

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Corporate Performance Panel		
DATE:	11 November 2020		
TITLE:	Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/2022 – Final Scheme		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Policy Development		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Housing		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Jo Stanton, Revenues and Benefits Manager		
OPEN/EXEMPT	Open	WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	Yes

REPORT SUMMARY/COVER PAGE

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2021/2022: FINAL SCHEME

PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:

The council must review and agree its 2021/2022 Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme for working age people by March 2021. We must first consult with the major preceptors then publish a draft CTS scheme for public consultation. The draft CTS Scheme was agreed by delegated decision and the public consultation ran from 17 September 2020 to 2 November 2020. The final CTS Scheme must then be agreed by full Council.

This report details the results of the consultation and the recommended final CTS scheme for working age people for 2021/2022.

KEY ISSUES:

We are free to design our own CTS scheme for working age people. CTS for pension age people is paid based on a national set of rules but we must cover the cost. As CTS is a discount it reduces our taxbase, and the taxbase for our Preceptors.

The draft CTS scheme for 2021/2022 has been agreed by delegated decision and open to public consultation. This paper details the outcome of the consultation. 6 responses were received and no changes are proposed to the draft CTS scheme as a result of the consultation.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

NA

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Panel agree that the draft CTS scheme for 2021/2022 which went to public consultation is recommended to Cabinet and Council as the final CTS scheme for 2021/2022.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

To ensure a CTS scheme for working age people for 2021/2022 is agreed by full Council by 11 March 2021.

REPORT DETAIL

1. Introduction

Council Tax Support (CTS) is a reduction awarded to people on low incomes to help with the cost of their council tax bill. Since 2013 each district council is responsible for its own CTS scheme for working age people, and must review and agree the scheme each year. The CTS Scheme for 2021/2022 must be agreed by full Council by 11 March 2021, although in practice it needs to be agreed by January 2021 as it forms part of the taxbase and budget setting process.

The draft CTS scheme was agreed by a delegated decision earlier in the year and has been open to public consultation. This report details the results of the consultation, the comments made and the recommended final CTS Scheme for 2021/2022.

Details on the CTS scheme can be found on the council's website at https://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk/info/20019/council_tax_support.

2. Background

We have to review, consult on and agree our CTS scheme for working age people for each financial year. The CTS scheme for 2021/2022 is currently under consideration.

The draft CTS scheme to go out to consultation is agreed under delegated powers. The final CTS scheme must be agreed by full Council.

3. The Current Council Tax Support Scheme - 2020/2021

The principles of the current CTS scheme for 2020/2021 are included at Appendix B.

The CTS scheme uses the same calculation method as the old Council Tax Benefit scheme (which ended in 2013) and the CTS scheme for pension age people. A person's total household income is assessed against an allowed amount which is based on their circumstances. If their income is less than the allowed amount, they receive the maximum amount of CTS payable under the scheme. If their income is more than the allowed amount, the maximum CTS is reduced by 20p for every £1 over the amount allowed.

There are a number of people who are in a protected group and receive a higher amount of CTS due to their circumstances, including those receiving a Disability Premium, Carer's Allowance or who are responsible for a child under the age of five. Pension age people are paid under a national set of rules and are unaffected by any changes to our CTS scheme.

4. The Proposed Scheme - Changes for 2021/2022

The CTS scheme for 2021/2022 is a continuation of the 2020/2021 scheme with some minor changes to keep it in line with other welfare reform amendments and to simplify administration. The proposed changes are:

- **To allow us the discretion not to action changes supplied by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for customers receiving Universal Credit (UC):**
 - Every time a customer's income changes their UC award is altered. This then updates their CTS award and a new council tax bill is sent. For customers who have monthly earnings this can mean a new council tax bill every month. This change allows us discretion to decide whether to use or

disregard information supplied by the DWP. The customer would still have to report changes of circumstances to us in the normal way.

- This change significantly reduces the administrative burden, and prevents constant changes to a customer's council tax account and instalments.
- **To align the additional earnings disregard with the Housing Benefit rules:**
 - Due to Covid-19 the DWP increased the amount of earnings that are not counted as income for UC and Working Tax Credit (called an Earnings Disregard). The Housing Benefit rules were also amended to ensure customers did not lose out as they have more income. This change allows the CTS rules to be amended in the same way.
 - This change prevents customers losing CTS where their Earnings Disregard is increased due to Covid-19.

The draft CTS scheme was open for consultation between 17 September 2020 and 2 November 2020. The consultation responses are reviewed at section 5.

5. Council Tax Support 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. The consultation opened on 17 September 2020 and was publicised through social media, council emails, newsletters and parish clerks.

The consultation closed on 2 November 2020. 6 responses were received, down from 8 responses last year. The responses are included in full at Appendix C. There were no comments made about the scheme in any of the consultation responses that affect the draft scheme and the majority of people felt we should make the proposed changes to the scheme.

No changes to the draft CTS scheme are proposed as a result of the consultation. A report on the proposed final CTS scheme for 2021/2022 will be taken to Cabinet on 5 January 2021 and full Council on 21 January 2021. The CTS scheme must be agreed before the council taxbase and the overall budget can be set.

6. Corporate Priorities

The CTS scheme supports Corporate Priority 1 – Provide important local services within our available resources.

Due to the budget setting timetable we must agree a CTS scheme for working age people for the 2021/2022 year by January 2021.

7. Financial Implications

CTS is a discount and reduces our taxbase and those of our Preceptors. Because of this the CTS scheme must be agreed before the overall taxbase can be agreed, and our budgets finalised.

As at 1 October 2020 10,205 people claim CTS, of which 4,877 (48%) are pension age (so are unaffected by changes to our local scheme) and 5,328 (52%) are working age. The number of people claiming CTS, and therefore the cost of the CTS scheme, was gradually declining until March 2020. However Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the numbers of people claiming CTS and the caseload has increased by 10% from March 2020 to October 2020.

As at 1 October 2020 the overall cost of the CTS scheme for 2020/2021 is £9,852,000. This cost is split between the preceptors in proportion to their share of the council tax demand as a reduction in their taxbase.

CTS reduces our taxbase by 5,253 band D equivalent properties. Our current Band D charge is £130.37, so the cost of the CTS scheme for us for 2020/2021 is £684,834. £341,700 of this reduction is due to the CTS scheme for pension age people, paid under the national regulations. We have no powers to alter this element of the scheme or the associated costs.

The taxbase forecast for 2021/2022 includes a further 10% increase in the CTS caseload and this is factored in to the budget calculations for 2021/2022.

8. Any other Implications/Risks

Any increases in demand, changes in the composition of the caseload, for example an increase in the number of pension age claimants or a sudden economic shock, could represent a financial risk by increasing the cost of the CTS scheme and reducing the taxbase further. This is seen with the Covid-19 outbreak where the economic impact of the measures the government has had to put in place have resulted in an increase in the caseload.

The impact of the CTS scheme is, and will continue to be, reviewed monthly and is reported in the Members Bulletin in October each year.

9. Equal Opportunity Considerations

The pre-screening Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is included at Appendix A. A full EIA was completed as part of the Cabinet Report of 7 September 2016. As the changes to the scheme since then and for 2021/2022 are minor no further assessment has been completed.

10. Consultation

The draft CTS scheme for 2021/2022 was open to public consultation from 17 September 2020 to 2 November 2020. The full results are summarised at section 5 and included in full at Appendix C.

11. Conclusion

The Panel is asked to agree that the draft CTS scheme for 2021/2022 which went to public consultation is recommended to Cabinet and full Council as the final CTS scheme for 2021/2022.

Appendix A Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment



Name of policy/service/function	Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/2022
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
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<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
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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.
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	N/A	<p>Actions:</p> <p>Actions agreed by EWG member:</p> <p>.....</p>

Assessment completed by:	Joanne Stanton
Job title	Revenues and Benefits Manager
Date	12 October 2020

Appendix B: Principles of the Current CTS Scheme

Our current CTS scheme assesses people's income against an allowed amount, called an 'applicable amount'. If their income is less than the applicable amount they receive full CTS, subject to a 25% contribution if they are working age and not in a protected group. If it is more than the applicable amount their CTS is reduced by 20p for every extra £1.

Our current CTS Scheme Principle:

An equal cut is made to everyone apart from those in a protected group.

The key points are:

- Working Age people have their CTS calculated based on 75% of their weekly CTS bill
- A weekly £10 deduction is made for each non-dependent regardless of their income
- The maximum amount of Capital allowed is £6,000
- No Tariff Income is assumed for capital under £6,000
- Self Employed people are assumed to have an income of at least the minimum wage (NB this is currently suspended for the 2020/2021 CTS Scheme)
- There is no Second Adult Rebate

To fulfil the requirement to consider vulnerable groups, CTS will be paid based on the national, more generous scheme for the following groups:

- Those who have reached the qualifying age for State Pension Credit
- Households with at least one child under the age of 5
- Those entitled to the Disability Premium as part of their needs calculation
- Those in receipt of Carer's Allowance
- Those in the ESA Support group

The CTS scheme also includes incentives to find work. People are allowed to keep an extra £10 (above the national limit) before their CTS is affected. This is known as a disregard and the amounts are:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| • Single | £15 |
| • Couple | £20 |
| • Disabled or a Carer | £30 |
| • Lone Parent | £35 |

We also have a local income disregard as below:

- War Pensions will be fully disregarded in the income calculation

General CTS Scheme Rules

- In all other areas the CTS Scheme rules will follow the rules for working age Housing Benefit claims

Appendix C – Council Tax Support 2021/2022 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>5</td> <td>0</td> <td>1</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total	5	0	1	6					<p>'Reduce all charges to make more affordable for people'</p> <p>'Not every self employed person is able to earn the minimum wage or do the hours because of covid 19 etc. More needs to be done to help the self employed. As a single person I currently have to struggle to pay the 25percent. It should be based on your actual income and not as a presumption. It's also unfair if you are eligible for other benefits=more £ than others' (Note – at present we have suspended some rules for self-employed people to make the CTS scheme more generous)</p>
Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total											
5	0	1	6											
Should we allow: discretion not to action UC changes notified by the DWP; and to align the earnings disregard with HB	<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>5</td> <td>0</td> <td>1</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total	5	0	1	6					<p>'Those not on benefits should also have help as some will have been impacted by covid but not eligible for any additional government support'.</p>
Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total											
5	0	1	6											
Should we not change the CTS and meet additional costs from other services?	<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>1</td> <td>4</td> <td>1</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total	1	4	1	6					<p>No comments were made</p>
Yes	No	Don't Know / Blank	Total											
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Any other comments	No comments were made													