

Local Support for Council Tax

Summary of consultation responses

1. Background

- 1.1 Over an 8 week period between 6 August and 30 September 2012 the council consulted on its proposal to apply a standard deduction of 18.5% on current benefit levels to all working age claimants from 1 April 2013.
- 1.2 The consultation set out the Council's preferred option and provided an opportunity for respondents to comment on the scheme and offer suggestions that could assist with the final scheme design. The consultation gave the opportunity for stakeholders affected by each of the options to give their views before the Council takes further decisions.
- 1.3 The consultation could have been completed on line or where requested a paper copy of the consultation pack was provided to residents with a free post envelope for it to be returned to the Council offices.

2. The consultation process

- 2.1 To ensure that all current council tax benefit claimants, other residents and interested parties were informed of the proposed changes and the consultation period the council:
 - Sent a letter to all council tax benefit claimants (6,669 at the end of July 2012) informing them of the changes, provided examples of how they may be affected and inviting them to respond to the consultation;
 - Sent an Email to local charity, voluntary and stakeholder groups who are registered to receive communications from the Benefits team;
 - Placed an article in the Council's In Shape magazine which was delivered to all households in the District in late August 2012 and is also available on the Council website;
 - Placed an article in the resident magazine of West Kent Housing Association which was delivered to all of their residents in September 2012;
 - Carried out a media briefing and issued press releases, with subsequent coverage in the local press from the Sevenoaks Chronicle, Edenbridge Courier, Dartford and Swanley News shopper and The Reporter; and
 - Advertised the consultation on the homepage of the council website and regularly through the Council's Twitter account.
- 2.2 In addition the council designed its own interactive tool, which is available on the Council website, to help residents quantify the potential impact on them and also operated a dedicated phone line throughout the 8 week consultation period to allow concerned residents to talk directly to officers with good knowledge of the council's proposal.

3. Summary of Results

3.1 In total the Council had 82 responses to the consultation. Of these 57 were completed online and 25 were sent in by post. The table below summarises those that responded to the consultation.

Table 1:

	Number	Percentage
Resident – Non claimant	22	26.8%
Resident – Benefit claimant	55	67.1%
Non-resident	2	2.4%
Did not say	3	3.7%
Working Age	59	72.0%
Pension Age	21	25.6%
Did not say	2	2.4%
Male	36	43.9%
Female	41	50.0%
Did not say	5	6.1%
Carers	17	20.7%
Disability	39	47.6%

3.2 The consultation asked for direct responses to three questions. Set out below is a summary of each of those questions and the responses that were received.

Table 2:

Q1	Do you agree that people of pension age should be protected from any deductions to council tax?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	58	70.7%
Disagree	17	20.7%
Did not say	7	8.5%

Table 3:

Q2	Do you agree that the amount of local council tax support you receive should be based on the current council tax benefit calculation?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	50	61.0%
Disagree	13	15.9%
Did not say	19	23.2%

Table 4:

Q3	Do you agree that all working age people should receive a reduction in their council tax benefit of 18.5%?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	17	20.7%
Disagree	51	62.2%
Did not say	14	17.1%

3.3 The fourth question in the consultation survey provided an open text box for respondents to record any suggestions or comments they had that could assist the Council in developing its final local support for council tax scheme.

3.4 In total 49 responses were received to this question. Each of these has been grouped in to categories that convey the key message that each of the respondents has given. These are set out in Table 5 below.

Table 5:

Response	Number	Percentage
(a) In support of the proposal		
Continue with the proposed scheme	4	8.3%
(b) Against the proposal		
Do not pass on the cuts, make savings in other services	5	10.4%
Charge more council tax on expensive properties / wealthy people	2	4.2%
Increase charges on second and empty homes	3	6.3%
(c) Make amendments to the proposal		
Protect the poorest, those that do not have the money to pay more	10	20.8%
Protect disabled people / families and their carers	11	23.0%
Support working poor / working families	3	6.3%
Support the unemployed	2	4.2%
Pensioners should not be protected	7	14.6%
Tier deductions to better reflect individual circumstances	1	2.1%

3.5 One response is not included in the data provided at Table 5. This respondent felt that the consultation could have been clearer in describing how the future support calculation will be carried out, but did not provide any suggestions for changes to the scheme.

4. Summary

4.1 In summary the key results of the consultation are:

- 71% of respondents agree that pensioners should be protected from any changes to council tax benefit;
- 61% of respondents agree that the amount of local council tax support claimants receive should be based on the current council tax benefit calculation;
- 62% of respondents disagree with the Council's proposal for an 18.5% reduction in council tax support for all working age claimants; and
- 71% of respondents providing comments to the open text question suggested that further protections should be put in place within the Council's local support for council tax scheme rather than the reductions not occurring at all (21%).

Annex 1 – Consultation response from council tax benefit claimants

Table 1:

Q1	Do you agree that people of pension age should be protected from any deductions to council tax?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	43	78.2%
Disagree	9	16.4%
Did not say	3	5.5%

Table 2:

Q2	Do you agree that the amount of local council tax support you receive should be based on the current council tax benefit calculation?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	34	61.8%
Disagree	9	16.4%
Did not say	12	21.8%

Table 3:

Q3	Do you agree that all working age people should receive a reduction in their council tax benefit of 18.5%?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	6	10.9%
Disagree	40	72.7%
Did not say	9	16.4%

Summary of council tax benefit claimant responses

- 78.2% of council tax benefit claimants agree that pensioners should be protected from any deductions. In comparison 70.7% of all respondents and 59.1% of respondents who are not council tax benefit claimants agree pensioners should be protected.
- 61.8% of council tax benefit claimants agree that the benefit calculation should not be changed. In comparison 61.0% of all respondents and 63.6% of respondents who are not council tax benefit claimants agree that the benefit calculation should not change.
- 72.7% of council tax benefit claimants disagree that working age people should receive an 18.5% reduction to their council tax benefit. In comparison 62.2% of all respondents and 36.4% of respondents who are not council tax benefit claimants disagree that council tax benefit should be reduced by 18.5% for working age claimants.

Annex 2 – Consultation response from non benefit claimants

Table 1:

Q1	Do you agree that people of pension age should be protected from any deductions to council tax?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	13	59.1%
Disagree	6	27.3%
Did not say	3	13.6%

Table 2:

Q2	Do you agree that the amount of local council tax support you receive should be based on the current council tax benefit calculation?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	14	63.6%
Disagree	4	18.2%
Did not say	4	18.2%

Table 3:

Q3	Do you agree that all working age people should receive a reduction in their council tax benefit of 18.5%?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	10	45.5%
Disagree	8	36.4%
Did not say	4	18.2%

Summary of non council tax benefit claimant responses

- 59.1% of non benefit claimants agree that pensioners should be protected from any deductions. In comparison 70.7% of all respondents and 78.2% of respondents who are council tax benefit claimants agree pensioners should be protected.
- 63.6% of non benefit claimants agree that the benefit calculation should not be changed. In comparison 61.0% of all respondents and 61.8% of respondents who are council tax benefit claimants agree that the benefit calculation should not change.
- 36.4% of non benefit claimants disagree that working age people should receive an 18.5% reduction to their council tax benefit. In comparison 62.2% of all respondents and 72.7% of respondents who are council tax benefit claimants disagree that council tax benefit should be reduced by 18.5% for working age claimants.

Annex 3 – Consultation response from people of working age

Table 1:

Q1	Do you agree that people of pension age should be protected from any deductions to council tax?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	39	66.1%
Disagree	15	25.4%
Did not say	5	8.5%

Table 2:

Q2	Do you agree that the amount of local council tax support you receive should be based on the current council tax benefit calculation?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	35	59.3%
Disagree	12	20.3%
Did not say	12	20.3%

Table 3:

Q3	Do you agree that all working age people should receive a reduction in their council tax benefit of 18.5%?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	10	16.9%
Disagree	42	71.2%
Did not say	7	11.9%

Summary of responses from people of working age

- 66.1% of working age people agree that pensioners should be protected from any deductions. In comparison 70.7% of all respondents and 85.7% of respondents who are pension age agree that pensioners should be protected.
- 59.3% of working age people agree that the benefit calculation should not be changed. In comparison 61.0% of all respondents and 66.7% of respondents who are pension age agree that the benefit calculation should not change.
- 71.2% of working age people disagree that working age people should receive an 18.5% reduction to their council tax benefit. In comparison 62.2% of all respondents and 38.1% of respondents who are pension age disagree that council tax benefit should be reduced by 18.5% for working age claimants.

Annex 4 – Consultation response from people of pension age

Table 1:

Q1	Do you agree that people of pension age should be protected from any deductions to council tax?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	18	85.7%
Disagree	1	4.8%
Did not say	2	9.5%

Table 2:

Q2	Do you agree that the amount of local council tax support you receive should be based on the current council tax benefit calculation?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	14	66.7%
Disagree	1	4.8%
Did not say	6	28.6%

Table 3:

Q3	Do you agree that all working age people should receive a reduction in their council tax benefit of 18.5%?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	6	28.6%
Disagree	8	38.1%
Did not say	7	33.3%

Summary of responses from people of pension age

- 85.7% of pension age people agree that pensioners should be protected from any deductions. In comparison 70.7% of all respondents and 66.1% of respondents who are working age agree that pensioners should be protected.
- 66.7% of pension age people agree that the benefit calculation should not be changed. In comparison 61.0% of all respondents and 59.3% of respondents who are working age agree that the benefit calculation should not change.
- 38.1% of pension age people disagree that working age people should receive an 18.5% reduction to their council tax benefit. In comparison 62.2% of all respondents and 71.2% of respondents who are working age disagree that council tax benefit should be reduced by 18.5% for working age claimants.

Annex 5 – Consultation response from males

Table 1:

Q1	Do you agree that people of pension age should be protected from any deductions to council tax?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	26	72.2%
Disagree	8	22.2%
Did not say	2	5.6%

Table 2:

Q2	Do you agree that the amount of local council tax support you receive should be based on the current council tax benefit calculation?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	23	63.9%
Disagree	7	19.4%
Did not say	6	16.7%

Table 3:

Q3	Do you agree that all working age people should receive a reduction in their council tax benefit of 18.5%?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	8	22.2%
Disagree	26	72.2%
Did not say	2	5.6%

Summary of responses from males

- 72.2% of males agree that pensioners should be protected from any deductions. In comparison 70.7% of all respondents and 73.2% of female respondents agree that pensioners should be protected.
- 63.9% of males agree that the benefit calculation should not be changed. In comparison 61.0% of all respondents and 63.4% of female respondents agree that the benefit calculation should not change.
- 72.2% of males disagree that working age people should receive an 18.5% reduction to their council tax benefit. In comparison 62.2% of all respondents and 58.5% of female respondents disagree that council tax benefit should be reduced by 18.5% for working age claimants.

Annex 6 – Consultation response from females

Table 1:

Q1	Do you agree that people of pension age should be protected from any deductions to council tax?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	30	73.2%
Disagree	8	19.5%
Did not say	3	7.3%

Table 2:

Q2	Do you agree that the amount of local council tax support you receive should be based on the current council tax benefit calculation?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	26	63.4%
Disagree	6	14.6%
Did not say	9	22.0%

Table 3:

Q3	Do you agree that all working age people should receive a reduction in their council tax benefit of 18.5%?	
	Number	Percentage
Agree	8	19.5%
Disagree	24	58.5%
Did not say	9	22.0%

Summary of responses from females

- 73.2% of females agree that pensioners should be protected from any deductions. In comparison 70.7% of all respondents and 72.2% of male respondents agree that pensioners should be protected.
- 63.4% of females agree that the benefit calculation should not be changed. In comparison 61.0% of all respondents and 63.9% of male respondents agree that the benefit calculation should not change.
- 58.5% of females disagree that working age people should receive an 18.5% reduction to their council tax benefit. In comparison 62.2% of all respondents and 72.2% of male respondents disagree that council tax benefit should be reduced by 18.5% for working age claimants.

Annex 7 – Consultation response from carers

Table 1:

Q1 Do you agree that people of pension age should be protected from any deductions to council tax?		
	Number	Percentage
Agree	12	70.6%
Disagree	5	29.4%
Did not say	0	0%

Table 2:

Q2 Do you agree that the amount of local council tax support you receive should be based on the current council tax benefit calculation?		
	Number	Percentage
Agree	12	70.6%
Disagree	4	23.5%
Did not say	1	5.9%

Table 3:

Q3 Do you agree that all working age people should receive a reduction in their council tax benefit of 18.5%?		
	Number	Percentage
Agree	3	17.6%
Disagree	14	82.4%
Did not say	0	0%

Summary of responses from carers

- 70.6% of carers agree that pensioners should be protected from any deductions. In comparison 70.7% of all respondents and 74.1% of respondents who are not carers agree that pensioners should be protected.
- 70.6% of carers agree that the benefit calculation should not be changed. In comparison 61.0% of all respondents and 61.1% of respondents who are not carers agree that the benefit calculation should not change.
- 82.4% of carers disagree that working age people should receive an 18.5% reduction to their council tax benefit. In comparison 62.2% of all respondents and 57.4% of respondents who are not carers disagree that council tax benefit should be reduced by 18.5% for working age claimants.

Annex 8 – Consultation response from people with a disability

Table 1:

Q1 Do you agree that people of pension age should be protected from any deductions to council tax?		
	Number	Percentage
Agree	29	74.4%
Disagree	8	20.5%
Did not say	2	5.1%

Table 2:

Q2 Do you agree that the amount of local council tax support you receive should be based on the current council tax benefit calculation?		
	Number	Percentage
Agree	20	51.3%
Disagree	9	23.1%
Did not say	10	25.6%

Table 3:

Q3 Do you agree that all working age people should receive a reduction in their council tax benefit of 18.5%?		
	Number	Percentage
Agree	5	12.8%
Disagree	30	76.9%
Did not say	4	10.3%

Summary of responses from people with a disability

- 74.4% of people with a disability agree that pensioners should be protected from any deductions. In comparison 70.7% of all respondents and 73.0% of respondents who are not disabled agree that pensioners should be protected.
- 51.3% of people with a disability agree that the benefit calculation should not be changed. In comparison 61.0% of all respondents and 73.0% of respondents who are not disabled agree that the benefit calculation should not change.
- 76.9% of people with a disability disagree that working age people should receive an 18.5% reduction to their council tax benefit. In comparison 62.2% of all respondents and 51.4% of respondents who are not disabled disagree that council tax benefit should be reduced by 18.5% for working age claimants.