

## POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Corporate Performance Panel		
DATE:	9 November 2016		
TITLE:	Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/2018 – 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 2017/2018: FINAL SCHEME**

##### PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:

The Council must review and agree its 2017/2018 Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme for working age people by 31 January 2017. Options for the draft CTS scheme for 2017/2018 were presented to the Panel on 18 July 2016 and the preferred draft CTS scheme was chosen. This was agreed by Cabinet on 7 September 2016. The draft CTS scheme was then opened to public consultation from 12 September 2016 to 23 October 2016.

This report details the results of the consultation and the recommended final CTS scheme for 2017/2018.

##### 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 2017/2018 has been agreed and consulted on and this paper details the outcome of the consultation. 31 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 the CPP on 18 July 2016. This report should be read in conjunction with the CTS report of 18 July 2016 and the CTS Cabinet Report of 7 September 2016.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Panel agree that the draft CTS scheme for 2017/2018 which went to public consultation is recommended as the final CTS scheme for 2017/2018

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

To ensure a CTS scheme for working age people for 2017/2018 is agreed by Council by 31 January 2017.

## **REPORT DETAIL**

### **1. Introduction**

The Council must review and agree a Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme each year. The CTS Scheme for 2017/2018 must be agreed by full Council by 31 January 2017.

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.

### **2. Proposal**

Three options for the 2017/2018 CTS scheme were presented to CPP on 18 July 2016 along with a number of questions and issues for the panel to consider. The majority of the panel supported the preferred option (option 3). This then went forward to the Cabinet meeting of 7 September 2016 where it was agreed the CTS scheme detailed at option 3 would form the draft CTS scheme to go to public consultation. The Cabinet report also contains the full Equality Impact Assessment, which is included in this report at Appendix A.

The six week consultation period has now closed and the results are shown at Appendix B. 33 responses were received. Two responses had to be discounted as the respondents did not confirm they had read the necessary information before completing the questionnaire so 31 responses are included in the appendix.

No amendments are proposed to the draft CTS scheme for 2017/2018 as a result of the consultation and it is recommended as the final CTS Scheme for 2017/2018.

### **3. Issues for the Panel to Consider: Consultation**

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.

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 a piece appeared in the Lynn News. Internally all the Revenues and Benefits staff received the link and a piece was included in Internal Affairs. The consultation closed on 23 October 2016.

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.

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.

There was broad support for each of the proposed changes to the CTS scheme for 2017/2018 as shown in Appendix D of the Corporate Performance Panel report of 18 July 2016. Therefore the draft CTS Scheme for 2017/2018 is recommended to be taken forward as the final CTS Scheme for 2017/2018.

#### **4. Corporate Priorities**

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, or any shortfall found from elsewhere.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

The financial implications remain the same as the CPP report of 18 July 2016 and the Cabinet report of 7 September 2016.

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 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.

Consultees were asked whether the Council should consider alternative options to reducing the help available under the proposed CTS scheme, funding the subsequent shortfall in income from elsewhere. Three choices were listed: Increase Council Tax, find savings from cutting other Council services, or use the Council's savings. The responses indicate people would prefer to see an increase in Council Tax if the level of help under CTS was to be increased, with 48% of respondents agreeing with this option and it being ranked first in order of preference. Using the Council's savings was second and cutting other services was ranked third.

However no changes to the draft CTS scheme are proposed and the final CTS scheme remains within the projections in the Financial Plan.

#### **6. Any other Implications/Risks**

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.

## **7. Equal Opportunity Considerations**

A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed as part of the Cabinet Report of 7 September 2016 and is included in this report at Appendix A.

## **8. Consultation**

The draft CTS scheme for 2017/2018 was opened to a six week public consultation from 12 September 2016 to 23 October 2016. The results of the consultation are detailed at Appendix B and discussed above at section 3.

## **9. Conclusion**

The draft CTS Scheme for 2017/2018 that went to public consultation is recommended as the final CTS Scheme for 2017/2018. This recommendation must be agreed by Cabinet and Council before 31 January 2017.

## **10. Background Papers**

Corporate Performance Panel Report 18 July 2016: 'Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/2018: Agreement of the Draft Scheme for Consultation'

Cabinet Report 7 September 2016: 'Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/2018: Draft Scheme for Consultation'

## Appendix A

### Full Equality Impact Assessment

# Equality Impact Assessment

Borough Council of  
**King's Lynn &  
West Norfolk**



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## 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.

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### 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).

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### **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.

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### **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.

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

Not applicable

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## **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.

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## **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.

- A) 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%)
  
- B) 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%)
  
- C) 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%)

D) 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%)

E) 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

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## **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.

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## **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.

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## **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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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 2040 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 2040 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 2040 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 2040 1007">Increase the council tax for all properties to cover the cost of the support scheme.</p> <p data-bbox="1070 1043 2040 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 2040 1375">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 &gt;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="450 874 557 975">Yes</th> <th data-bbox="557 874 678 975">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="450 975 557 1011">17</td> <td data-bbox="557 975 678 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 557 1046">55%</td> <td data-bbox="557 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>																						
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<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%	
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<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>1<sup>st</sup></th> <th>2<sup>nd</sup></th> <th>3<sup>rd</sup></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>7</td> <td>7</td> <td>2</td> <td>31</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>48%</td> <td>23%</td> <td>23%</td> <td>6%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Find savings from cutting other council services</td> <td>6</td> <td>7</td> <td>16</td> <td>2</td> <td>31</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>19%</td> <td>23%</td> <td>52%</td> <td>6%</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Use the Council's savings</td> <td>8</td> <td>12</td> <td>8</td> <td>3</td> <td>31</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>26%</td> <td>38%</td> <td>26%</td> <td>10%</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	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%	
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<p>Any other comments on the scheme</p>	<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

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

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Prefer Not To Say</b>	<b>Total</b>
Gender	12	15	4	31

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

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