

Local Council Tax Support Consultation

Introduction

The Local Government Finance Act 2012 sets out that Billing Authorities have to hold a public consultation on any potential changes to their existing Local Council Tax Support Scheme. To comply with this and to seek public opinion on the scheme a 6 week consultation took place between 22nd August and 3rd October 2016.

There were a total of 164 respondents. However this did not relate to 164 fully completed questionnaires as they were a high level of respondents that did not fully complete the questionnaire, this was through abandoning the completion of the questionnaire at different points.

Overview

The questionnaire was divided into the following sections:

- Background to the Consultation

Within this section supporting information was provided to explain the broad principles of the Consultation.

- Paying for the Scheme

Within this section the views were sought on whether the current scheme should continue.

- Proposed changes to the scheme

Within this section views were sought on specific changes proposed.

- Alternative methods

Within this section views were sought on alternative options to fund the current scheme in contrast to the proposed changes with free text sections allowing wider comment to be provided.

- About you

Equality and Diversity responses.

Responses

Rounding has been applied to results. Free type comments reported verbatim.

I have read the section 'Background to the Consultation' at the start of this Questionnaire.

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		61	100
No		0	0

Paying for the scheme

Should Colchester Borough Council keep the current Local Council Tax Support Scheme? (Should it continue to provide the same level of support as it does at the moment?)

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		29	62
No		12	26
Don't know		6	12

Please use the space below to make any comments you have in regards to maintaining the Local Council Tax Support Scheme:

- With the exception of the £12 non means tested regardless of savings element for non dependent. This should reflect the non dependents income - either up or down
- no comment
- If the council allocated money to the essential work needed in the borough then there would surely be enough funds to cover costs.
- I have serious concerns about the level of poverty fostered on to the most vulnerable with the benefit cap as well a change in this could mean children not eating
- there should be some provision for those on a low income
- Why change a system that is already in place for something that won't save money
- People of working age on benefits cannot afford to pay as we are given the minimum to live on which is then made less by various payments such as this and bedroom tax putting us in poverty. DLA and PIP are Not incomes but grants to allow us to live as others.
- Should be supporting vulnerable people and those on low incomes

Proposed changes to the scheme

Option 1 – Removing the family premium for all new working age applicants
The removal of the family premium from 1st April 2017 for new claims will bring the Local Council Tax Support Scheme in line with Housing Benefit. The family premium is part of how we assess the 'needs' (Applicable Amounts) of any applicant, which is compared with their income. The family premium (currently £17.45 per week) is normally given when an applicant has at least One dependant child living with them. This change would not affect those on Universal Credit, Income Support, Income Related Employment and Support Allowance or Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance.

The benefit of doing this:

- It brings the working age Local Council Tax Support Scheme in line with Housing Benefit changes and provides efficiency in administration.
- The change has already been introduced for pension age applicants by Central Government.

The drawbacks of doing this:

- New working age applicants may see a reduction in the amount of support they receive.
- Some households with children may pay more

Do you agree with the option 1?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		29	72
No		7	18
Don't know		4	10

If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

- Entire scheme should be means tested.
- The affected parties would be those who are trying to meet their obligations by working. Those who don't work would benefit and make it easier for them to not consider getting a job. Many of those who do not work are capable of working and should be utilised in local community projects so that the borough does not need to fund minor projects such as litter picking and tidying of community areas. That way they are affectively earning their benefits thus saving the council money.
- I would propose continuing with this and find another way
- To avoid a 2 tier system, every claimant should be on the same as everybody else. Either keep the system we have now or if a new system is needed, then a completely new system that saves the council money and pass the savings on, where the money should be.

- People on benefits should not pay as it places us in poverty
- Continue with the family element as it is being removed for other benefits

Option 2 - Amending Backdating to 1 month

Currently claims for Local Council Tax Support from working age applicants can be backdated for 28 days where an applicant shows they could not claim at an earlier date. Central Government has reduced backdating for Housing Benefit claims to 1 month. It is proposed that the Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme should be in line with the changes to Housing Benefit.

The benefit of this:

- It brings the working age Local Council Tax Support Scheme in line with Housing Benefit and provides efficiency in administration
- The change will provide a small increase to the maximum period of backdating

The drawback of this:

- There are no drawbacks

Do you agree with the option 2?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		35	88
No		1	2
Don't know		4	10

If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

- This could be implemented provided it is looked into by then council benefits dept and listening to everyone on the tax benefit and drawn out so everybody is happy knowing money will be saved and passed on.
- People on benefits can not afford to lose money from the minimum they receive

Proposed changes to the scheme

Option 3 - Reducing the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Local Council Tax Support to 4 weeks

Within the current scheme, applicants can be temporarily absent from their homes for 13 weeks (or 52 weeks in certain cases) without it affecting their Local Council Tax Support. This replicated the rule within Housing Benefit. Housing Benefit has now been changed by the Central Government so that if a person is absent from Great Britain for a period of more than 4 weeks their benefit will cease.

It is proposed that Colchester Borough Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme is amended to reflect the changes in Housing Benefit. There will be exceptions for certain occupations such as Mariners and the Armed Forces or where an applicant has to go abroad due to the death of a close relative.

The benefit of doing this:

- **It brings the working age Local Council Tax Support Scheme in line with Housing Benefit and provides efficiency in administration**

The drawback of this:

- **If a person is absent from Great Britain for a period which is likely to exceed 4 weeks, their Local Council Tax Support will cease from when they leave Great Britain. They will need to re-apply on return**

Do you agree with the option 3?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		33	83
No		3	7
Don't know		4	10

If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

- **This doesn't make sense! Is it temporarily absent abroad? If so then I agree! If it is temporarily absent as in gone into hospital for 13 weeks then I don't**
- **Good idea in principle, it needs a full debate between the benefit dept and claimants and amendments must be implemented so nobody loses out.**
- **If someone is out of Great Britain for reasons other than those exceptions mentioned above they should not receive benefit for this period.**

Alternative methods

Alternatives to reducing the amount of help provided by the Local Council Tax Support Scheme

If Colchester Borough Council keeps the current scheme, it will be administratively more complex (as it will not align with Housing Benefit which is also administered by the Colchester Borough Council) and it will cost taxpayers more.

If this happens we will need to find savings from other services to help meet the increase in costs.

The proposals set out in this consultation could deliver savings. The alternatives are set out in the background information.

Do you think we should choose any of the following alternative options rather than the proposed changes to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme?

Please select one answer for each source of funding

	Yes	No	Don't know	Response Total
Increase the level of Council Tax	10.26%(4)	64.1% (25)	25.64% (10)	39
Reduce the funding available for other Council Services	10.26% (4)	69.23% (27)	20.51% (8)	39
Use the Councils savings	17.95% (7)	56.41% (22)	25.64% (10)	39

If the Council were to choose these other options to make savings, what would be your order of preference?

Please rank in order of preference by selecting a number from 1 – 3 in the boxes below, where 1 is the option that you would most prefer and 3 is the least.

	1	2	3	Response Total
Increase the level of Council Tax	20.51% (8)	7.69% (3)	71.80% (28)	39
Reduce the funding available for other Council Services	20.51% (8)	28.21 (11)	51.28% (20)	39
Use the Councils savings	28.21% (11)	38.46% (15)	33.33% (13)	39

Please use the space below to make any other comments on the scheme

- Please see my comments previously
- I think the reliance on food banks is a disgrace and the loss of council tax benefit was shocking and understand that the councils have to make up the shortfall which is also wrong. Some families simply cant have any more outgoings without going hungry- its 2016 its disgraceful.
- I think Cllr Paul Smith and his coalition colleagues are doing a great job under trying circumstances, with good support from Adrian Pritchard and other CBC officers. This public consultation is a good example of their commitment to democracy and open government
- consider the million pound council tax and the high earner tax, so the higher the cost of the home, the more you pay and the more you earn over £60,000, the more you pay.

Please use the space below if you would like Colchester Borough Council to consider any other options

- Include prison as absent from home
- I think those who are capable of work should be asked to work in the community to receive their benefits. It would give them a sense of earning their money and pride in themselves.

- What might help to a point is VAT on things, see what can be saved there also, cutting back on perks for council employees/managers

If you have any further comments regarding the Local Council Tax Support Scheme, please use the space below

- Local council tax support should be assessed by the amount of money going into a household regardless of whether that money is worked for or by benefits. If the amount of benefit is higher than a working persons income then it should be taken into account and not automatically given just because the person is already receiving other benefits by not working. A working person should not be treated differently to a benefit reliant person, when that person is struggling to pay their own bills by working but a benefit reliant person does not get means tested on their benefits. It makes no sense.
- They should have 100% reduction for people on DLA/PIP
- People on benefits should not have to pay from the minimum we are given. DLA & PIP are not incomes and should not be included in calculations. Pushing disabled and sick in to poverty should not happen.

Equality and Diversity Questions

Are you, or someone in your household, claiming Local Council Tax Support?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		4	12
No		27	82
Don't know		2	6

Are you

		Response Total	Response Percent
Male		12	36
Female		17	52
Prefer not to say		4	12
Other, please specify		0	0

Age

		Response Total	Response Percent
18-24		2	6
25-34		5	15
35-44		7	21
45-54		7	21
55-64		4	12
65-74		4	12
75-84		1	3
85+		0	0
Prefer not to say		3	10

Do you consider yourself to have a physical impairment?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		3	10
No		24	80
Not sure		1	3
Prefer not to say		2	7

Do you consider yourself to have a sensory impairment?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		2	7
No		25	86
Not sure		0	0
Prefer not to say		2	7

Do you consider yourself to have a learning difficulty or disability?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		2	7
No		23	85
Not sure		1	4
Prefer not to say		1	4

Do you consider yourself to have any mental health needs?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		4	12
No		24	76
Not sure		0	0
Prefer not to say		4	12

Ethnicity

		Response Total	Response Percent
White British		24	75
White Irish		1	3
White Other		2	6
Gypsy / Roma		0	0
Traveller of Irish Heritage		0	0
Black or Black British African		0	0
Black or Black British Caribbean		0	0
Mixed White/Black African		0	0
Mixed White/Black Caribbean		0	0
Black Other		0	0
Asian or Asian British Pakistani		0	0

Asian or Asian British Indian		0	0
Asian or Asian British Other		0	0
Mixed White/Asian		0	0
Asian Other		0	0
Chinese		0	0
Mixed Other		0	0
Not Known		0	0
Prefer not to say		5	16
Other, please specify		0	0

END