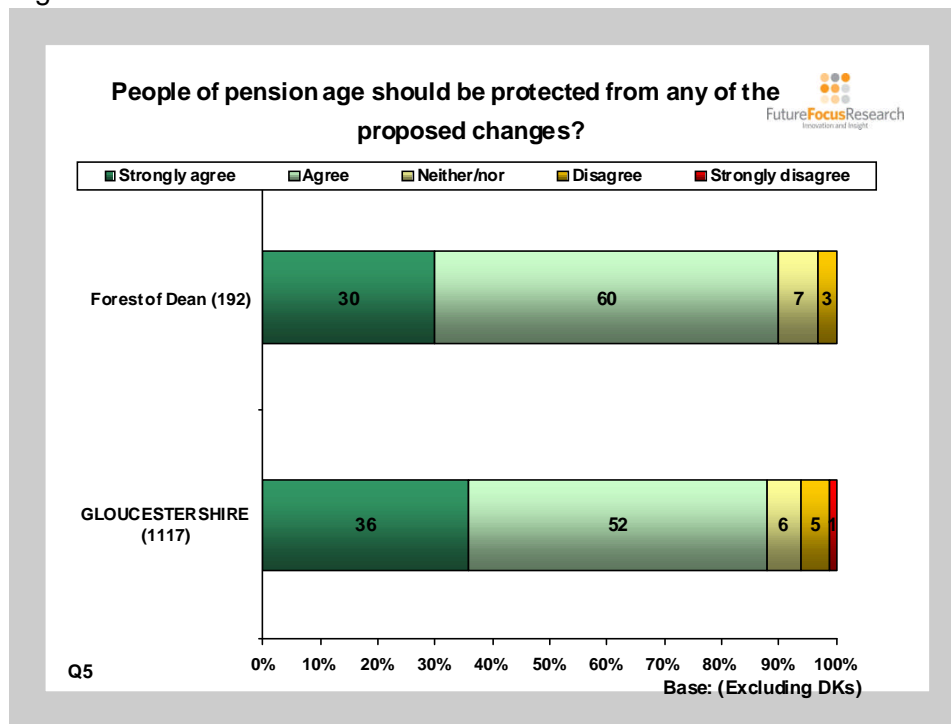


Figure 6.4

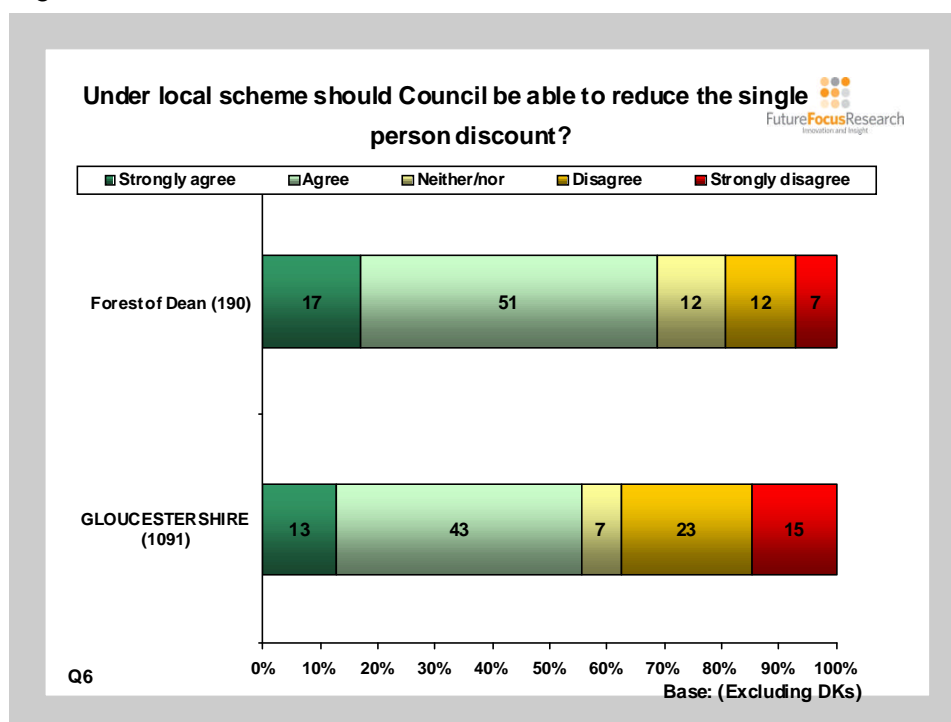


Figure 6.5

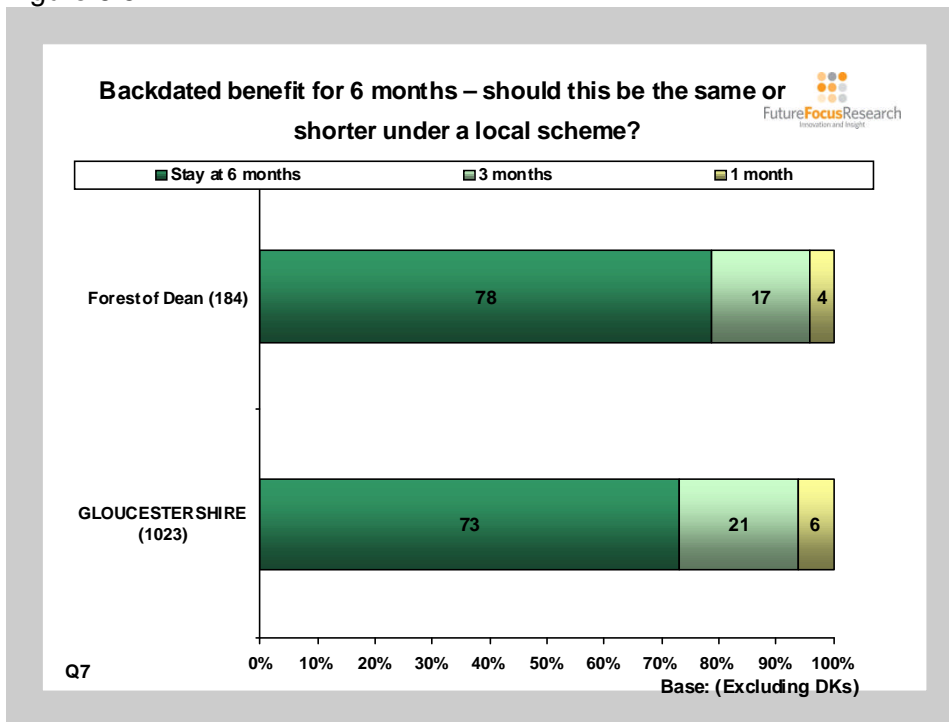


Figure 6.6

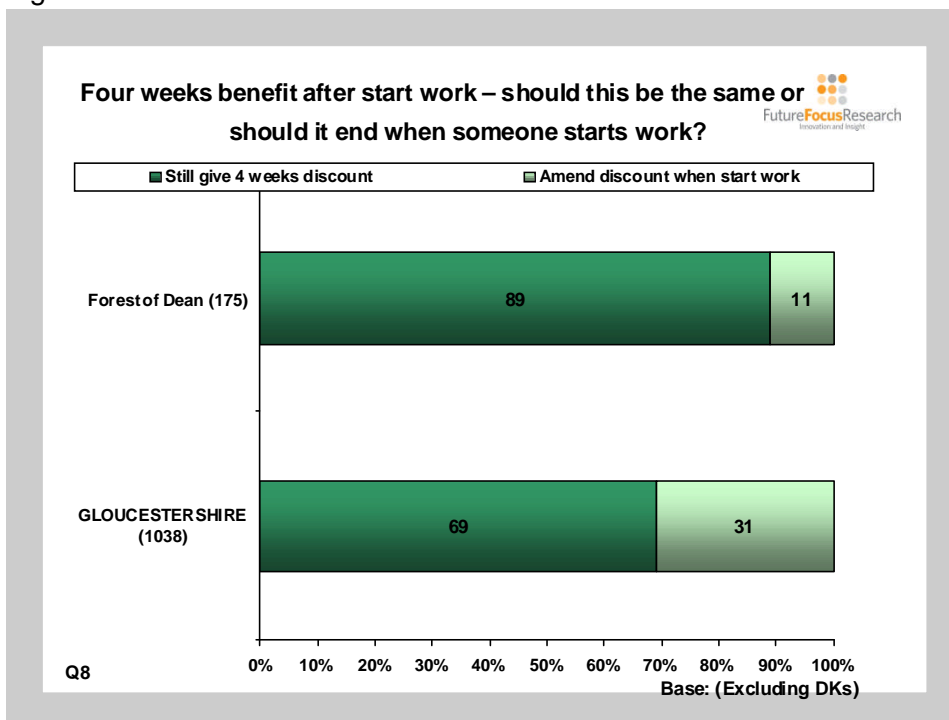


Figure 6.7

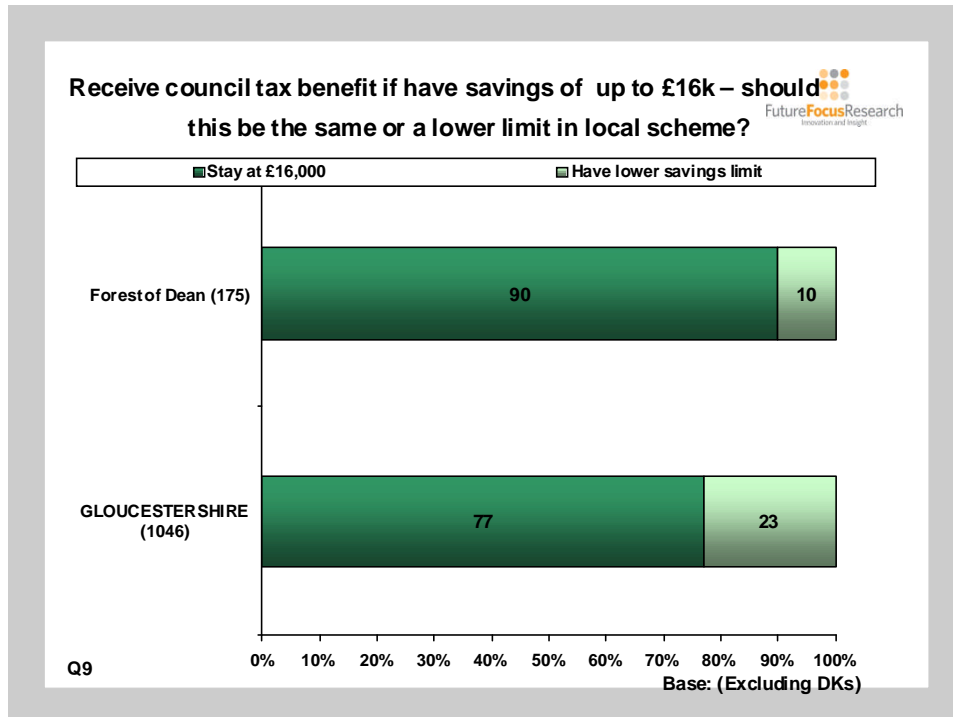


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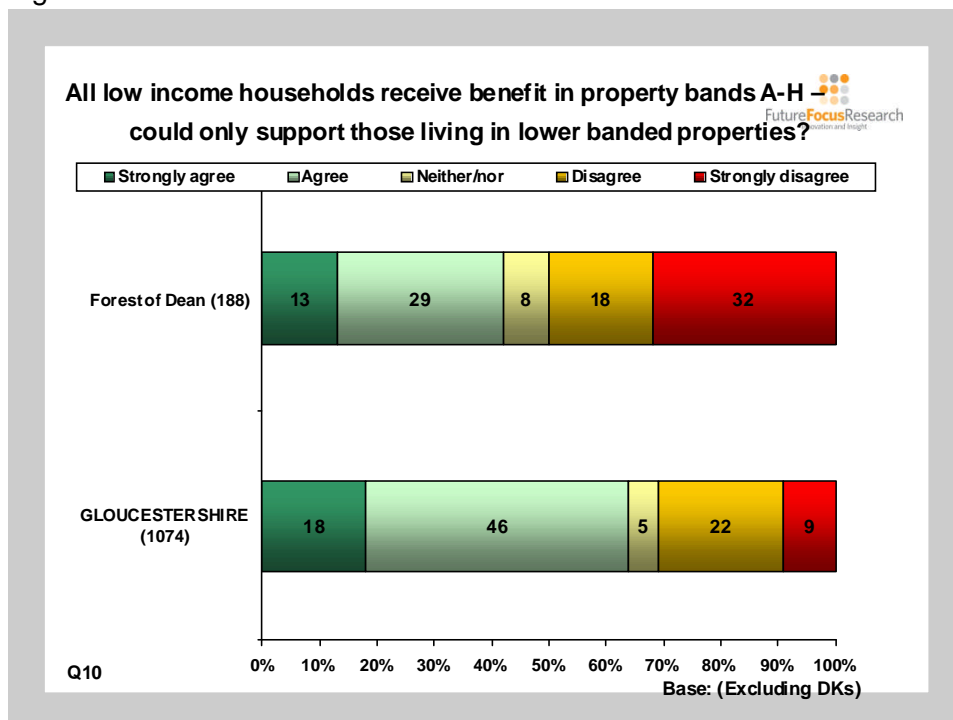


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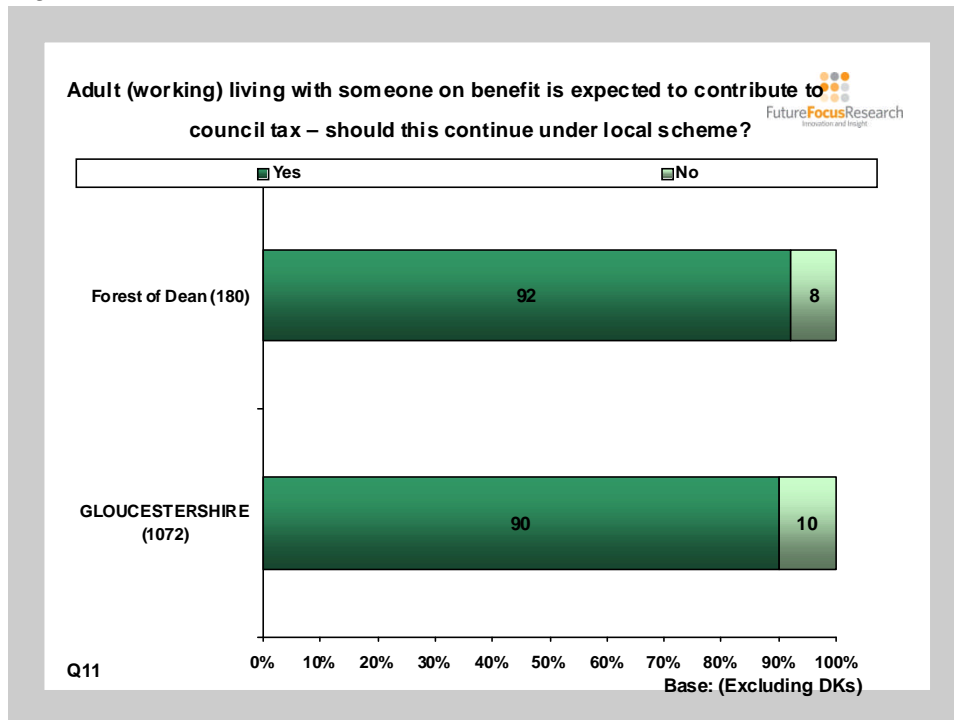
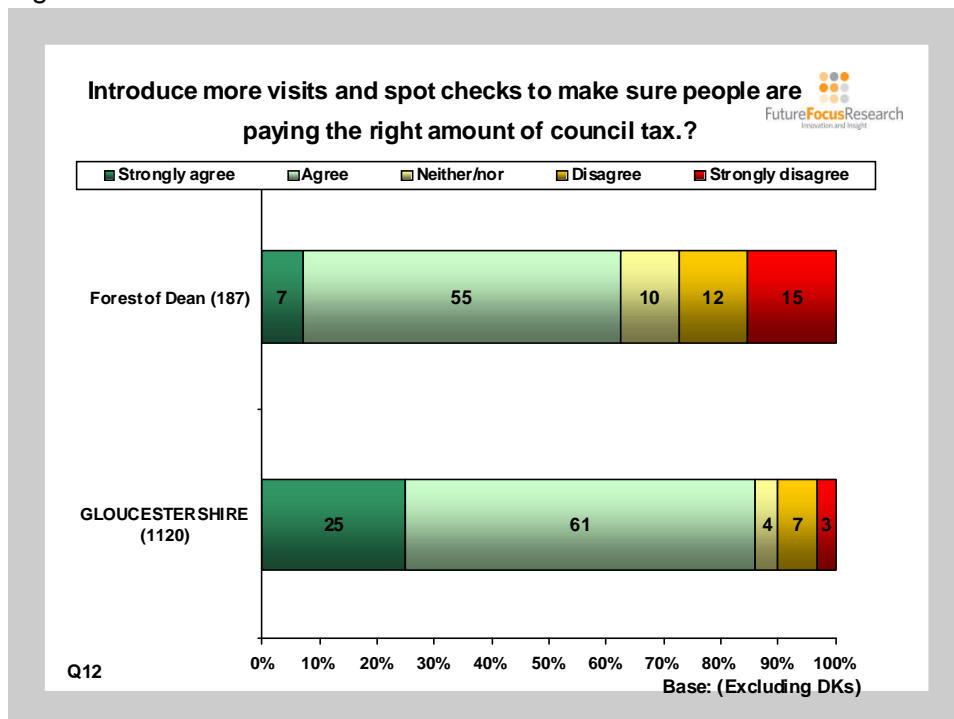


Figure 6.10



7. Gloucester City Council

Figure 7.1

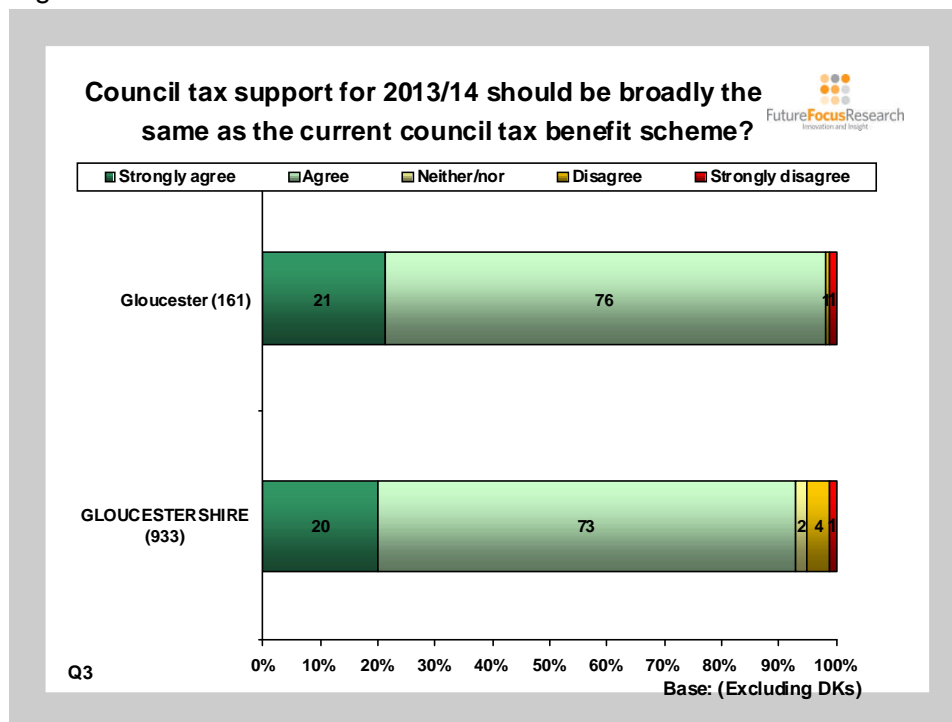


Figure 7.2

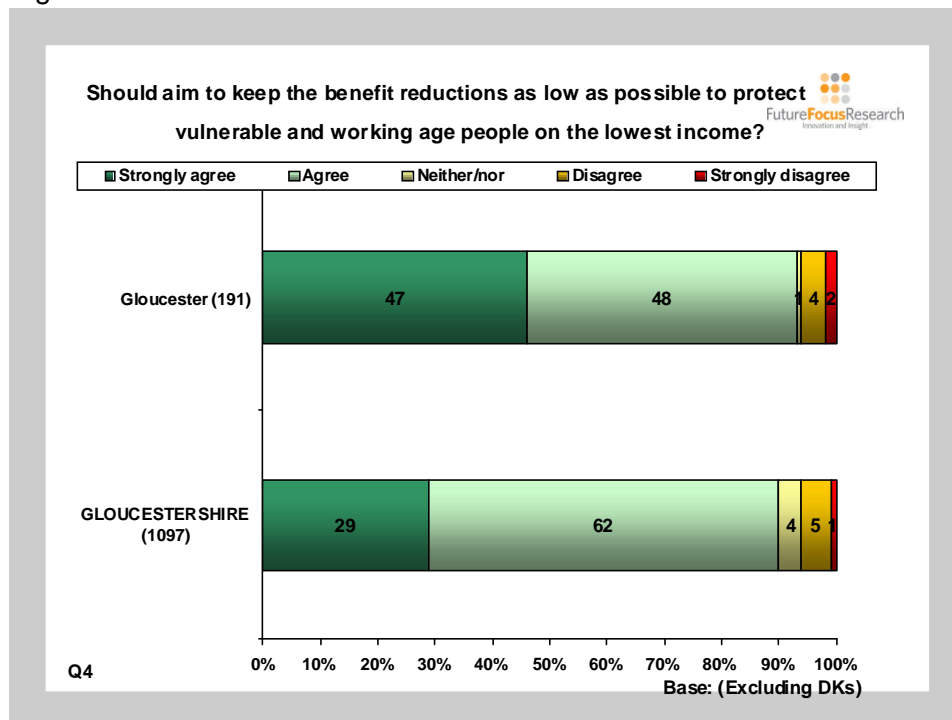


Figure 7.3

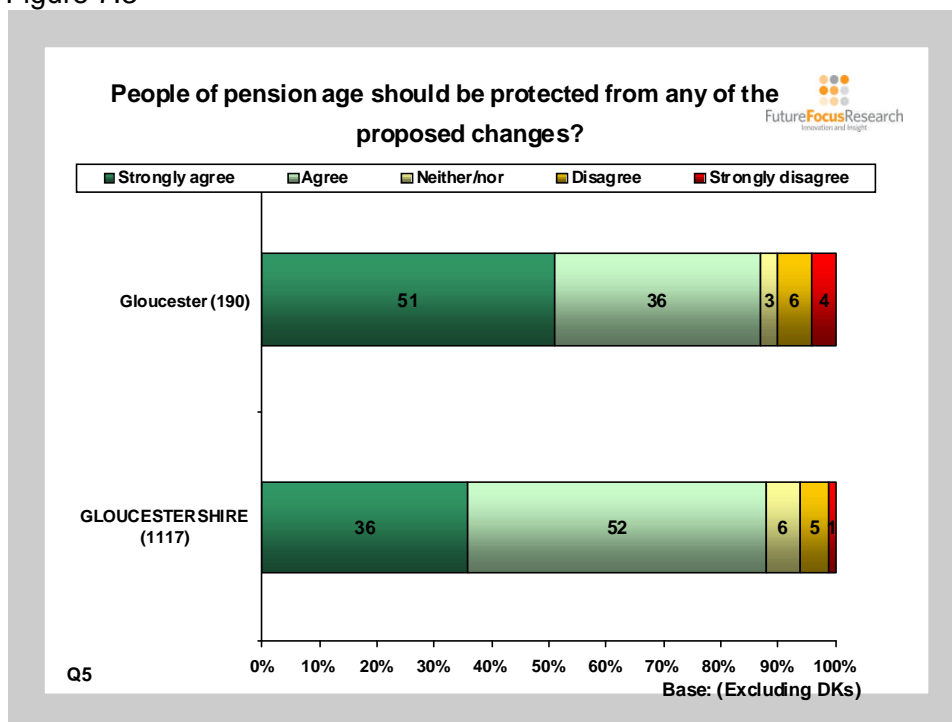


Figure 7.4

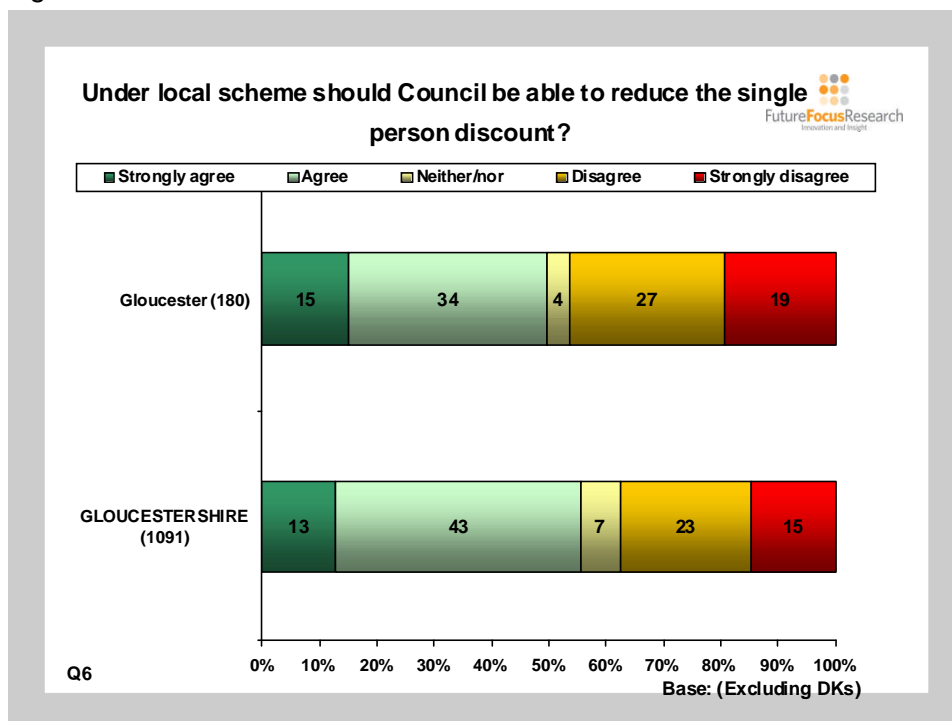


Figure 7.5

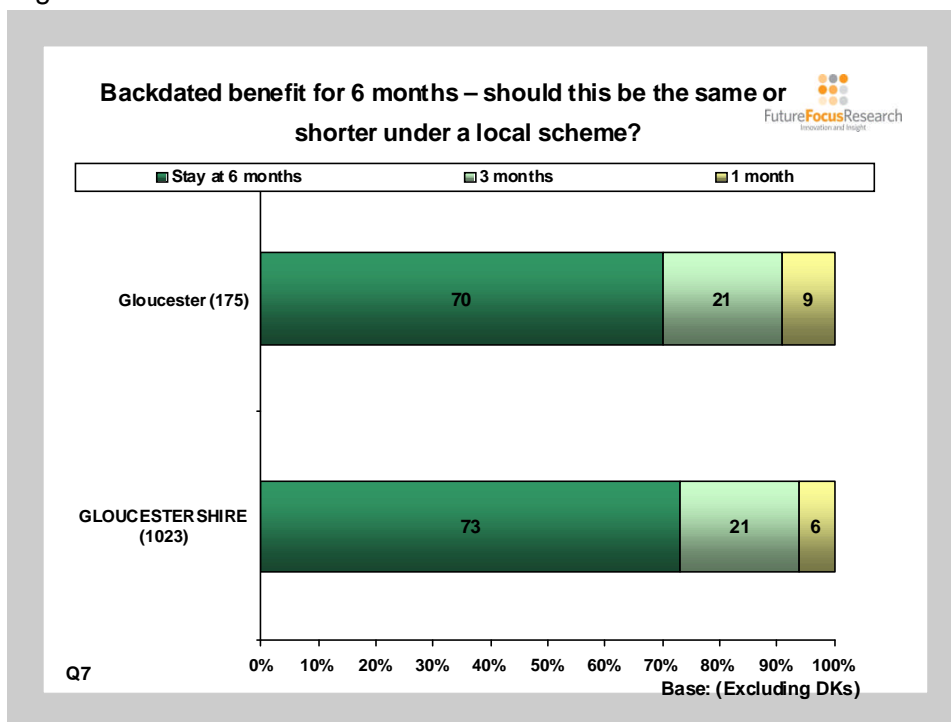


Figure 7.6

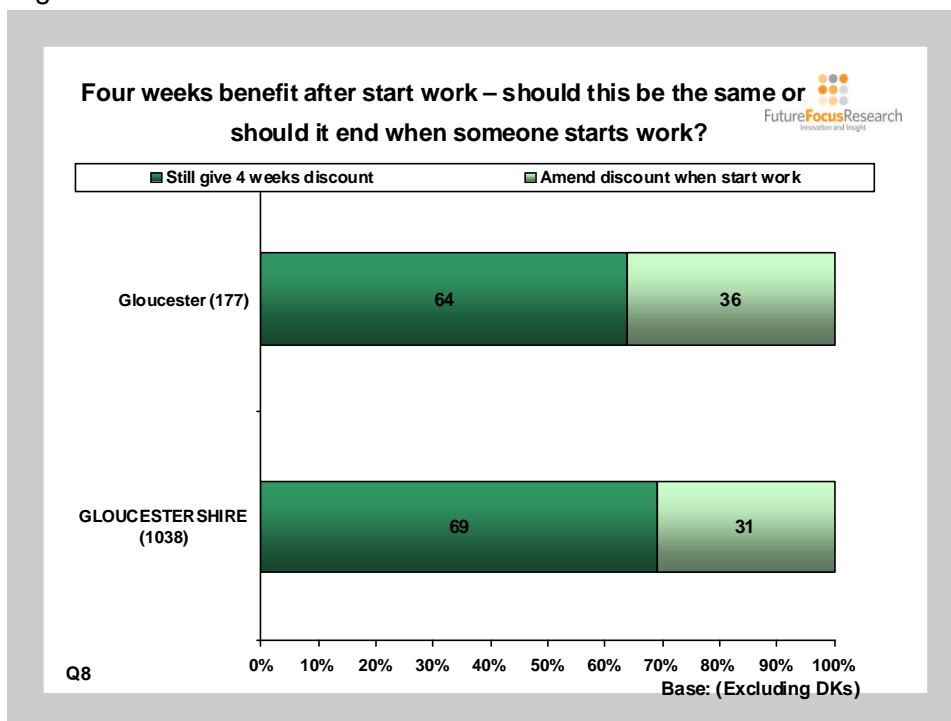


Figure 7.7

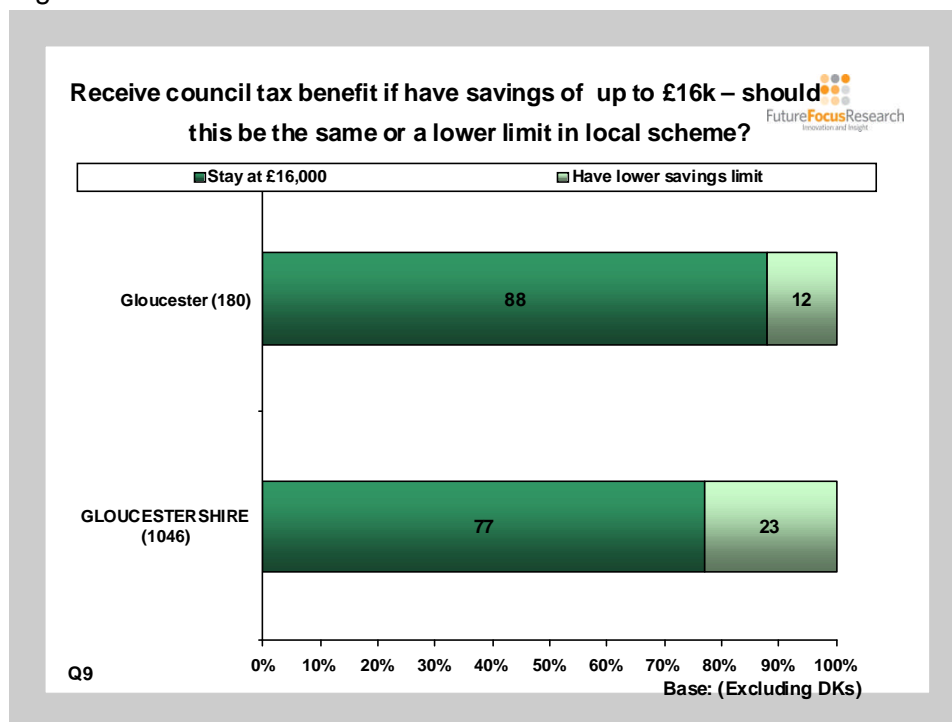


Figure 7.8

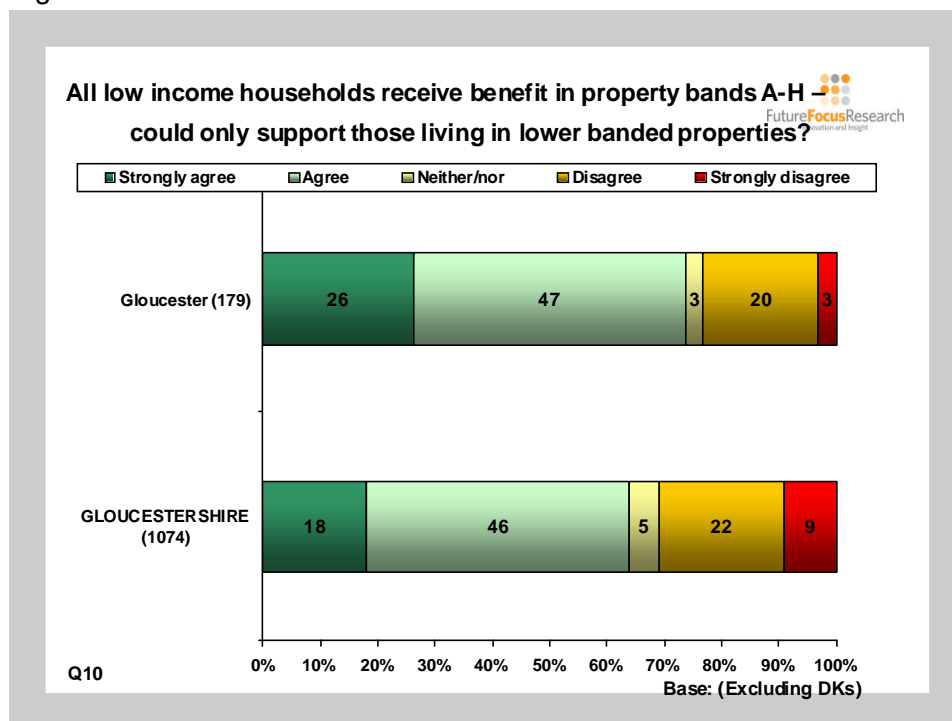


Figure 7.9

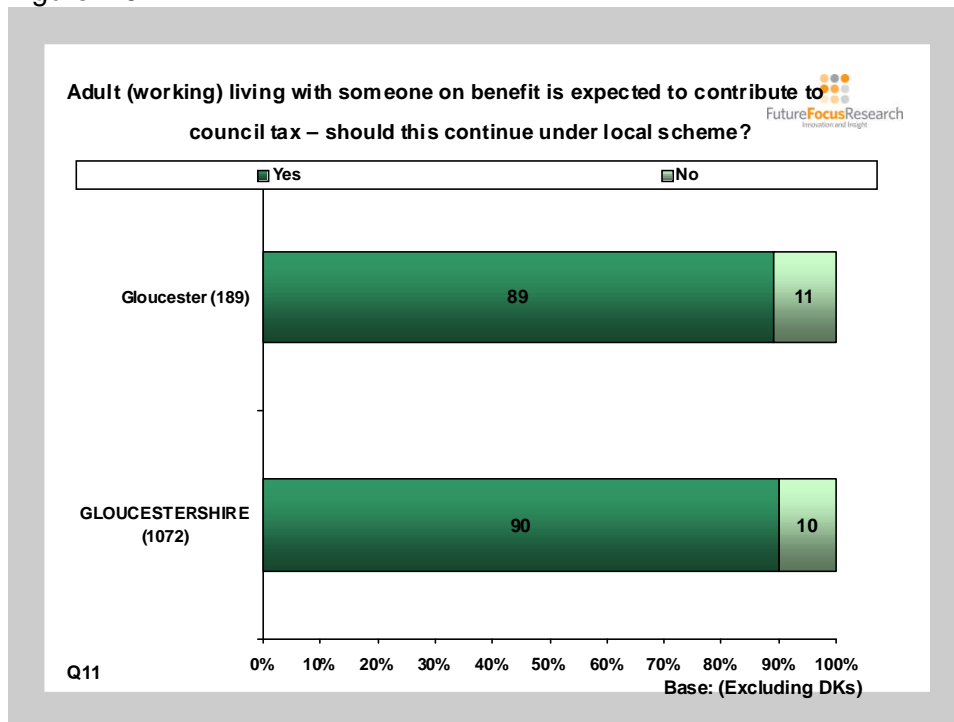
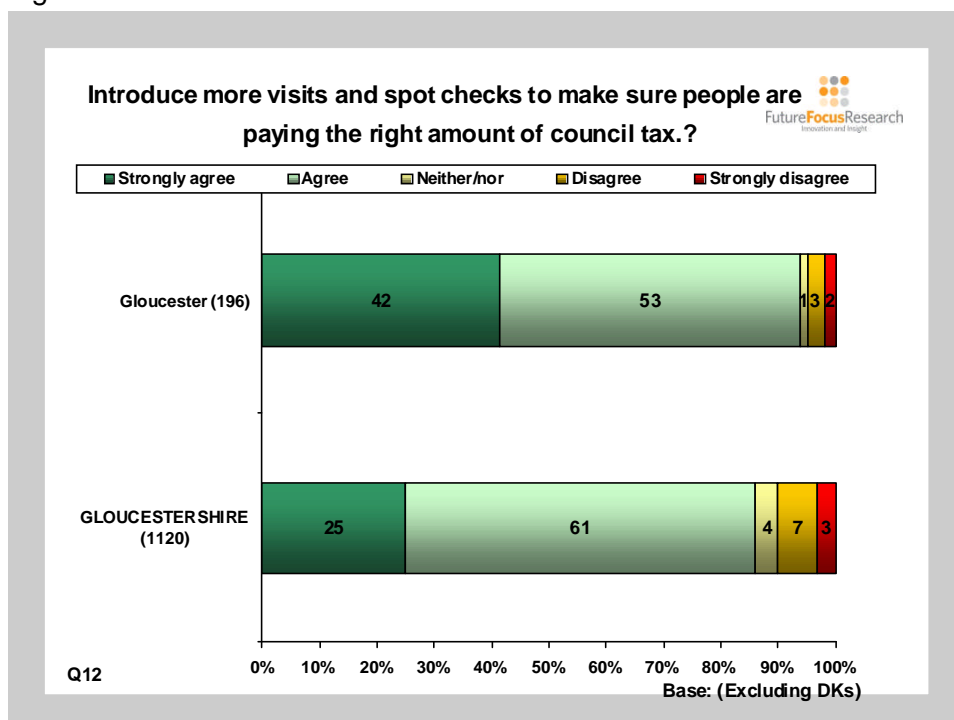


Figure 7.10



8. Stroud District Council

Figure 8.1

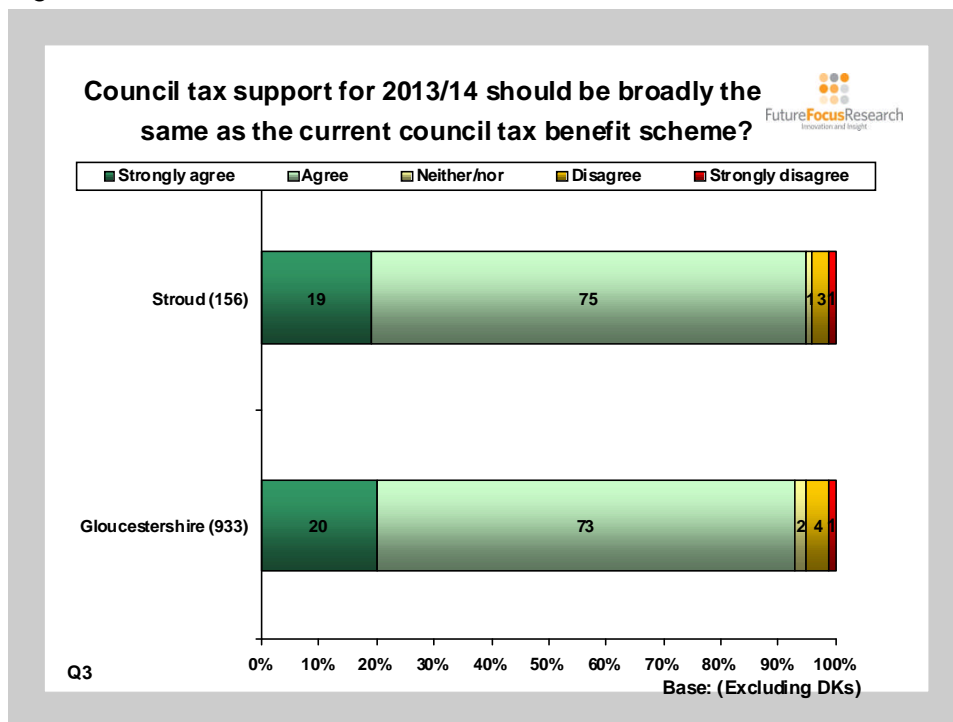


Figure 8.2

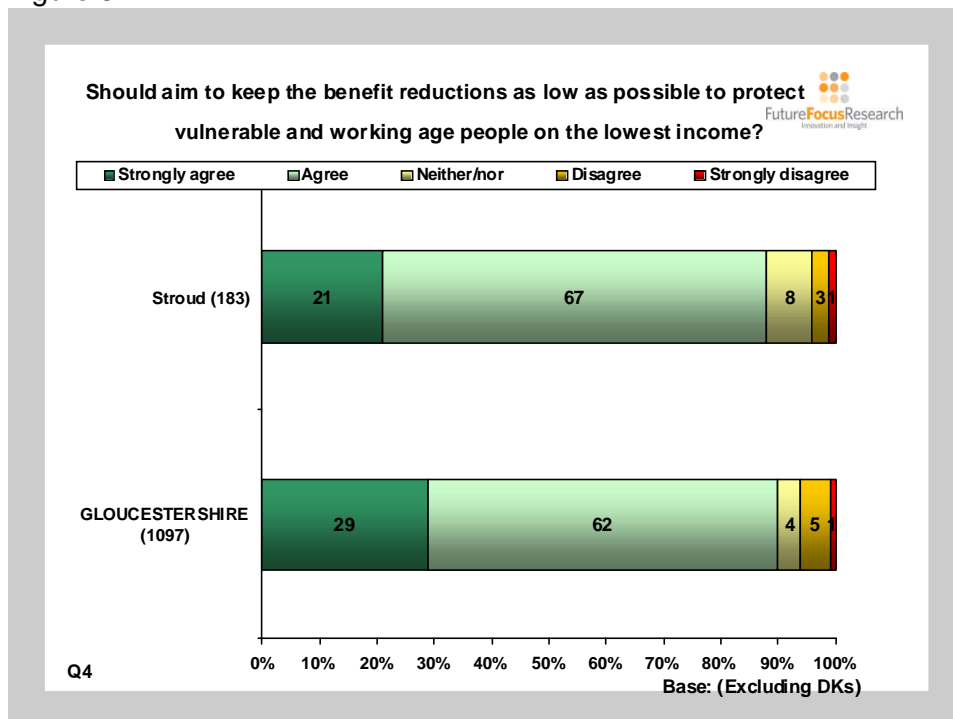


Figure 8.3

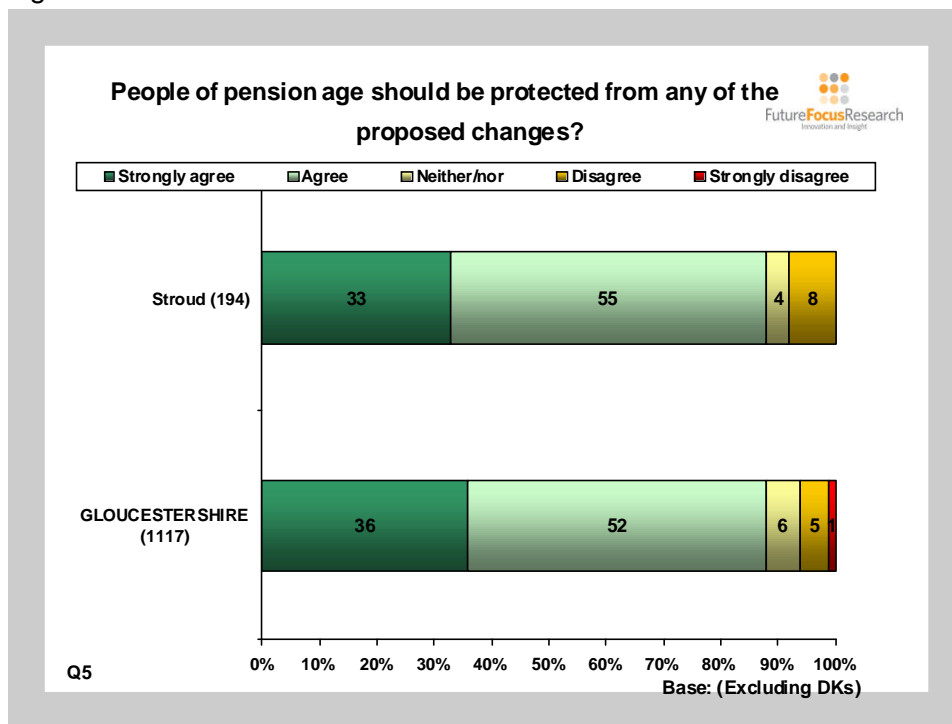


Figure 8.4

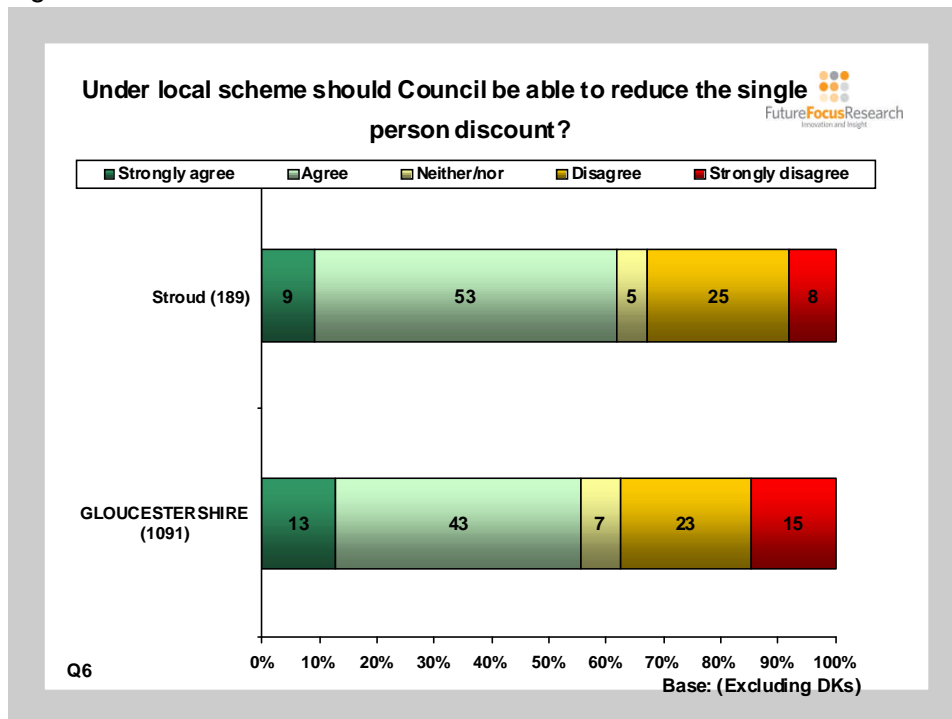


Figure 8.5

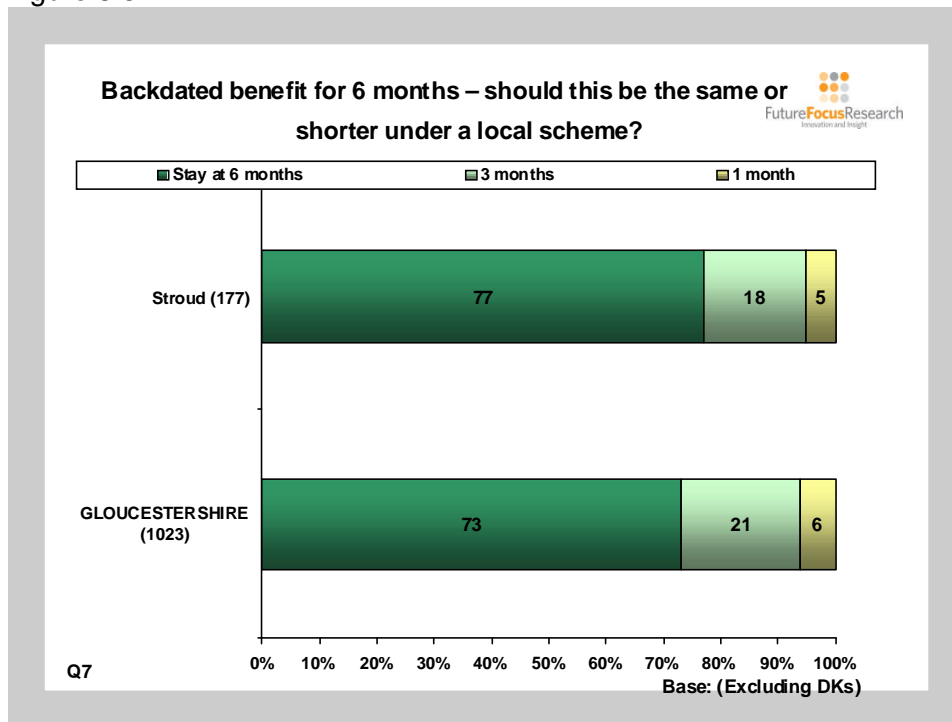


Figure 8.6

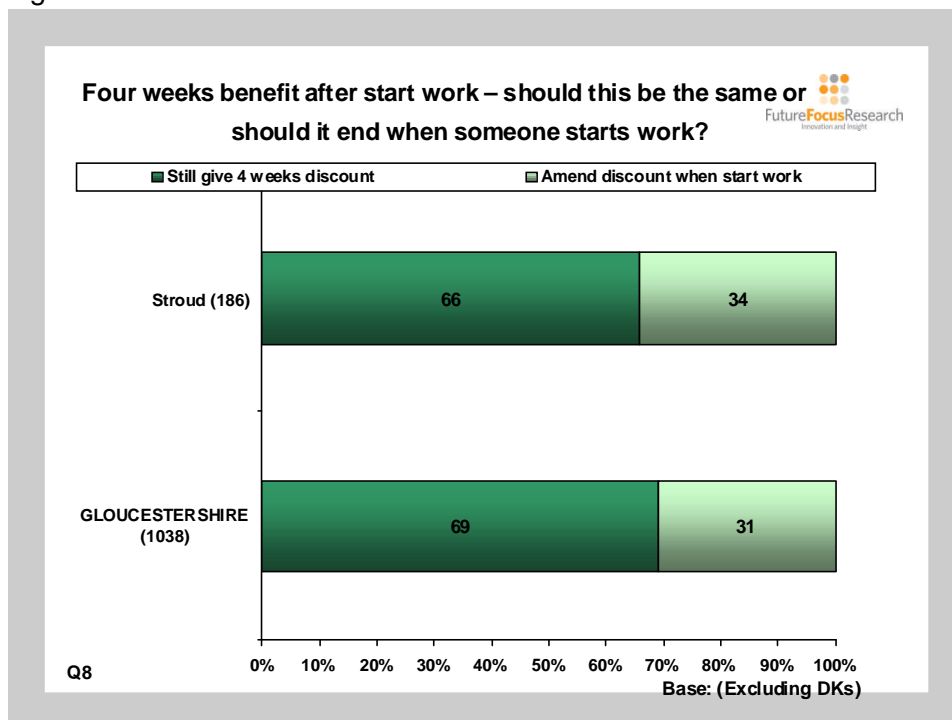


Figure 8.7

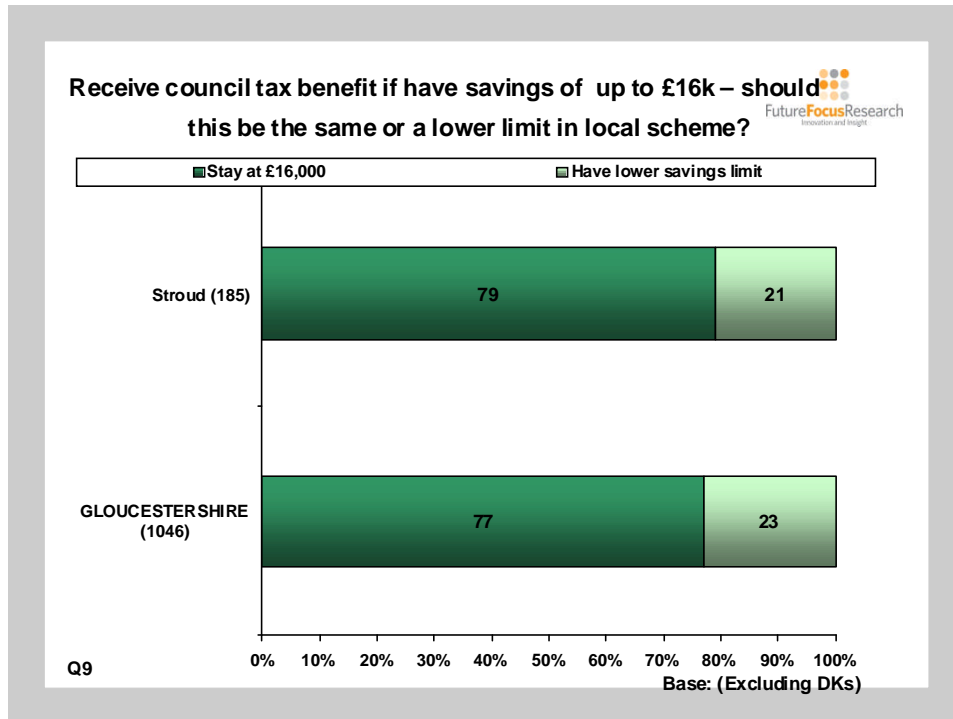


Figure 8.8

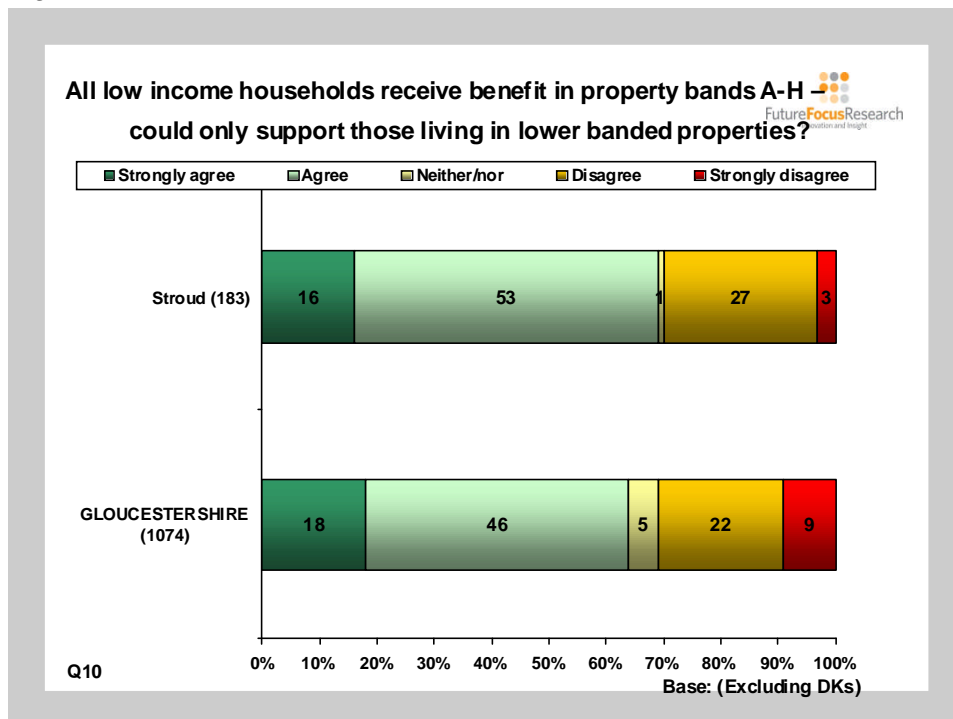


Figure 8.9

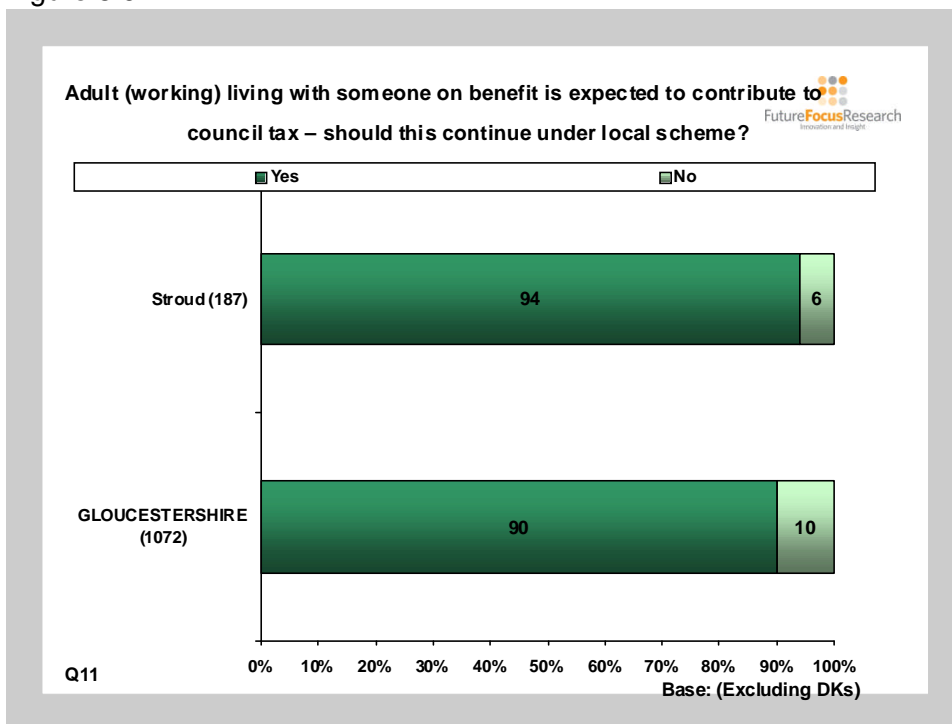
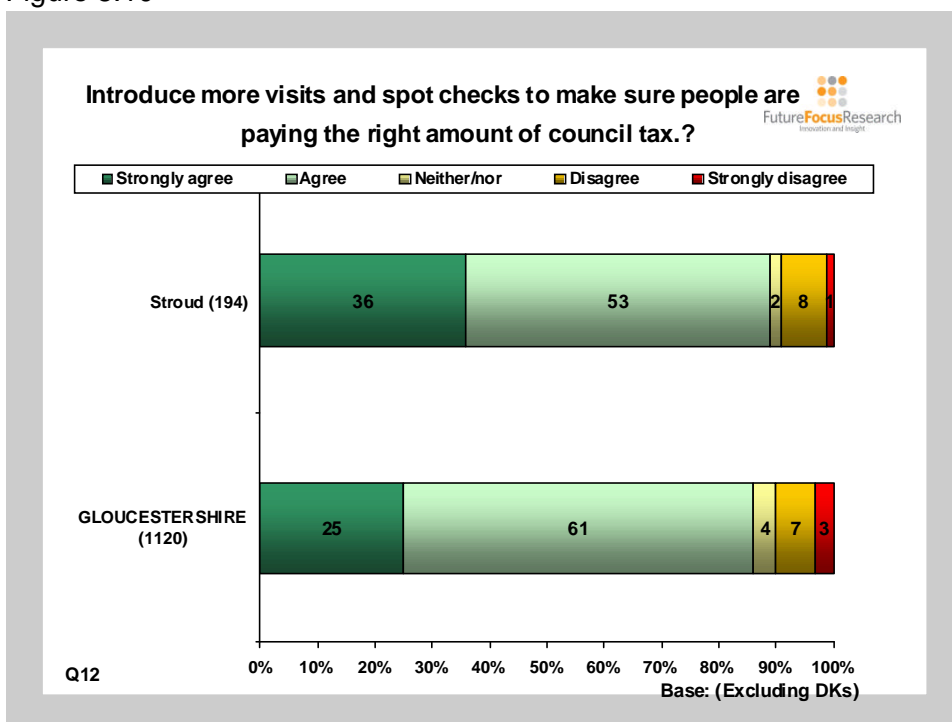


Figure 8.10



9. Tewkesbury Borough Council

Figure 9.1

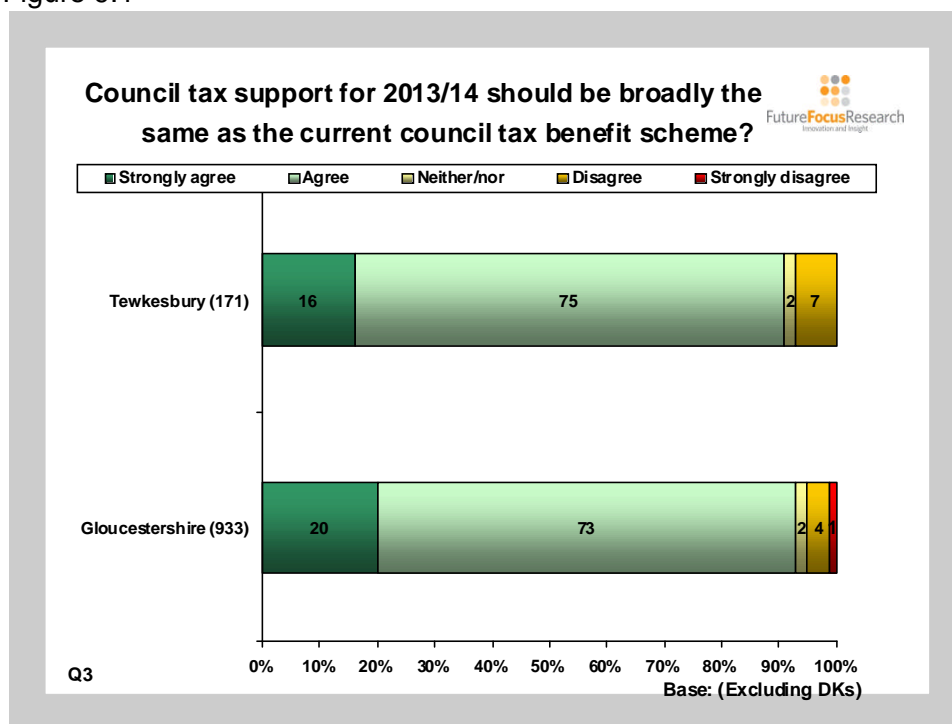


Figure 9.2

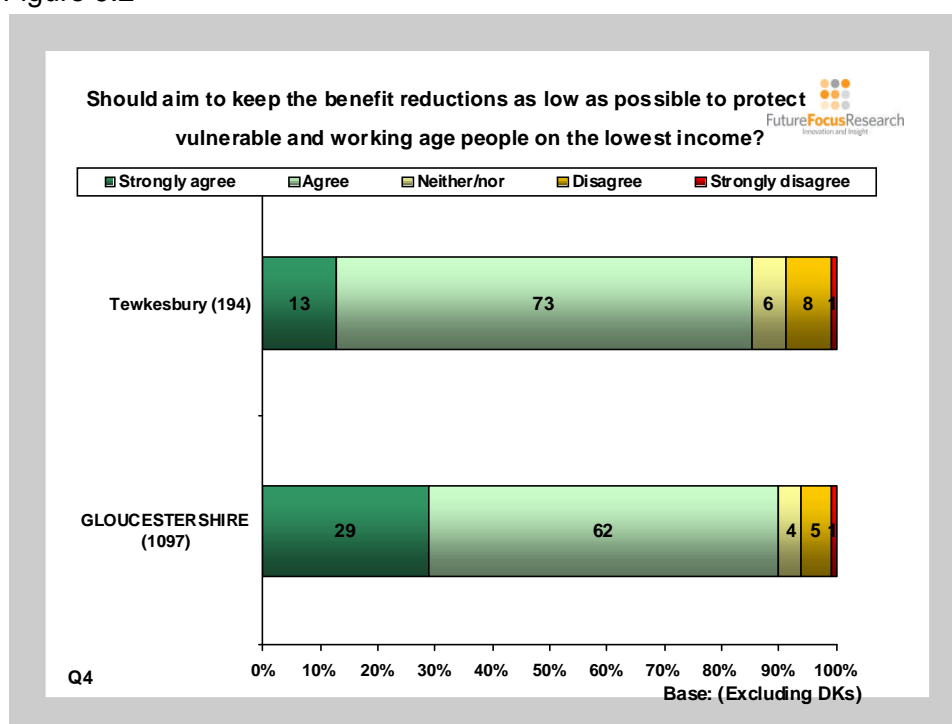


Figure 9.3

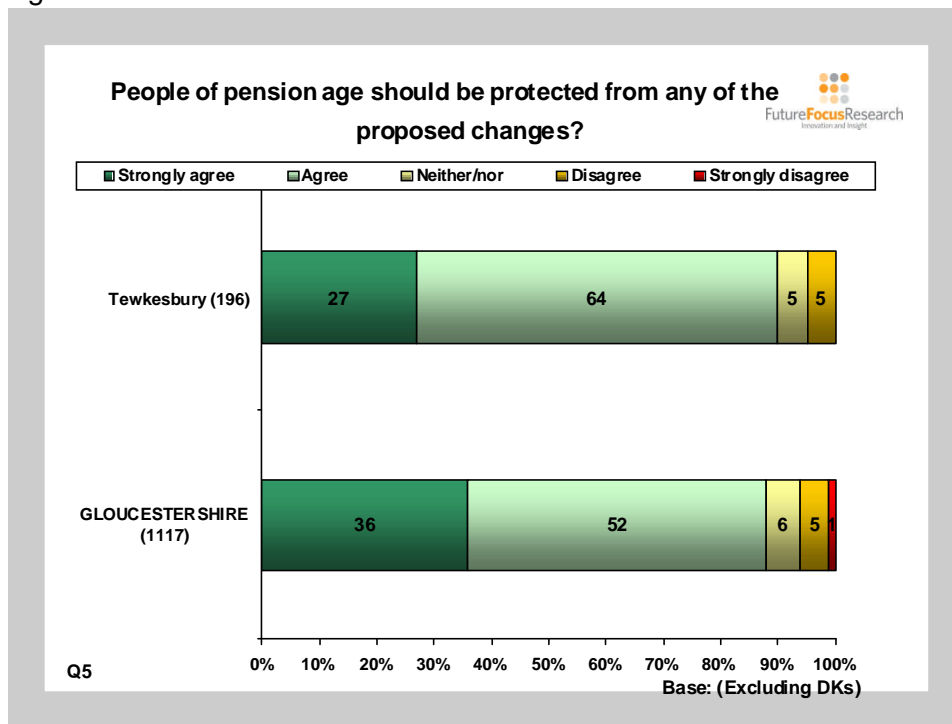


Figure 9.4

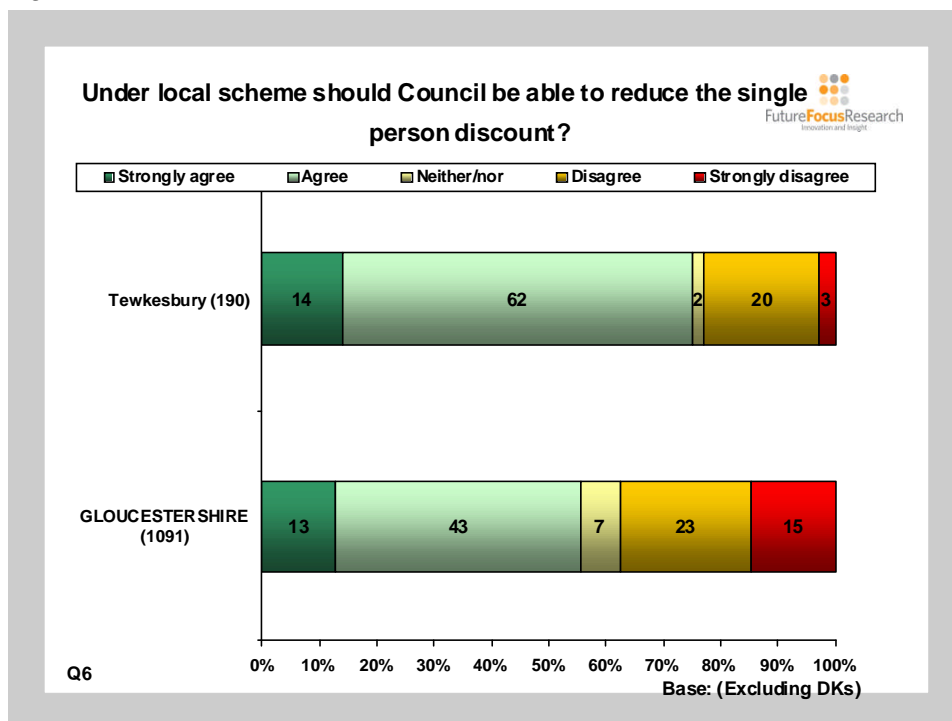


Figure 9.5

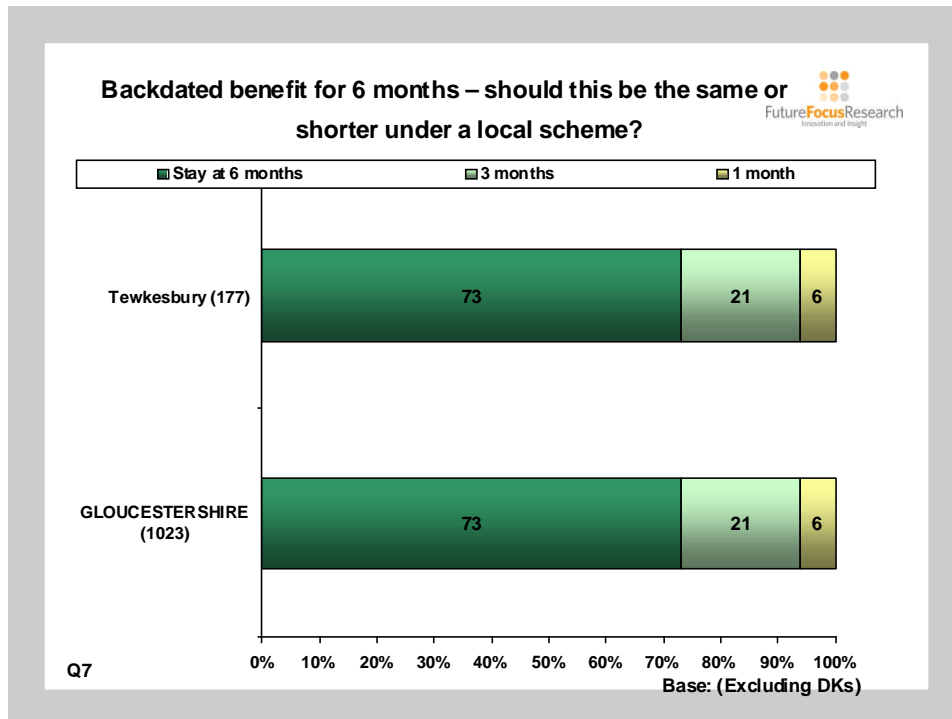


Figure 9.6

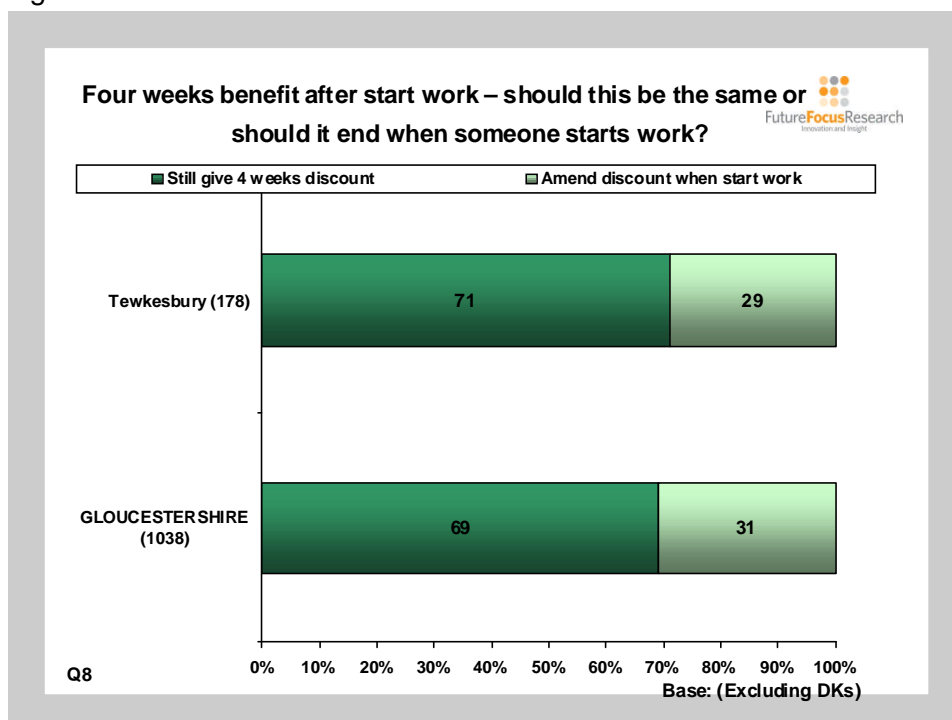


Figure 9.7

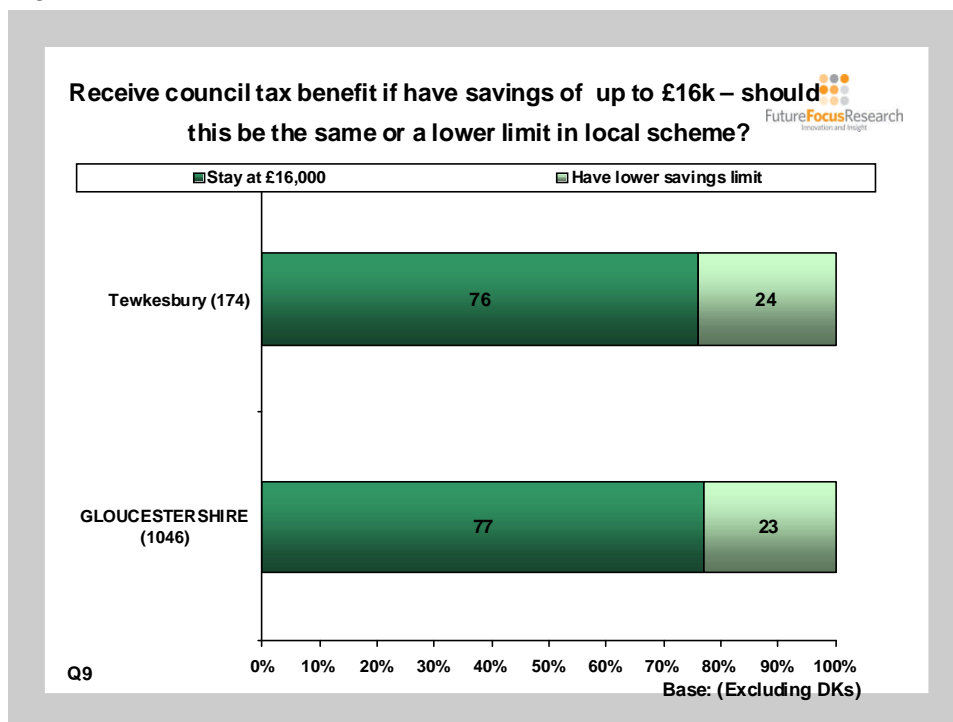


Figure 9.8

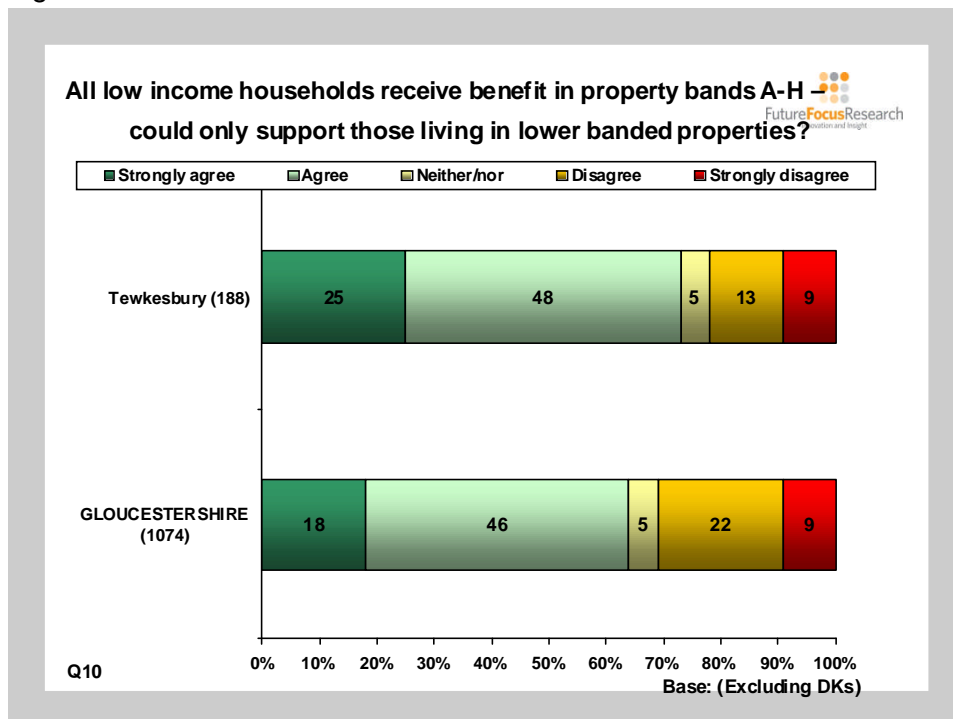


Figure 9.9

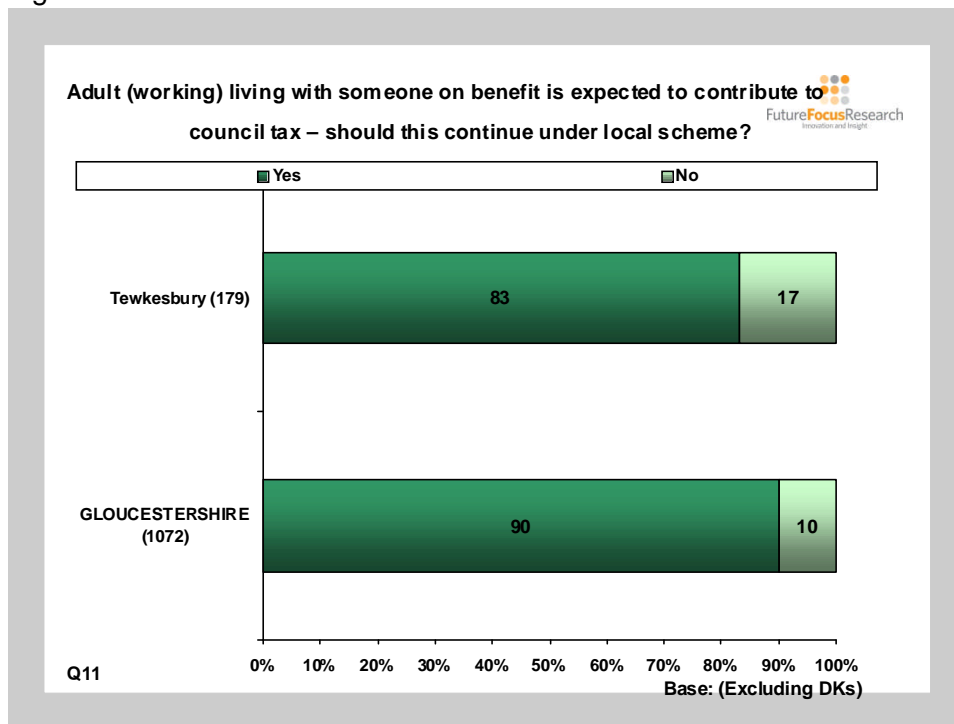


Figure 9.10

