

LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME CONSULTATION RECORD

Date	Item/ Event	Notes
27/8/2012	e-mail from individual	<p>The Questionnaire designed as the method of public consultation is inflexible so my response is as under:</p> <p>Principle 1 - All people of working age should pay some Council Tax The scheme proposes that all working age claimants of Local Council Tax support will be required to pay at least a minimum contribution to their Council Tax – in the draft scheme this is set at 20% of the full Council Tax bill. This would mean a minimum payment of £152 per year for a single person and £203 for a couple in a Band A property.</p> <p>RESPONSE: 100% Support should be available to those in most need.</p> <p>Principle 2 - Council Tax support should be targeted at those who need it most Council Tax support will continue to be calculated based on comparing income to a “Living Allowance” which reflects the circumstances of individual households. The proposed LCTS would continue to offer support for those with additional costs relating to special circumstances by allowing for these additional costs in the Living Allowance or ignoring income relating to these special circumstances in the calculation. In this way the proposed LCTS would continue to provide additional support to those caring for others, living with a disability, bringing up a family, to war widow(ers) and for those living with disablement from war. Full details of these special allowances is provided in the draft LCTS.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Support should be targeted at those who need it most.</p> <p>Principle 3 - Council Tax support should be targeted at people on low incomes Under the current scheme support is provided to single householders, regardless of their income and capital, where another adult in their home has a low income – this is known as the “second adult rebate”. It is proposed that this support is not included in the new LCTS scheme, and that support should be made available only to those people with low incomes.</p> <p>RESPONSE: Support should be targeted at those who need it most.</p>

Principle 4 - Every working age adult in the household should be expected to contribute to Council Tax payments

Under the current scheme Council Tax support is reduced to reflect income from other adults living in the claimant's house – these are known as “non-dependants” and include people such as adult sons and daughters, a mother, father or friend of the claimant living in the house on a non- commercial basis. These people are assumed to be giving the claimant some money towards their Council Tax regardless of whether or not they actually do. The draft LCTS scheme proposes continuing this principle so that the income of all adults in the household is taken into account.

RESPONSE:

Every working age adult in the household should be expected to contribute to Council Tax payments.

Principle 5 - The new LCTS should help encourage working age people to work

The proposed scheme will continue to include some key incentives to encourage working age people to work. These include:

- Ignoring the first £10 of a single claimant's earnings, £15 of a couple's earnings and £30 of a single parent's earnings for the purpose of calculating their weekly income for support purposes.
- Making an allowance for at least part of the cost of childcare for people who work.
- Payment of LCTS for the first 4 weeks when a claimant (or partner) moves from benefits into work.
- A “rapid reclaim” process for anyone claiming support again after a break of 12 weeks or less.

RESPONSE:

The new LCTS should help encourage working age people to work. No benefit should have an effect that any working age person feels they are better off on welfare benefits in lieu of working.

Principle 6 - The new LCTS scheme should be based on the key features of the present housing benefit scheme

This will reduce the risks and costs to the Council in introducing a brand new scheme, and will mean that people can apply for housing benefit and LCTS on the same form, and that both can be calculated at the same time, with similar rules of entitlement.

RESPONSE:

		<p>The Council should adopt the most efficient method of operation.</p> <p>Principle 7 - LCTS should not be paid to those with relatively large capital or savings</p> <p>The proposed LCTS scheme retains the capital “cut off” of £16,000 in order to ensure that people with significant savings cannot claim support, whilst continuing to encourage saving for the future.</p> <p>RESPONSE:</p> <p>Only income, not capital, should be the criteria used. Capital considerations can have the effect of discouraging savings ethic in the same way as benefit payments can discourage work ethic.</p>
3/9/12	Public Drop In - Yarm	<p>4 attendees. 2 arrived almost at the end of the session having gone to the other community centre first. NB for future sessions give the address of the venue too.</p> <p>A number of passers by spoken to as well most have seen the document & a number said they would complete it.</p> <p>Specific comments from individuals were recorded on questionnaires & submitted through the usual channels, unless individuals indicated that they would complete the document at home.</p> <p>One resident indicated that an area of social housing had not received the documents & asked if this was deliberate. Residents there don't get the Herald & Post delivered. Noted</p>
3/9/12	Infinity Financial Inclusion Partnership Meeting	<p>Briefed InFinity members on the LCTS draft scheme and the consultation process. A slot is booked on the agenda for the welfare reform event (9 October) for facilitated discussion. Questions raised relating to what our recovery policy would be- would it be cost effective to take recovery action.</p>
3/9/12	Renaissance Northern area Partnership	<p>People should be made aware of all the good work that the council are doing especially in the face of adversity and financial pressure.</p> <p>KP suggested using the community right to challenge on these changes and do a e petition to raise the issue with central government. The Board agreed to let KP raise this at the Voice meeting.</p> <p>Concerns over peoples ability to pay and lack of employment opportunities raised.</p>
4/9/12	Health and Wellbeing Board	<p>Requested information relating to numbers affected in each ward.</p> <p>LS agreed to attend further public meetings if requested.</p> <p>Question raised relating to approach adopted by other Tees Valley authorities.</p>
5/9/12	Local Public	<p>Scheme and wider welfare reform issues outlined.</p>

	Services Board	
10/9/12	Employability Consortium	Scheme and consultation details outlined. Members requested details of the Infinity Welfare Reform event. Copies of questionnaire requested for staff members dealing with work programme.
12/9/12	Public Drop In - Billingham	4 attendees. Individual advice given to 3 people. 1 attendee expressed concern over how people on low incomes could be expected to pay. Encouraged to complete questionnaires to give views.
18/9/12	Housing and Neighbourhood Partnership	Scheme and consultation details outlined. Suggested opportunity for council and registered providers to work together to identify solutions for individuals affected. Both will be recovering debts from low income households. Concern that individuals do not understand the changes and potential impact. Will it be cost effective to recover small sums from people claiming benefit?
19/9/12	Public Drop In - Stockton	8 attendees. Mainly seeking an explanation of the proposals, or advice relating to how the new scheme might affect them personally. 1 questionnaire completed to record the views of attendee. Others took questionnaire home to complete.
20/9/12	Local Safeguarding Childrens Board	Scheme and consultation details outlined
24/9/12	Voice Forum	<p>Concern that proposals will affect some of the most vulnerable residents. Also concerns that some people have not received the document, and that some people affected will not understand the proposals. There is an understanding of the dilemma faced by the council & will respond to the consultation. Response below, received 22/10/2012 (extension to consultation agreed in advance) :-</p> <p>“</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Voice Forum</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Response to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme Consultation</p> <p><i>The Voice Forum is a fully constituted organisation that is made up of organisations from the community and voluntary sector that are based or deliver services in Stockton-on-Tees. We meet every other month to discuss the issues that are key to our community and try to influence services on behalf of the organisations we represent.</i></p> <p><i>Following a presentation delivered by Linda Stephenson on 24th September the Voice Forum recognises the constraints placed on Stockton Borough Council by national government policy with regards to the introduction of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.</i></p> <p><i>At the Voice Forum meeting it was agreed to establish a small ‘task and finish group’ to discuss the</i></p>

		<p>proposals outlined in the consultation and come up with an alternative proposal.</p> <p>We strongly feel that as a direct consequence of the planned national welfare reform is that the most disadvantaged and excluded people in our community will find they will suffer the biggest negative impact.</p> <p>In order to assist with the alleviation of poverty within the Borough the Voice Forum would wish to see the introduction of a voluntary contribution scheme built into the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.</p> <p>As this would be a voluntary scheme no resident would be required to participate but would be given the opportunity via their rates bill to make a voluntary contribution to the LCTS Benevolent Fund.</p> <p>The contribution could be an additional voluntary payment of 1% going up to 20% of their Rate.</p> <p>The money contributed could be maximised if the rate payer gift aided the money.</p> <p>All the money raised would be placed in a Local Council Tax Support Benevolent Fund which would be used to assist in the alleviation of poverty in the area.</p> <p>The criteria and administration of the Benevolent Fund would need to be established and published with the Rates request.</p> <p>The Voice Forum acknowledges that Stockton Borough Council is one of the best Local Authorities in the Country with regard to its social policies and would ask that the Council consider this proposal when establishing the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and 2013/14 rates administration.</p> <p>We look forward to your response and comment.</p> <p>Kevin Pitt Chair Voice Forum Voice Forum Task and Finish Group – LCTSS Consultation Kevin.pitt@ntlworld.com"</p>
24/9/12	Renaissance Western Area Partnership	Meeting cancelled
25/9/12	Renaissance Eastern Area Partnership	Meeting did not go ahead as only 2 members present. Both had already had information about the scheme.
25/9/12	Safer Stockton	Scheme and consultation details outlined. Comment made that this was an added pressure for people in

	Partnership	drug treatment etc that needed to be taken into account by agencies involved.
26/9/12	Public Drop In-Thornaby	2 attendees – both were professionals wanting information to relay to their teams and/ or clients.
26/9/12	BME Network	Meeting inquorate. Update given to members present. Comments made that document should have been written to allow people to answer the questions without reading the details of the proposals.
27/9/12	Renaissance Central Area Partnership	The proposals will affect people already affected by welfare reforms especially those relating to underoccupation in the social rented sector and disability benefits. Members of partnership aware of 5 organisations in the area already who are giving out food parcels. Will the amount collected outweigh the cost of collection – Is it worth it? Some people will have nil income for periods of time – should these be given 100% support for these periods? Non dependants often do not contribute, imposing hardship on the taxpayer. Need to publicise & emphasise the need for non dependants to contribute. Commented on the clarity of the consultation paper.
1/10/12	Public Drop in-Ingleby Barwick	1 attendee. Discussion was related to council tax.
8/10/12	Over 50's forum	Discussion was wide ranging with questions relating to single person discount, council tax banding and appeals. Comments that the questionnaire was very clear and it was a positive step that everyone had been consulted rather than just those claiming benefit. However some attendees thought that this did make for some confusion.
8/10/2012	Response from individual member of Voice Forum	CHANGES TO COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT It is unfair that pensioners are not touched at all in the 10% savings that have to be made in the scheme, given that everyone else, regardless of income, is going to have to pay, if a householder. Principles as set out in the document. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I do not think it a good idea to expect all working age claimants to pay. It may only be a low amount, £3 or £4 a week, but the cost of collection from many of these people is going to quite high in billing etc, and will lead to personal debt and lower collection rates for not just the Council, but Fire and Police Services as well. 2. There needs to provision in the policy for those people with nil, or miniscule, income. There are not a lot, but there are people in this situation who have nil income from benefits or anywhere

else, even if only for a time. It will make administration of non pursuit of these people easier if there is something in the local regulations for this.

For all the others the comments are based on the fact that some savings are going to have to be made somewhere, so agreeing with them, does not mean I think they are a good idea, just that they could be considered.

3. OK, but people need to be clear that words like “caring”, and “living with a disability” will relate to being assessed as eligible for the relevant welfare benefits. This needs to be reflected in the publicity.
4. OK
5. OK but it does need to be surrounded by good publicity. Currently “non dependents” are supposed to contribute to the household’s Council Tax if benefit is received. However in my experience many do not, particularly the younger generation, and parents find it very hard to get the message over to them that they are supposed to contribute by the amounts currently set by Government. Many people just do not know they are meant to ask for the contribution from the non dependent, also do not realise that Council Tax Benefit Office must be alerted when they move in or out. As there will need to be publicity about the changes, this is an opportunity to get this message over at the same time.
6. OK and some good principles in there.
7. OK
8. Given that cuts are having to be made, and people’s income reduced in many cases, the savings limit may well have to be reduced from £16,000.

9/10/12	Infinity Welfare Reform Event	<p>Facilitated consultation exercise-</p> <p>Question 1 What works well in the current CTB scheme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient and easy process • Council tax can be requested weekly • Joint claim form for housing benefit (one claim form) Administered by same assessors • Notification of bills, amounts payable • Efficiency of staff • Reviews dealt with quickly • Administrated direct to SBC- not responsible for paying bills • Customer service on hand if have queries • People on certain benefits receive full CTB • Get bill so no financial impact • Claim with one form for HB & CTB • People on benefits get it free • Have also found that Stockton very good at processing benefit • Evidence requirements good, in fact should provide more evidence to support claim • Straight forward- council tax account is credited- Good payment method • Joint application for HB and CTB • Arrangement for Third Parties to pay any charges • Currently working! • Direct payment to local council tax office • Direct Payment supports the claimants well being by reducing stress • Joint form <p>Question 2 What could work better or causes most problems for your clients?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in income reporting
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- Clients unable to understand calculations
- Suspended quickly if change of circs notified
- Understanding literature- plain English
- Streamline JC+ CTB – if JSA takes longer to become in payment claimants responsibility to contact CTB to inform
- Transitions to and from work
- Lack of understanding who can qualify-i.e. may even if your working
- Not going to have enough money to pay
- Time delay in processing claims- in some LAs
- Not having the necessary proof can cause a problem
- Timescales- Can cause arrears- Knock on effect on recovery
- Consent issues re sharing information
- Difficulty when benefit is stopped- lack of communication, e.g. coming off ESA no reason why stopped
- Finding the 20% contribution to pay to council tax
- Shortage of food, energy, risk of homelessness due to payment of contribution
- Risks associated with cold, food etc, ill health, hospitalisation
- Problems- miscalculations, overpayments, paid in arrears, length of time to be in payment
- 20% contribution could be an issue with affordability

Question 3

Do you have any comments or alternative proposals

- Better advertising- use telly advert space for general changes- pointing out people need to seek further info from LA's
- Important that working peoples bills don't go up further to accommodate those on benefits not contributing
- Going to escalate peoples debts- where do people find this money to pay it when money on a tight budget
- Too much impact with all other changes happening
- Don't believe pensioners should be exempt
- Hitting the most vulnerable again with all welfare cuts. Impact on poorest. Cumulative effect.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People currently in receipt of CT may/will need support • Increase council tax by £1 Band A , £2 Band B etc to find saving. • Council find savings elsewhere
9/10/2012	Eggescliffe and Eaglescliffe Parish Council	Eggescliffe & Eaglescliffe Council discussed the Local Council Tax Support Scheme at a recent meeting; the Council has concerns regarding the rate of collection and collection costs of small amounts of council tax and the cumulative effect on local parish and town councils.
16/10/12	CSI Select Committee	Report presented on the interim findings of the consultation, up to 17 September 2012
23/10/12	Executive Scrutiny Committee	Report presented on the interim findings of the consultation, up to 17 September 2012
30/10/12	Disability Advisory Group	Proposals outlined and a number of questions were raised, relating to administrative procedures and the single claim form. Also confirmed that the proposals did not affect the single person discount.
5/11/12	Royal British Legion letter	Attached as appendix 5