



Council Tax Support

Consultation Findings

Report

October 2018

Introduction

A public consultation for the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2019/20 was undertaken throughout September and October 2018.

The consultation exercise was designed to engage with as many residents and interested parties as possible. The consultation sought responses on the proposed changes and in addition, alternative ideas that could be considered for inclusion in Council Tax Support scheme, or as part of a wider budget savings programme.

The overarching objectives of the consultation were to engage with customers and representative organisations alike, publicise and provide information, and obtain views and opinions about the Councils own proposals that will take effect in April 2019.

The findings of the consultation will be used to help inform and influence member discussion, and ultimately, the proposals for changing scheme in the 2019/20 financial year.

The decision on proposed changes to the scheme will be finalised by Full Council on the 24th January 2019.

Consultation Exercise

To help ensure that the consultation process was full and comprehensive, a wide range of methodologies were adopted in September and October. These included:

- Mailshot to customers and representative groups;
- Online survey on the Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council website;
- Paper questionnaires were made available at the One Stop Shops;
- Customer engagement – At the One Stop Shops and the via Contact Centre enquiries;
- Internal communications – email and briefings for members and staff, and;
- Links to the survey added to customer emails;

The consultation and the online survey closed for comments on the 22nd October 2018.

Consultation Methodology

1. The Council's website featured the online survey throughout the consultation period. The online survey was also widely promoted on all email communications with customers.
2. Paper surveys were also made available to customers and were pro-actively advertised and completed with customers at the One Stop Shops at Blackburn and Darwen. Contact Centre staff also completed the online survey for customers following incoming telephone enquiries.
3. In total, 500 mailshot letters were issued to affected groups. These included, self-employed claimants, claims currently receiving or exempt from non-dependent deductions and claims currently on band C and above.

The mailshot explained the reason for the public consultation and invited recipients to go online to take part in the consultation and complete the questionnaire. The

mailshot also provided details of a contact telephone number and email address for any direct enquiries in relation to the consultation.

4. A number of emails were also issued to representative groups, including local voluntary and community organisations from across the Borough as well as local registered social housing providers.
5. As many Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council staff both live and work in the area, they are potentially interested parties. The online consultation was communicated via the staff intranet and a teamtalk email to all Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council staff, inviting them to take part in the survey and to inform families and friends of the proposed changes.

Consultation Survey Results

In total there were 381 responses received during the consultation process. A total of 291 recorded that they were liable for Council Tax whilst 27 were not, with a further 63 preferring not to say, or did not answer the question.

When asked if they received Council Tax Support, 128 or 35% of the respondents recorded that they came from households currently in receipt of Council Tax Support, whilst a further 203 indicated that they were not in receipt. A further 37 respondents did not indicate either way and preferred not to say. An additional 13 respondents did not answer the question at all.

The results for the responses are presented by examining each of the consultation questions and the responses provided.

In addition to the responses mentioned above, representative groups/voluntary organisations were also contacted for opinions and views on the proposed changes. Unfortunately, only 4 organisations responded, these include; the Womens Centre, great Places, AgeUK, and the Blind Society. The views of these organisations has been summarized in section '*Representative Group responses*'.

Demographic Information from the consultation Survey

During the consultation exercise a number of questions were asked to identify demographic information from respondents.

From respondents the following information was identified:

Gender (364 responded)

Male 143 or 39.3%

Female 198 or 54.4%

Prefer not to say or entered an alternative gender 23 or 6.32%

Age (372 responded)

18-64 years of age 309 or 83.1%

65+ 43 or 11.6%

Prefer not to say 20 or 5.4%

Disability (371 responded)

With a disability or long term physical or mental health condition 91 or 24.5%

Who did not have a disability or long term physical or mental health condition 253 or 68.2%

Prefer not to say 27 or 7.3%

Ethnicity (369 responded)

White British 229 or 62.1%

White other 17 or 4.6%

Asian or Asian British – Indian 55 or 14.9%

Asian or Asian British – Pakistani 36 or 9.8%

Prefer not to say 32 or 8.7%

Equality Monitoring

Equality monitoring helps us to meet our statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010. Data was requested at the end of the survey and covers some of the characteristics which are protected from discrimination as contained within the Equality Act 2010.

The response rate from Council Tax Support recipients was significantly lower (35%) than the response rate from Non-CTB recipients (55%). This disparity has also been reported by other Authorities that have consulted on this matter. However, it should be noted that the split in total number of Council Tax Support/non Council Tax Support recipients in the Borough is not too dissimilar at 27.3% to 72.7%.

Replies were received for all age groups, however the majority of responses (83.1%) were received from those aged 18 to 64. The response rate observed from those aged 65 or over appears low (11.6%) in comparison with the demographic profile of the Borough, however this could be as a result of them not being directly affected by the changes.

In keeping with the demographic profile of the Borough, the majority of the responses (62.1%) to the consultation came from respondents with a white British background, with fewer responses (24.7%) coming from respondents who indicated an Asian heritage. Again, the results from the consultation are similar to the actual demographics of the Borough which indicate an Asian heritage percentage of approximately 30%.

Responses were also received from persons with a disability.

Overall, the responses represent a wide range of views and the findings of the consultation are thought to be representative, as the level of responses are, on the whole, in-keeping with the demographic profile of the Borough.

Responses

Q1. To simplify the Council Tax Support scheme and save the council money, we propose not to rely on self-employed applicants declaring their income, and instead, intend to set a minimum income level.

Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a minimum income for self-employed claimants of £274.05 (35 hours multiplied by the National Living Wage)?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	60.48%	228
No	16.98%	64
Don't know	22.55%	85
TOTAL		377

Q2. If there is a non-dependant (adult who doesn't own or rent the property) living in the household, their income is taken into account when assessing a Council Tax Support claim. Deductions are then made based on the income of that person. At present there are four different deduction amounts that can be made.

Do you agree with the proposal to simplify the scheme and have one flat rate of deduction, for example, £5.00 per week?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	61.80%	233
No	21.75%	82
Don't know	16.45%	62
TOTAL		377

Q3. Council Tax Support is awarded based on the council tax payable. Those in higher bands can therefore receive more Council Tax Support.

Do you agree with the proposal to limit the maximum award to that of a band B property?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	53.23%	198
No	33.33%	124
Don't know	13.44%	50
TOTAL		372

Q4. To simplify the administration, the council proposes to ignore small changes to a person's Council Tax Support claim.

Do you agree with the proposal not to amend the Council Tax Support calculation if the adjustment is £2 per week or less?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	73.50%	269
No	12.84%	47
Don't know	13.66%	50
TOTAL		366

Q5. If a single applicant does not qualify for Council Tax Support but has a 2nd adult in the property (such as, a boarder/son or daughter) on low income, a rebate of up to 25% can be applied to the bill.

Do you agree with the proposal to no longer award Council Tax Support in these circumstances?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	50.68%	187
No	37.40%	138
Don't know	11.92%	44
TOTAL		369

Q6. Council Tax Support can be awarded to people who are temporarily absent from their homes for certain reasons. We propose to change the time allowed in line with other welfare benefits, for example, temporarily abroad would reduce from 13 weeks allowed to 4 weeks.

Do you agree with the proposal to reduce the current period to 4 weeks?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	62.87%	232
No	26.02%	96
Don't know	11.11%	41
TOTAL		369

Q7. Because the council is proposing to make changes to the Council Tax Support scheme it is considering extending discretionary support for the most vulnerable in the borough who may be affected by the changes.

Do you agree with the proposal to extend discretionary support?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	72.88%	266
No	12.60%	46
Don't know	14.52%	53
TOTAL		365

Q8. Currently, the maximum eligible Council Tax Support a working age person can receive is 80%.

Do you think the council should simply reduce the eligible level of support to a maximum of 75% rather than the current 80%?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	40.76%	150
No	45.92%	169
Don't know	13.32%	49
TOTAL		368

Q9. Do you have any other suggestions how the Council Tax Support scheme can be changed?

The comments are listed in Appendix A.

Q10. Do you have any suggestions how the council can make further budget savings?

The comments are listed in Appendix A.

Representative Group responses

As indicated above, only four responses were received, a summary of the responses is below

Question 1 – 2 of the respondents agreed with the proposal to introduce the minimum income floor, whilst 2 did not.

Question 2 – 2 of the respondents agreed with the proposal to introduce one flat rate of non-dependent deduction, whilst 2 did not.

Question 3 – All 4 respondents disagreed with the band cap at band B.

Question 4 – 3 of the respondents agreed with the proposal to introduce a tolerance level, whilst 1 did not.

Question 5 – 2 of the respondents agreed with the proposal to abolish of 2nd adult rebate, whilst 2 did not.

Question 6 – All respondents agreed with the proposal to reduce temporary absence to 4 weeks.

Question 7 – All respondents agreed with the proposal to extend a discretionary support scheme.

Question 8 – 2 of the respondents agreed with the proposal to reduce the eligible amount from 80% to 75%, whilst 2 did not.