

REPORT TO CABINET

Open		Would any decisions proposed :		
Any especially affected Wards NONE	Mandatory	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide	NO	
		Need to be recommendations to Council	YES	
		Is it a Key Decision	YES	
Lead Member: Cllr Adrian Lawrence E-mail: cllr.adrian.lawrence@west-norfolk.gov.uk		Other Cabinet Members consulted:		
		Other Members consulted:		
Lead Officer: Joanne Stanton, Revenues and Benefits Manager E-mail: joanne.stanton@west-norfolk.gov.uk Direct Dial:01553 616349		Other Officers consulted: Lorraine Gore Management Team		
Financial Implications YES	Policy/Personnel Implications NO	Statutory Implications YES	Equal Impact Assessment YES If YES: Pre-screening/ Full Assessment YES	Risk Management Implications YES

Date of meeting: 6 December 2016

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2017/2018: FINAL SCHEME

Summary

The Council must review and agree its Council Tax Support scheme each financial year. This process includes consulting with major preceptors, publishing a draft Council Tax Support scheme and then consulting with interested parties before the final Council Tax Support scheme is approved.

The draft Council Tax Support scheme for consultation was agreed by Cabinet on 7 September 2016. The consultation period ended on 23 October 2016. This report details the results of the consultation and recommends the final Council Tax Support scheme for 2017/2018.

It is recommended that Members:

- 1. Note the responses from the Council Tax Support consultation at Section 2**
- 2. Agree that the draft Council Tax support scheme detailed in the Cabinet report of 7 September 2016 be recommended to Council as the final Council Tax Support scheme for 2017/2018**

Reason for Decision

To ensure a Council Tax Support scheme for 2017/2018 is agreed by full Council by 31 January 2017

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Council Tax Support (CTS) is a discount awarded to those on a low income to help towards the cost of their council tax bill. It is based on a person's household and income. There are currently 11,214 households claiming CTS in the Borough.
- 1.2. The Council must review and agree a CTS scheme each year. The CTS Scheme for 2017/2018 must be agreed by full Council by 31 January 2017.
- 1.3. The draft CTS scheme was agreed earlier in the year and has been open to public consultation. This report details the results of the consultation and the comments made, and the recommended final CTS Scheme for 2017/2018.
- 1.4. This report should be read in conjunction with the Cabinet Report of 7 September 2016 detailing the draft CTS Scheme for 2017/2018.

2. Consultation

- 2.1 The CTS Consultation was available primarily via the Council's website and as a paper copy if requested. Online responses were encouraged as data can be electronically logged and collated. A CTS entitlement calculator was also included so people could calculate the impact of the proposals on their own CTS award if appropriate.
- 2.2 The consultation opened on 12 September 2016 and the link to the CTS Consultation webpage was sent to all of the Borough's Councillors and Parish Clerks so they could encourage their residents to respond. It went to 51 third party organisations including Shelter, CAN and the CAB, as well as 34 Housing Benefit landlords. The link was tweeted, added to Streetlife and included in the Council's Stayconnected email. A press release was issued and an article appeared in the Lynn News. Internally all the Revenues and Benefits staff received the link and an article was included in Internal Affairs. The consultation closed on 23 October 2016.
- 2.3 33 responses were received, although two had to be discounted as they had not answered the entry question. A full analysis of the remaining 31 responses is included at Appendix B.
- 2.4 65% of respondents agreed we should keep the current CTS scheme. A number of individual comments were made, sometimes linked to the respondent's own circumstances, but there were no common themes or major concerns raised.
- 2.5 There was broad support for each of the proposed changes to the CTS scheme for 2017/2018 as shown in Section 3 of the Cabinet Report of 7 September 2016 and summarised at section 3 below. Therefore the draft CTS Scheme for 2017/2018 is recommended to be taken forward as the final CTS Scheme for 2017/2018.

3. Changes to be included in the final Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/2018

- 3.1 The principle of the existing CTS scheme is an equal cut is made to everyone apart from those in a protected group. This principle continues with the 2017/2018 CTS Scheme
- 3.2 The changes to the scheme for 2017/2018 have already been detailed in previous reports but are included again here for information. These changes only apply to working age people who are not in a Protected Group:
- A) The Applicable Amounts and Premiums are frozen at the same levels as 2015/2016 and 2016/2017,
 - B) The 25% deduction is applied at the start of the calculation rather than the end,
 - C) Child Benefit and Child Maintenance are no longer included as income,
 - D) Allowances for families used to calculate CTS are restricted to two children for new claims and new births,
 - E) CTS will not be paid for temporary absences outside Great Britain lasting four weeks or longer, and
 - F) 70% of Graduate Loans will be disregarded
- 3.3 The 2017/2018 CTS scheme is estimated to cost £9,227,608, equivalent to a reduction in the taxbase of 6,123 Band D properties. This compares to £9,277,229 for 2016/2017, a reduction of just under £50,000. This is within the projections in the Financial Plan. The cost is split between the preceptors in proportion to their share of the council tax.
- 3.4 The scheme will not contain any transitional provisions however a Discretionary Hardship fund of £10,000 will continue to assist any person in receipt of CTS who is experiencing hardship and having difficulty paying their Council Tax bill. The hardship provisions form part of the Council Tax Discretionary Reliefs policy agreed by Members in 2014.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 The Council is able to adopt any scheme of CTS for its working age claimants. As CTS is now a discount rather than a benefit it reduces the Council Taxbase which impacts on the Council's income. The Council receives a CTS grant as part of its Formula Funding, although the actual amount for CTS is no longer identified separately by Central Government.
- 4.2 The Council could decide to adopt a CTS Scheme that is based on the national, more generous, scheme of CTS for pension age customers. The national scheme is based on the old scheme of Council Tax Benefit with no cuts to support for any group. However this scheme would not fit within the projections in the Financial Plan and alternative resources would need to be identified to fund the additional cost.

- 4.3 The cost of a local CTS scheme based on the national, more generous CTS scheme is estimated at £10,234,230 equivalent to a reduction on the taxbase of 6,518 band D properties. The deficit between this and the proposed CTS scheme is an estimated £1,006,622. This would mean a £765,033 deficit for Norfolk County Council, a £140,927 deficit for the Police and Crime Commissioner and a £100,662 deficit for the Borough and Parish Councils.
- 4.4 The impact on individual parish and town councils is through a reduction in council tax base and will vary throughout the Borough according to the distribution of CTS applicants. The Council will continue to distribute a CTS grant to the parishes although this is reducing each year in line with reductions in RSG.
- 4.5 The Council can choose to implement the national scheme, or a different more expensive CTS scheme, and meet the shortfall from elsewhere within service budgets, increasing fees and charges or by raising council tax. Should the Council choose to do so, the consultation responses identified that people would rather see council tax increased than cutting services or using savings. However for the past three years the Council has chosen to implement a local CTS scheme which is based on the reduced level of funding and fits within the Financial Plan.
- 4.6 Pension age claimants are excluded from the local CTS scheme and are paid based on the more generous national CTS scheme, with the Council meeting this cost. As the majority of the Council's claims are pension age, to continue to meet the projections in the Financial Plan a significant reduction in the level of support needs to be continued for working age claimants. There are limited options available to achieve this and there is not scope for any alternative scheme to be significantly different to the CTS scheme agreed for 2016/2017.
- 4.7 The CTS scheme for 2017/2018 is designed to protect vulnerable groups and incentivise work whilst meeting the projections in the Financial Plan. It also includes wider welfare reform changes to other benefits and makes some technical changes, including no longer counting child benefit and child maintenance as income.

5. Policy Implications

- 5.1 The CTS Scheme for 2017/2018 is a continuation of an existing policy, updated to include welfare reform changes, remove income for children from the CTS calculation and make technical changes to the calculation of CTS.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The funding for the CTS scheme is now rolled into the Council's RSG funding and is no longer identified separately by Central Government. There have been significant reductions in RSG since CTS was originally implemented.

6.2 The taxbase figures in the Financial Plan 2015/2020 assume the CTS scheme, and the corresponding reduction in the taxbase, remains at the same level as 2016/2017 and that the taxbase will grow by 350 band D properties each year. The 2017/2018 proposed CTS scheme is in line with the assumptions included in the Financial Plan.

6.3 Any changes in the CTS scheme which increase costs will require funding or savings to be identified from other service areas.

6.4 The modelled figures for the 2017/2018 CTS scheme show the projected cost to be £9,227,608, equivalent to reduction in the taxbase of 6,123 band D properties. This is within the projections in the Financial Plan 2015/2020.

6.5 The Council will continue to pay a CTS grant to the affected parishes as detailed in the Financial Plan. The grant is paid in proportion to the cost of the CTS scheme for each Parish. The grant is reduced annually in line with the reduction in RSG.

7. Personnel Implications

7.1 None

8. Statutory Considerations

8.1 The Council is required to agree a CTS Scheme for the 2017/2018 financial year by 31 January 2017.

9. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

9.1 A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is included at Appendix A.

10. Risk Management Implications

10.1 The CTS scheme for 2017/2018 is designed to meet the taxbase projections as detailed in the Financial Plan and to include the Government's wider programme of welfare reform. However any increases in demand, changes in the composition of the caseload, for example an increase in the number of pension age claimants, or unforeseen changes to other welfare benefits during the year could represent a financial risk by increasing the cost of the CTS scheme and reducing the taxbase further. The impact of the CTS scheme is, and will continue to be, reviewed monthly.

11. Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

11.1 None

12. Background Papers

12.1 None

**Appendix A: Pre Screening Equality Impact Assessment
(also see 4 December 2012 Cabinet Report)**

<p>Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment</p>	<p>Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk</p> 
<p>Name of policy/service/function</p>	<p>Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/2018</p>
<p>Is this a new or existing policy/service/function?</p>	<p>Continuation and updates to an Existing Policy</p>
<p>Brief summary/description of the main aims of Policy being screened.</p> <p>Please state if this policy/service is rigidly constrained by statutory obligations</p>	<p>Local Council Tax Support (CTS) schemes were introduced from 1 April 2013, replacing the existing national scheme of Council Tax Benefit (CTB) to help those on low incomes with their Council Tax bills.</p> <p>Each council is free to design their own CTS scheme although certain parameters have been set by Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pensioners must be protected from any reduction in support • Vulnerable groups must be considered for protection from any reduction in support • Work incentives should be promoted <p>Government reduced the funding available for CTS schemes by 10% in 2013/2014. From 2014/2015 the funding is rolled into the council's formula funding and not identified separately. As pensioners are protected from any reduction this becomes nearly a 25% reduction in support for working age people if the Council chooses to continue with the 2016/2017 CTS scheme.</p> <p>The 2016/2017 CTS scheme for the Borough was agreed on 28 January 2016 and includes protection for the following groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pensioners • Households with a child under 5 • People entitled to the Disability Premium • People in receipt of Carer's Allowance • People in the ESA Support group <p>The 2017/2018 CTS scheme is a continuation of the 2016/2017 CTS scheme but contains updates to match wider welfare reform changes to other state benefits. It also contains technical changes to update the calculation of CTS awards.</p>
<p>Question</p>	<p>Answer</p>

<p>1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups according to their different protected characteristic, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service?</p> <p>Please tick the relevant box for each group.</p> <p>NB. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group.</p>		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
	Age		√		
	Disability	√			
	Gender				√
	Gender Re-assignment				√
	Marriage/civil partnership				√
	Pregnancy & maternity				√
	Race				√
	Religion or belief				√
	Sexual orientation				√
Other (eg low income)		√			
Question	Answer	Comments			
<p>2. Is the proposed policy/service likely to affect relations between certain equality communities or to damage relations between the equality communities and the Council, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular community or denying opportunities to another?</p>	Yes	<p>The legislation for local CTS schemes states pensioners must be protected from any reduction in the level of support they receive. As the funding has been reduced this means a bigger cut falls on working age people and they have to pay 25% of their council tax bill.</p> <p>The legislation also compels councils to have regard to the impact on vulnerable groups and the promotion of work incentives</p>			
<p>3. Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?</p>	Yes	See 2			
<p>4. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?</p>	Yes	<p>The CTS scheme contains a number of groups who are protected from the changes in the local CTS scheme and who receive CTS based on the national, more generous, scheme.</p> <p>Pensioners are protected as they are not expected to return to work to increase their income to pay for any reduction in council tax support.</p> <p>Children under 5 are protected in accordance with Child Poverty and the regulations for Universal Credit.</p> <p>Those entitled to the Disability Premium are a Protected Group protected to reflect their higher living costs.</p> <p>People receiving Carer's Allowance are a Protected Group as it is harder for them to take on work or work extra hours to</p>			

		<p>increase their income</p> <p>People in the ESA Support group are protected as they are deemed unable to work</p> <p>Work Incentives are promoted to encourage people back into work to increase their income and the amount people can keep before it affects their CTS is increased by £10 a week. This is in line with the Government's welfare reform principles.</p>
<p>5. Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions? If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Actions:</p> <p>A full EIA has been completed as part of this Cabinet Report</p> <hr/> <p>Actions agreed by EWG member:</p>
<p>Assessment completed by: Name</p>	<p>Joanne Stanton</p>	
<p>Job title</p>	<p>Revenues and Benefits Manager</p>	
<p>Date</p>	<p>11 August 2016</p>	



Equality Impact Assessment

Full Impact Assessment Form: Local Council Tax Support Scheme

1. What is the service area(s) and who is the lead officer?

Service Area:

- Chief Executive

Lead Officers:

- Lorraine Gore – Assistant Director, Chief Executive's
- Joanne Stanton – Revenues and Benefits Manager

Current Service Provision:

- Local Council Tax Support (CTS) replaced the national Council Tax Benefit scheme from April 2013. Funding was reduced and moved from the Department of Work and Pensions to local Councils. Local Councils are now responsible for designing a CTS scheme each year to help people in their area on low incomes with the cost of their council tax bill. The amount of CTS awarded is dependent on the income and circumstances of the applicant and the CTS scheme the local council has in place.
- In the Borough, CTS is paid to over 11,200 claimants at an annual cost of £9.23m. The CTS scheme has been established since 2013 and has been subject to minor amendments to include wider welfare reforms each year since then.
- The proposed changes to the CTS scheme for 2017/2018 include Central Government reforms to the rules for claiming Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. These changes impact on a number of groups and make a significant difference to the CTS some people receive.

2. What change are you proposing?

The local CTS scheme is now well established, having first been agreed in 2013. A full EIA was also carried out at this time. Minor changes have been made to the scheme each year since then but none requiring a further full EIA.

The Government's Welfare Reform Bill 2015 announced wide ranging welfare reforms to be introduced in 2016 and 2017. Some of these are already in place and matched in the Council's CTS scheme – such as the freeze in working age benefits and reductions in social rents – and some have yet to be introduced.

The CTS scheme aims to match wider welfare reforms and is updated annually to include changes to the criteria for claiming Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. The intention is to keep these benefits closely aligned to ensure the CTS scheme is easier for customers to understand and administratively simple.

Changes being introduced over the coming months as a result of welfare reforms, and proposed as part of the draft CTS scheme for 2017/2018 are:

- A continuing freeze on Applicable Amounts and Premiums (allowances) so they remain at 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 levels,
- A limit on the allowances for children so families only receive an allowance for a maximum of two children, even if they have more (only applies to new claims or new births from 1 April 2017), and
- The limit on temporary absence from the home outside Great Britain being reduced from 13 weeks to 4 weeks (introduced from 28 July 2016 for Housing Benefit and Pension Credit).

Changes are also proposed to the CTS scheme to amend the calculation of CTS and to make provision for claims which may be affected by welfare reforms from 2018 onwards. These are:

- The CTS calculation will be based on 75% of the weekly council tax bill, rather than 75% of the weekly entitlement. This ensures customers pay 25% of their weekly council tax. The current CTS scheme uses 75% of the entitlement meaning people have been paying less council tax than was intended, and
- No longer including Child Benefit and Child Maintenance as income when calculating how much CTS someone is entitled to. This means people could receive more CTS as their income is lower. It also makes the scheme fairer if a child's age for the Protected Group reduces to under three rather than under five (due to be introduced in Universal Credit in the future).

3. How will this change help the council achieve its corporate business plan objectives (and therefore your Directorate/service objectives)?

The council must agree a CTS scheme for the forthcoming year by 31 January 2017. CTS is a discount so it affects the taxbase in the same way as any other council tax discount. The taxbase forms part of the Financial Plan so the CTS scheme must meet the required budgetary constraints.

4. What is your evidence of need for change?

The changes to the criteria for the CTS scheme are needed to ensure wider welfare reforms to other benefits, including Housing Benefit and Universal Credit, are included in the scheme. The CTS scheme also needs to meet the projections within the Financial Plan.

5. How will this change deliver improved value for money and/or release efficiency savings?

Not applicable

6. What geographical area does this proposal cover?

The change will affect all areas of the Borough.

There are no cross boundary implications but as each Council has variations in its schemes which produces a 'postcode lottery' where someone with the same circumstances would receive a different level of CTS in one Council area compared to another.

7. What is the impact of your proposal?

The principle of the 2016/2017 CTS scheme is an equal cut is made to everyone apart from those in a protected group. This means that working age people only receive 75% of their CTS entitlement.

This principle continues with the draft 2017/2018 CTS Scheme but with some amendments. Updates are made to include welfare reform changes, and some technical changes are included to tidy up the criteria and the calculation of CTS. These amendments were taken to the Corporate Performance Panel on 18 July 2016 who supported the draft scheme. (NB: the CPP Report did not include the Temporary Absence changes as the start date of 28 July 2016 was not announced until 19 July 2016 which was after the Panel meeting).

There are five changes to the current CTS scheme proposed for the 2017/2018 CTS scheme. These changes only apply to working age people who are not in a Protected Group. These are detailed below.

G) The Applicable Amounts and Premiums are frozen at the same levels as 2015/2016 and 2016/2017:

- This matches changes made to other benefits by the Government, including Housing Benefit. It means that there is no automatic annual increase in amount of CTS someone receives.
- This change affects 1,594 claims (14%)

H) The 25% deduction is applied at the start of the calculation rather than the end:

- This is a technical change and means that the calculation of CTS is based on a lower figure than the current scheme. It means the maximum amount of CTS someone can receive may be lower.
- This change affects 838 claims (7%)

I) Child Benefit and Child Maintenance are no longer included as income:

- This means that people receiving either of these should see an increase in their CTS as less income is taken into account.
 - This change affects 311 claims (3%)
- J) Allowances for families used to calculate CTS are restricted to two children for new claims and new births:
- Under the 2016/2017 CTS scheme an allowance of £66.90 per child is given for the first and each subsequent child with no limit applied. A couple with four children would receive the Couple's Allowance of £114.85, plus allowances for the children of 4 x £66.90, a total of £382.45. Provided their weekly income is less than this they will receive full CTS.
 - From 1 April 2017, if they made a new claim they would still be entitled to the Couple's Allowance of £114.85, but would only receive allowances for two of the children of 2 x £66.90, a total of £248.65. If their weekly income is higher than this their CTS will start to reduce.
 - This change matches changes being made to Tax Credits and Housing Benefit from April 2017.
 - This change affects 56 claims (0.5%)
- K) CTS will not be paid for temporary absences outside Great Britain lasting four weeks or longer:
- This reduces the current time limit from 13 weeks to four weeks in line with Housing Benefit and Pension Credit and means anyone absent outside Great Britain for four weeks or longer cannot receive CTS for the whole of their absence
 - This change affects a minimal number of claims

8. What data have you used to support your assessment of the impact of your proposal?

The supplier of the Council's Revenues and Benefits system (Civica) supplies software to allow the extensive modelling of any proposed CTS scheme. The output allows a line-by-line analysis of each CTS claim and the impact of any changes.

9. What consultation has been undertaken with stakeholders/groups directly or indirectly impacted by the proposals and how do you intend to use this information to inform the decision?

The draft CTS scheme for 2017/2018 will be subject to a six week public consultation running from 12 September 2016 to 23 October 2016. The results will then form part of a further Cabinet Report recommending the final CTS scheme for 2017/2018.

10. Are there any implications for other service areas?

The CTS scheme is now well established for both customers and staff. However any changes are likely to give rise to more enquiries. The following departments may be affected:

- Council Information Centre
 - Increase in volume of customer enquiries
 - Dealing with more angry / unhappy customers
 - Dealing with more customers with financial difficulties
 - Housing / Homelessness
 - Increase in customers unable to afford their housing costs as they have to pay more Council Tax
 - Combined effect of the new CTS scheme with other welfare reforms affecting people's ability to pay their housing costs
 - Finance
 - Reduction in collection rates and income to the Council affecting cash flow, although this has not proved to be the case to date.
 - Major Precepting Authorities
 - As CTS is a discount it reduces the taxbase for all precepting authorities. Any changes will impact on the County and the Police by altering their taxbase which may result in a reduction in income.
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11. What impact (either positive or negative) will this change have on different groups of the population?

Including the wider Government welfare reforms in the Council's CTS scheme makes it easier for customers to understand and ensures a consistent approach across the different benefits customers may be receiving.

The freeze to all allowances and premiums, the amendment to the application of the 25% deduction and the changes to the rules on temporary absence will affect any claim not in a Protected Group. They do not specifically have a positive or negative impact on any particular group of the population.

The changes to the treatment of Child Benefit and Child Maintenance will have a positive impact on people with either one or two children who receive child benefit and/or child maintenance. This will no longer be included as income in the CTS calculation and their CTS award will increase.

People with more than two children who make a new claim from 1 April 2017 will have the allowance for a child limited to a maximum of two children. Similarly anyone with two children who has a new birth from 1 April 2017 will not receive any additional allowance for that child. The allowance adds £66.90 per child to the amount a person is calculated to need for the purposes of the CTS calculation. Households where there is a child under five are in a Protected Group so this change will not apply where there is a new birth until the child reaches the age of five. It will only apply to those households where there are more than two children and the youngest is aged five or older.

Overall, claims are likely to be affected by a combination of the changes which affects the overall net impact. For example a family receiving Child Benefit may be entitled to an increase in CTS as this is no longer taken into account as income, but part of this is offset by a small reduction as a result of the change to the 25% deduction.

12. What actions could be taken to mitigate the adverse impacts identified in question 11? Please clearly state if any actions cannot be mitigated.

The Government's drive behind welfare reform is to encourage people to increase their income by finding work. Those who cannot be expected to work, or increase their hours if they are already working, should be protected from reductions to their CTS and having to pay more council tax.

54 per cent of the Council's current CTS caseload is Pension Age. This group are paid based on the national, more generous CTS scheme as they are not expected to find work, but the Council still has to fund the cost. Due to this, and the high number of working age claims in a Protected Group, an equal 25 per cent reduction applies to all working age claimants not in a Protected Group.

The Protected Groups include households with vulnerable residents and those not expected to find work or increase their hours. Their CTS is calculated based on the national, more generous, CTS scheme rules. The groups are:

- Households with a child under 5
- Those entitled to the Disability Premium as part of their needs calculation
- Those in receipt of Carer's allowance
- Those in the Employment and Support Allowance Support Group

Other people may be affected and a Hardship Fund of £10,000 is available to assist any vulnerable person experiencing difficulty paying their Council Tax.

13. How will you monitor the impact of this change?

Customer feedback will be encouraged and monitored to identify any adverse impacts. The reasons for applications to the discretionary Hardship Fund will be analysed to establish if any group is suffering extreme detriment under the new CTS scheme so action can be taken.

The cost and composition of the CTS scheme is monitored monthly to ensure projections are still within the Financial Plan.

Overall the new CTS scheme will be monitored and reports made available to Members six monthly.

14. Other Staff Involved in Assessment (including Corporate Equality Group Representatives), and comments from Equality Work Group Reps

Passed to the Equalities Group for comment.

Assessment Completed By: Jo Stanton
Job Title: Revenues and Benefits Manager
Date: 11 August 2016

Appendix B – Council Tax Support 2017/2018 Consultation Responses

Question	Responses	Comments/Alternatives									
Should we keep the current Council Tax Support scheme?	<table border="1" data-bbox="450 363 864 469"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="450 363 562 395">Yes</th> <th data-bbox="562 363 701 395">No</th> <th data-bbox="701 363 864 395">Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="450 395 562 427">20</td> <td data-bbox="562 395 701 427">11</td> <td data-bbox="701 395 864 427">31</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="450 427 562 469">65%</td> <td data-bbox="562 427 701 469">35%</td> <td data-bbox="701 427 864 469"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Total	20	11	31	65%	35%		<p data-bbox="1070 363 2047 531">With the bedroom tax and cuts to benefits many people in KL are living in poverty including families with children. It is essential to support our most vulnerable residents and continue to keep the current council tax support scheme. I would prefer to see council tax increase slightly for all residents who are in employment and removed for those living on benefits</p> <p data-bbox="1070 568 2047 735">The Council Tax Support Scheme is needed more than ever, nearly every employer pays the minimum, utility costs have soared and many parts of West Norfolk are extremely limited in employment opportunities. The only change should be the savings amount - 6k is far too low these days and using that amount to pay council tax just stores up problems for the future.</p> <p data-bbox="1070 772 2047 903">Society has a responsibility to support vulnerable families. This needs to be done efficiently and with provisions to prevent abuse. It is also essential not to demonise, or brand as 'scroungers' those who rely on council tax support as the vast majority of families who benefit have no other options.</p> <p data-bbox="1070 940 2047 1007">Increase the council tax for all properties to cover the cost of the support scheme.</p> <p data-bbox="1070 1043 2047 1241">Seems all aimed at those living in housing association, but many people struggle with large bills who live in private rented or owner-occupier who probably lived in that house all of their married lives, but are now struggling, uproar when suggestion that council occupiers downsize, but if you own the house, no you should just downsize, unfair. Have I got this wrong?</p> <p data-bbox="1070 1278 2047 1374">We believe that you should continue the scheme but make the level of discount offered more finely graduated so that it can closer reflect individual household income circumstances.</p>
Yes	No	Total									
20	11	31									
65%	35%										

		<p>X Parish Council supports the current scheme as it is a valuable supplement to the Precept and, as such, an important income stream to the Parish.</p> <p>The current scheme does not seem to help all that need it. I am on a low income and get full help in terms of Housing Benefit, WTC, CTC etc, and yet did not qualify for Council Tax Support.</p> <p>You should actually increase the support you provide for those in need. This council offers the least amount of support possible and it's increasingly hard for people to manage.</p> <p>I've just moved from East Cambs I am a single mother, run a part time business and take sole care of my child. I have to pay council tax with no discount in west Norfolk because my ex pays me maintenance. Maintenance is not a wage! How dare you count it as such! Are u taking this into account for all single mothers or just the ones who work?</p> <p>It would be much simpler if you just charged half the council tax for people who live alone or are single parents only. A household with 2 working adults should be self supporting. Families with two or more children use the Council services the most but pay the least under your scheme. It just makes them more state dependent. People should not live beyond their means.</p> <p>People who are on any kind of ESA should be in the protected group and not just those in the support group.</p>
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<p>Do you agree with the principle that any Child Maintenance and Child Benefit paid to the applicant or partner should be ignored as income when calculating Council Tax Support?</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Yes</th> <th>No</th> <th>Don't Know / Blank</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>19</td> <td>9</td> <td>3</td> <td>31</td> </tr> <tr> <td>61%</td> <td>29%</td> <td>10%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total	19	9	3	31	61%	29%	10%		<p>We are concerned that this could mean that some households with no working adult could be better off in certain circumstances than similar households where one adult is working in a low waged job. This would not encourage becoming employed and we therefore do not agree with the proposal.</p> <p>Continue to treat both as income as that's how anyone in receipt will surely regard them. Anyone choosing to have a child should be prepared to support it, not rely on other taxpayers to do so.</p> <p>People with dependants bringing them up on their own have more costs and less support. You are contributing to child poverty if you do not allow maintenance payments to be exempt. Single parents don't ask to be in the situation they are in and a lot work very hard to make the best for their kids who are already at a loss being in a single parent family.</p> <p>Child Maintenance should not be ignored as it contains an element of support for parent who is receiving it, Child Benefit should be ignored.</p>
Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total											
19	9	3	31											
61%	29%	10%												
<p>Do you agree with limiting the number of dependant children within the calculation for Council Tax Support to a maximum of two?</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Yes</th> <th>No</th> <th>Don't Know / Blank</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>19</td> <td>8</td> <td>4</td> <td>31</td> </tr> <tr> <td>61%</td> <td>26%</td> <td>13%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total	19	8	4	31	61%	26%	13%		<p>Everyone should be treated the same irrespective of how many children they have</p> <p>This appears to support the view that poorer families who have more than two children are somehow 'feckless' as opposed to wealthier families with more than two children. As such it is regressive and discriminatory as has no place in a civilised society.</p> <p>I believe that two children is too tight a restriction and that three is the better limit as it would mirror average family sizes.</p>
Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total											
19	8	4	31											
61%	26%	13%												

		<p>Those who have more children should be gradually brought in line with payments of others</p> <p>Many families merge via new relationships and the scheme would discourage people from moving in together as the number of children increases. Also, many people find themselves needing help through traumatic events like relationship breakdown, or death of a parent - so a couple that could 'afford' their 4 children could become a single parent being punished for having >2</p> <p>Allow people who have their third child after 1st April 2017 should be included</p> <p>Bringing things in line with the DWP does not always sit comfortable with people. The DWP have not exactly made it easy for vulnerable people and it is dangerous to presume that they are the benchmark for bringing things into line.</p>												
<p>Do you agree with changing the way the 25% minimum payment for working age applicants is calculated?</p>	<table border="1" data-bbox="450 874 976 1046"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="450 874 555 975">Yes</th> <th data-bbox="555 874 678 975">No</th> <th data-bbox="678 874 824 975">Don't Know / Blank</th> <th data-bbox="824 874 976 975">Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="450 975 555 1011">17</td> <td data-bbox="555 975 678 1011">9</td> <td data-bbox="678 975 824 1011">5</td> <td data-bbox="824 975 976 1011">31</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="450 1011 555 1046">55%</td> <td data-bbox="555 1011 678 1046">29%</td> <td data-bbox="678 1011 824 1046">16%</td> <td data-bbox="824 1011 976 1046"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total	17	9	5	31	55%	29%	16%		<p>Keep it as it is</p> <p>Those that have greater incomes should pay more helping out those on low incomes.</p> <p>A 25% minimum will, in a relative sense, affect the poorest households more. Those that are least able to afford their Council Tax will be expected to pay the same (as a minimum) as those that perhaps can afford to pay a little more.</p> <p>No working age household should have to pay more</p> <p>It would be more fair if everyone paid at least half.</p>
Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total											
17	9	5	31											
55%	29%	16%												

Do you agree with reducing the period for which a person can be absent from GB and still receive CTS, to four weeks?

Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total
18	9	4	31
58%	29%	13%	

The purpose of the visit abroad should be taken into account. If people are away for a holiday or are in custody for a long period CT Support should stop and be applied for again when they return to their residence. For compassionate absences, sickness etc or service in HM Forces individuals should not be required to re-apply. *Note – there are a number of exceptions to this proposal including absence due the death of a close relative and absences for Armed Forces Personnel posted abroad*

Stay as is and introduce a quick re-application scheme - the current system is far too complex

I personally feel 4 weeks is too low and discriminates against families who legitimately spend the Summer holidays with family abroad. 6 weeks would be fairer.

Yes it seems reasonable but it would be very difficult to administer.

Do you really imagine that anyone's going to report an absence if they know their CTS is going to be stopped? No point in introducing a rule that's incapable of being policed. Therefore leave it as it is.

Any loss or reduction should start from the 4 week and 1 day point and not from the start of the 4 week period.

Some people have perfectly valid reasons for being out of the country for over 4 weeks, for example, if they have an ill relative outside the UK. Extend the period to 12 weeks. *Note – absence due to the death of a close relative is an exception to this rule.*

Depends on the reason, i.e. if a person is working abroad to support a family here this should not apply.

<p>Do you agree with ignoring 70% of any new postgraduate loan in the CTS calculation?</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Yes</th> <th>No</th> <th>Don't Know</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>24</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>31</td> </tr> <tr> <td>77%</td> <td>10%</td> <td>13%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total	24	3	4	31	77%	10%	13%		<p>100% of loan should be disregarded</p> <p>West Norfolk is known to be one of the worst areas of the UK for low aspiration and achievement at age 18. There are no locally based universities within daily travel reach whilst living at their parents' home, as is increasingly the case throughout the country. By not taking account of 30% of the loan the Borough Council can use this to attract young talent here.</p> <p>100% of new postgraduate loans should be used in the calculation. This loan is to compensate for increased university education costs and has to be repaid, it is not a grant. just exempting 70% is penalising those who will rely on this loan in order to gain qualifications and skills which will benefit our society.</p>																						
Yes	No	Don't Know	Total																																	
24	3	4	31																																	
77%	10%	13%																																		
<p>Do you think we should choose any of the following options rather than the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support scheme?</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Yes</th> <th>No</th> <th>Don't Know/Blank</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Increase the level of Council Tax</td> <td>15</td> <td>14</td> <td>2</td> <td>31</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>48%</td> <td>45%</td> <td>7%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Find savings from cutting other council services</td> <td>7</td> <td>21</td> <td>3</td> <td>31</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>23%</td> <td>68%</td> <td>10%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Use the Council's savings</td> <td>10</td> <td>12</td> <td>9</td> <td>31</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>32%</td> <td>39%</td> <td>29%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Yes	No	Don't Know/Blank	Total	Increase the level of Council Tax	15	14	2	31		48%	45%	7%		Find savings from cutting other council services	7	21	3	31		23%	68%	10%		Use the Council's savings	10	12	9	31		32%	39%	29%	
	Yes	No	Don't Know/Blank	Total																																
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	32%	39%	29%																																	

If we were to choose these other options, what would be your order of preference?		1 st	2 nd	3 rd	Don't Know/ Blank	Total
	Increase the level of Council Tax	15	7	7	2	31
		48%	23%	23%	6%	
	Find savings from cutting other council services	6	7	16	2	31
		19%	23%	52%	6%	
Use the Council's savings	8	12	8	3	31	
	26%	38%	26%	10%		
Any other comments on the scheme	<p>It time to put council tax up and not cut services</p> <p>Parish councils find the money useful to offset costs with the community.</p> <p>People are more important than spend on heritage culture etc. So they should be priority</p> <p>It is essential to support people on low incomes - the alternative could / would be a greater cost to the council and other agencies in the future. The personal savings limit should be dropped or significantly increased - parity with other benefits would be 16k (I think)</p> <p>A referendum to decide whether to raise the level of council tax would inevitably bring a decision against a rise. Everything else is going up. Council tax should go up every year.</p> <p>I personally feel that there needs to be a greater range between the council tax bandings, with a reduction for band A and an increase for C and above. <i>Note – the council tax property bands are based on national regulations and the Council does not have the power to change the ranges or proportions.</i></p> <p>I struggle to pay my council tax as it is, so do not want it increased</p>					

You should not be tempted to bring your payments calculator into line with national standards because it simplifies the process. West Norfolk is a low wage economy and national standards are calculated by government on national statistics. Life is more difficult in an area like this and this should be reflected in the Borough's payment calculations.

X Parish Council would wish to maximise the amount it receives in support grant as it is an important income stream for the Parish. We would not wish to see any cuts in existing Borough service levels to finance any changes; X Parish Council office already receives complaints about the level of Borough services and further cuts would exacerbate this.

The fact that government funding is cut should not be made up by the public having to pay more, or receive less services.

This council needs to provide more support to vulnerable people, not look towards reducing it.

If someone is self employed and claiming Housing Benefit they have to prove their earnings as part of this scheme, therefore it is only right and fair that this should be used to calculate their Council Tax support, the current system uses a fictitious figure which does not represent their true earnings which has already been agreed for Housing Benefit purposes.

Council Tax seems to be the only form of tax that has not risen in line with other taxes. An increase in Council Tax is long overdue.

I notice that some services e.g. rubbish collection is sub-contracted. Many councils find that it is cheaper to keep this inhouse. Perhaps then we could get a weekly service and not be charged exhorbitant prices for taking a small boot load of wood from a dismantled shed. Charging a householder £35 to recycle this is out of order that is one quarter of my weekly pension

I believe the collection process to be unfair. Working with the vulnerable people group I am well aware of the great work and connections that the committal team have with partner agencies. The process of debts going to Rossendales make no sense when you are passing debts to a process that hound some of the most vulnerable people in the borough.

<p>Other Options for the Council to consider</p>	<p>Bring pensioners into the main scheme , especially regarding capital limits <i>Note – pensioners are paid under a national set of rules and there are no plans by central government to change this is the near future</i></p> <p>All other non-essential options should be considered first - non essential being decisions on changes that would not negatively impact peoples poverty level, health or care</p> <p>Higher council tax for properties that are occupied for less than 50% of the year would help plug the funding gap as well as returning housing stock to use. <i>Note: the Council already charges the maximum amount allowed for second homes</i></p> <p>If a claimant is also claiming Housing Benefit then the Council has their true earnings (which the government also use for Tax Credits), therefore it is only right to use the correct figure and not a figure that will ensure that any self employed person will not receive any help.</p> <p>Have you considered employing a couple of staff to home visit in terms of your collection process? This could be a more successful process than what is already used. This could be a more constructive way of getting payment plans in place and letting the people of the Borough know that there is somebody helpful rather than a bull in a china shop approach from a bailiff.</p>
<p>Any Further Comments or Questions</p>	<p>Removing the staff from the contact centre has made it more difficult for residents to get help especially those with language difficulties or learning difficulties, no everyone can use computers. The BC should re-introduce front line staff.</p> <p>The council tax system is extremely unfair. People who live in big expensive houses should pay more and the Council Tax reduced for smaller homes. Like most government taxes those who work the hardest and don't waste their money are penalised. This is not how society should work.</p>

Respondents

	Yes	No	Prefer Not To Say	Total
In receipt of Council Tax Support	5	24	2	31

	Male	Female	Prefer Not To Say	Total
Gender	12	15	4	31

	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	Prefer Not To Say	Total
Age	4	2	7	5	5	4	4	31

	Yes	No	Not Sure	Prefer Not To Say	Total
Disability Limiting Day to Day Activities	5	21	1	4	31