

Were the Nottingham City Council Selective Licensing consultation results really in favour of the scheme?

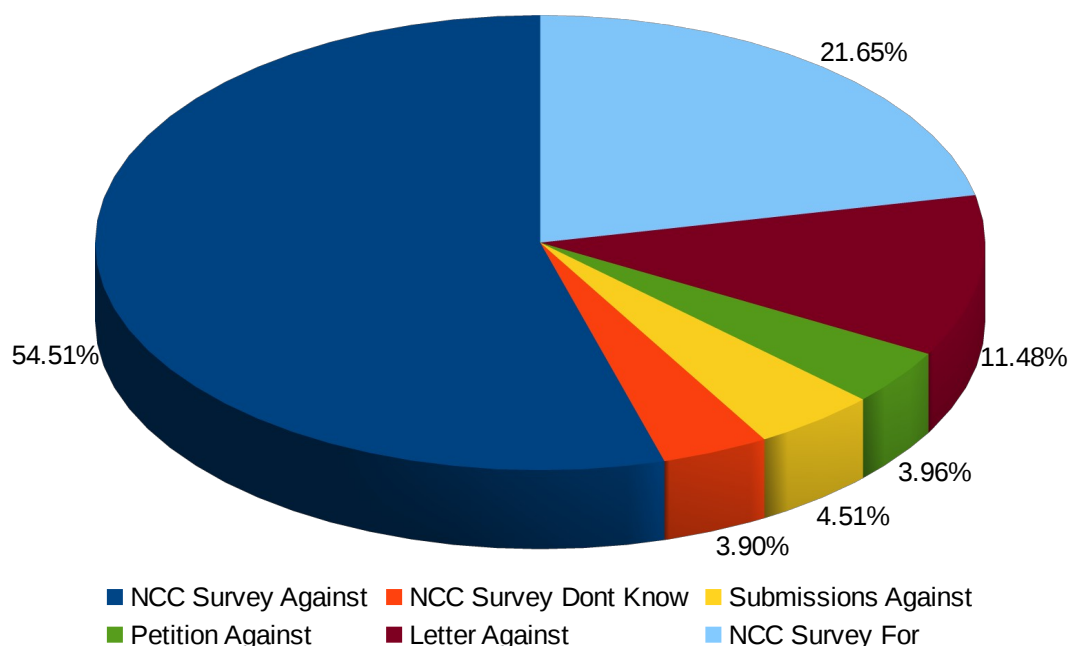
Did the presentation of the consultation feedback data enhance the case for a Selective Licensing Scheme?

When Nottingham City Council at last released data from its consultation exercise into their £20m Selective Licensing initiative which ran to the end of March 2017, the data demonstrated a broad rejection of the scheme which was obviously a blow to the Council's efforts to build support for Selective Licensing. The data is apparently no longer available but highlights can still be found on the Executive Board minutes. All in all the Council's own survey resulted in just 1460 responses, a large proportion of which were against the scheme along with other aspects such as the then stated cost, the coverage and the enforcement regime. The subsequent response by the Council has resulted in much of the consultation feedback being either ignored or the figures being cherry-picked as shown.

Selective hearing?

The Council claimed to have received 1460 responses to its consultation survey, 81 submissions from organisations and individuals, a petition totalling 71 against the survey and 208 electronic copies of a letter against the survey. If a submission has equal weighting with a survey response that's 1,820 responses (See Figure 1). 68% (993) of the consultation survey respondents were against the scheme which meant that when added to the the other response sources just under 22% of all official consultation responses were in favour of the scheme. To counter this the Council have elected to focus on the survey to the exclusion of the other submissions (unless they were positive) and cherry-picked parts of that survey where tenants were narrowly in favour of the scheme.

Figure 1 Consultation Responses



What the survey said or didn't.

By focusing on the survey hundreds of negative responses were eliminated. Many landlords were reluctant to complete the online survey as they had to provide key details about themselves and were worried about being pursued via their submission. This was a bias that the NCC never dealt with. Despite the fact that 68% were opposed to the scheme, the NCC chose to filter out landlords and also agents, and further they chose to emphasise the fact that 54% of tenants thought the scheme would lead to improvements “in the rental sector” which is hardly a resounding cry for the scheme.

Most responses to the scheme's proposals were actually quite damning.

For example those who were against the draconian enforcement measures being proposed were 55% opposed to 28% for such measures. Bizarrely, the Council chose to pick up on the fact that 28 (non-stakeholder) social housing tenants who for some reason had also responded to the survey were 64% in favour! It is telling though that not even half of the PRS tenants (49%) agreed with the enforcement regime. The tenants also disagreed with the then £600 per property lump sum up front charge with just 27% of PRS tenants thinking this was a good idea with a resounding 76% of all respondents were against the charge. As of the time of writing the license cost figure has now risen to ~~£650~~ £780.

It was also apparent that most respondents had no faith in the claim that the scheme would reduce ASB (66% v 17% against). Tenants aren't stupid they know that millions of pounds in licensing fees will be diverted from their homes and communities to fund the council's licensing department.

The Council's proposed designation was also badly received. Only 38% of PRS tenants agreed on the extent of the scheme and only 21% of total survey respondents agreed with it. It is worth noting that they have now redrawn the boundaries of the scheme to take out some areas many of which appear to be parkland, industrial sites or low density housing meaning only a few thousand homes have escaped the scheme.

An attempt to discredit their own data

The Council has sought to produce analysis of the data and filter out many of the responses.

446 responses appear to have been filtered out in the analysis document because no postcode was entered on the form. This is highly likely to go against landlords wanting to protect their anonymity and the Council needs to provide a full disclosure of the responses.

The council has made an artificial distinction of respondents – those living out of town as opposed to those living in the City. This has obviously been an attempt to isolate and negate (filter) landlord responses. Despite being unfair there are a number of problems with doing this including:

If a landlord moves home from Clifton to Ilkeston during the consultation does he/she have less of a stake in the outcome?

If you separate responses in this way how does this work with tenants? The response document has a group of tenants who rent a home in Nottingham in the PRS but live outside of Nottingham. It is

difficult to conceive how this group could be arranging their lives but the Council gave them prominence in the response data.

Summary

This is the data that was presented at the meeting of the Executive (See link below). It would seem that the the consultation was against the scheme after all. Further investigation should now proceed into the the results of the consultation and indeed into the conduct of the consultation.

<http://committee.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/documents/s59486/Appendix%20%20Selective%20Licensing%20Consultation.pdf>