

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Corporate Performance Panel		
DATE:	13 November 2017		
TITLE:	Council Tax Support Scheme 2018/2019 – Final Scheme		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Policy Development		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Housing and Community		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Joanne Stanton		
OPEN/EXEMPT	Open	WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	Yes

REPORT SUMMARY/COVER PAGE

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2018/2019: FINAL SCHEME

PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:

The Council must review and agree its 2018/2019 Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme for working age people by 31 January 2018. Options for the draft CTS scheme for 2018/2019 were presented to the Panel on 17 July 2017 and the preferred draft CTS scheme was chosen. This was agreed by Cabinet on 6 September 2017. The draft CTS scheme was then opened to public consultation from 7 September 2017 to 18 October 2017.

This report details the results of the consultation and the recommended final CTS scheme for 2018/2019.

KEY ISSUES:

The Council is free to design its own CTS scheme for working age people. CTS for pension age people is paid based on a national set of rules but the Council must cover the cost. Central Government provide some funding towards the CTS scheme as part of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) but this is not identified separately and has reduced in line with reductions to RSG.

The draft CTS scheme for 2018/2019 has been agreed and consulted on and this paper details the outcome of the consultation. 15 responses were received and no changes are proposed to the draft CTS scheme as a result of the consultation.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

The options were presented to CPP on 17 July 2017. This report should be read in conjunction with the CTS report of 17 July 2017 and the CTS Cabinet Report of 6 September 2017.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Panel agree that the draft CTS scheme for 2018/2019 which went to public consultation is recommended as the final CTS scheme for 2018/2019.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

To ensure a CTS scheme for working age people for 2018/2019 is agreed by Council by 31 January 2018.

REPORT DETAIL

1. Introduction

The Council must review and agree a Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme each year. The CTS Scheme for 2018/2019 must be agreed by full Council by 31 January 2018.

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 2018/2019.

2. Proposal

Two options for the 2018/2019 CTS scheme were presented to CPP on 17 July 2017 along with a number of questions and issues for the panel to consider. The majority of the panel supported the preferred option (option 2). This then went forward to the Cabinet meeting of 6 September 2017 where it was agreed the CTS scheme detailed at option 2 would form the draft CTS scheme to go to public consultation.

The six week consultation period has now closed and 15 responses were received, the results of which are shown at Appendix B. No amendments are proposed to the draft CTS scheme for 2018/2019 as a result of the consultation, and the draft scheme is now recommended as the final CTS Scheme for 2018/2019.

3. Issues for the Panel to Consider: Consultation

The CTS Consultation was primarily available via the Council's website and as a paper form if requested. Online responses were encouraged as data can be electronically logged and collated. A CTS entitlement calculator was included so people could calculate the impact of the proposals on their own CTS award if appropriate.

The consultation opened on 7 September 2017 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 and included in the Council's Stayconnected email. A press release was issued and an article appeared in the Lynn News on 12 September 2017. Internally all the Revenues and Benefits staff received the link and a piece was included in Internal Affairs. The consultation closed on 18 October 2017. 15 responses were received, down from 31 responses last year.

Just over half of the respondents disagreed with keeping the current CTS scheme, supporting the proposed changes. 87% agreed that we should disregard the new Bereavement Support Payments from the DWP. 73% agreed we should disregard payments made by the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund¹ and the London Emergencies Trust². The comments in Appendix B should also be noted.

¹ Following the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017

² Helping those affected by terror attacks at Westminster, London Bridge, Finsbury Park and Parsons Green, and the Grenfell Tower fire

4. Corporate Priorities

The council must agree a CTS scheme for the forthcoming year by 31 January 2018. 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, or any shortfall found from elsewhere.

5. Financial Implications

The financial implications remain in line with the figures in the CPP report of 17 July 2017 and the Cabinet report of 6 September 2017. The proposed changes to disregard payments could see a slight increase in the cost of the CTS scheme, as these payments are no longer counted when working out a person's weekly income. However these cases are likely to be minimal and the CTS caseload continues to fall, reducing the overall cost of the scheme and absorbing any increases.

The Council could choose a CTS scheme that matches the national, more generous CTS scheme used for pension age people. However this would reduce the taxbase further and create a shortfall of around £100,000 a year for the Borough and Parish Councils. The shortfall for Norfolk County Council would be around £765,000 and £141,000 for the Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner.

No changes to the draft CTS scheme are proposed and the final CTS scheme proposed for 2018/2019 remains within the projections in the Financial Plan.

6. Any other Implications/Risks

The CTS scheme for 2018/2019 is designed to meet the taxbase projections as detailed in the Financial Plan 2016/2021 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.

7. Equal Opportunity Considerations

A full Equality Impact Assessment was completed as part of the Cabinet Report of 7 September 2016. As the changes to the scheme for 2018/2019 are minor no further assessment has been completed. A Pre Screening Equality Impact Assessment is included at Appendix A.

8. Consultation

The draft CTS scheme for 2018/2019 was opened to a six week public consultation from 7 September 2017 to 18 October 2017. The results of the consultation are detailed at Appendix B and discussed above at section 3.

9. Conclusion

The draft CTS Scheme for 2018/2019 that went to public consultation is recommended as the final CTS Scheme for 2018/2019. This recommendation must be agreed by Cabinet and Council before 31 January 2018.

10. Background Papers

None

Appendix A Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment



Name of policy/service/function	Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2018/2019				
Is this a new or existing policy/ service/function?	Continuation of an Existing Policy				
Brief summary/description of the main aims of Policy being screened. Please state if this policy/service is rigidly constrained by statutory obligations	Council Tax Support is a discount given to residents on a low income. The Council is free to agree its own local scheme for the discount for working age people.				
Question	Answer				
<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			
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?	No				
3. Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?	No				
4. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?	Yes	There are protections for those who have a disability, caring responsibilities, children under 5 or are pension age.			
<p>5. Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions?</p> <p>If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section</p>	N/A	Actions:			
		Actions agreed by EWG member:			
Assessment completed by:	Joanne Stanton				
Job title	Revenues and Benefits Manager				
Date	19 October 2017				

Appendix B – Council Tax Support 2018/2019 Consultation Responses

Question	Responses				Comments/Alternatives												
Should we keep the current Council Tax Support scheme?	<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>4</td> <td>8</td> <td>3</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>27%</td> <td>53%</td> <td>20%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total	4	8	3	15	27%	53%	20%					<p>'Should be in line with HB claims'</p> <p>'All the changes to Benefits need to be brought into "line ".'</p> <p>'There isn't enough help with this current scheme with low income families as it is anyway. Changes need to be made to help people who are struggling and are working as much as possible - the help shouldn't always go to people who are lazy and have no desire to work. Some priority should also go to British citizens, not just foreigners'.</p> <p>'Recent benefit changes have caused some undue financial hardship. What steps if any are the Council taking to minimise and/or avoid causing any further hardship by implementing new rules?'</p>
Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total														
4	8	3	15														
27%	53%	20%															
Do you agree with disregarding the new Bereavement Support Payments?	<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>13</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>87%</td> <td>13%</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total	13	2	0	15	87%	13%						<p>'All income should be taken into account when assessing any and all benefits. It is incorrect to say there are no drawbacks - it could increase the overall cost of benefits paid'.</p>
Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total														
13	2	0	15														
87%	13%																

<p>Do you agree with disregarding any payments made by the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund and the London Emergencies Trust?</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>11</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>74%</td> <td>13%</td> <td>13%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total	11	2	2	15	74%	13%	13%		<p>'All income should be taken into account when assessing any and all benefits. It is incorrect to say there are no drawbacks - it could increase the overall cost of benefits paid'.</p>															
Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total																										
11	2	2	15																										
74%	13%	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>Not make the changes and use any savings for other Council services?</td> <td>6</td> <td>8</td> <td>1</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>40%</td> <td>53%</td> <td>7%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not make the changes and retain any savings for future use?</td> <td>3</td> <td>9</td> <td>3</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>20%</td> <td>60%</td> <td>20%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					Yes	No	Don't Know/ Blank	Total	Not make the changes and use any savings for other Council services?	6	8	1	15		40%	53%	7%		Not make the changes and retain any savings for future use?	3	9	3	15		20%	60%	20%	
	Yes	No	Don't Know/ Blank	Total																									
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	20%	60%	20%																										
<p>If we were to choose these other options, what would be your order of preference?</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>1st</th> <th>2nd</th> <th>Don't Know/ Blank</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Not make the changes and use any savings for other Council services?</td> <td>10</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>67%</td> <td>13%</td> <td>20%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not make the changes and retain any savings for future use?</td> <td>2</td> <td>10</td> <td>3</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>13%</td> <td>67%</td> <td>20%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					1 st	2 nd	Don't Know/ Blank	Total	Not make the changes and use any savings for other Council services?	10	2	3	15		67%	13%	20%		Not make the changes and retain any savings for future use?	2	10	3			13%	67%	20%	
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<p>Any other comments on the scheme</p>	<p>‘Those who do not have savings/capital of £6,000 or more should be supported. If the systems changes to Housing Benefit means that these people will be worse off then the system needs to change to look after people more helpfully. All Benefits should be "lined up". This questionnaire does not have clear questions so some people will not follow the language or the meaning’.</p> <p>‘All benefits should be means tested, and all income taken into account. There should be no protected groups, i.e., the payment of a disability premium or child disability premium should not automatically disregard other income’.</p> <p>‘I think the proposed changes are fair and support them’.</p> <p>‘On the previous page there is a statement: ... "In the main, the changes will be cost neutral due to the continued reduction in scheme costs...". What is not clear from the information provided is why there is a continued reduction in scheme costs. Is it as simple as less people claiming under the scheme or are scheme costs reducing for some other unexplained reason?’</p>
<p>Other Options for the Council to consider</p>	<p>‘Any ideas of how to manage these changes that do not limit our communities from flourishing should be considered. Efficiencies should be implemented but not at the cost of withholding help for those who are living on lower incomes’.</p> <p>‘Help more low income families. If a household is on the wrong tax band - do not take the owed money by yourselves off the current bill, give the household the option to have a reduction in the bill or give them the cash back’.</p> <p>‘All recipients of Housing or Council Tax benefits should be financially reviewed every 12 months’.</p>

Respondents

	Yes	No	Prefer Not To Say	Total
In receipt of Council Tax Support	2	12	1	15

	Male	Female	Prefer Not To Say	Total
Gender	5	9	1	15

	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	Prefer Not To Say	Total
Age	1	3	3	5	2	0	1	15

	Yes	No	Not Sure	Prefer Not To Say	Total
Disability Limiting Day to Day Activities	3	11	0	1	15