



Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation Results

Author	Laura Bessell
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Author	Laura Bessell-Welfare Reform Team Leader
Approver	Isabell Proctor-Director of Resources, Robin Bates Head of Finance and Resources
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Review

Name	Title	Organisation
Isabell Proctor	Director Of Resources/Localisation Programme Sponsor	Northampton Borough Council
Robin Bates	Head of Finance and Support	Northampton Borough Council
Silvina Katz	Corporate Policy and Consultation Manager	Northampton Borough Council
Ian Tyrer	Revenues Manager	Northampton Borough Council
Matthew Steele	Benefits Manager	Northampton Borough Council
Steve Archer	Local Council Tax Support Lead	Northampton Borough Council

Distribution

Name	Title	Organisation
	Localisation Programme Board	Northampton Borough Council
	Chief Finance Officers Group	County, Police and Districts of Northamptonshire

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.0 This report contains the results to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation which took place between 10th September and 22nd October 2012.
- 1.2 Council Tax Benefit is financial help towards the cost of paying the Council Tax bill. From April 2013, the Government will end Council Tax Benefit and replace it with a new scheme called Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Local Scheme) which will be set up and run by each council.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Council's Localisation Programme Board approved proposals for consultation on the 2013/14 local Council Tax Scheme the on 5th September 2012.
- 2.2 The consultation process covering all of the options being considered was carried out from the 10th September 2012 until the 22nd October 2012. The aim of this consultation was to find out people's views on the options proposed by Northampton Borough Council.
- 2.3 The consultation period will formally be closed on the date the scheme is approved on 21st January 2013 and will be communicated with stakeholders as appropriate.
- 2.4 This consultation followed the principles set out in the Council's Consultation Toolkit and industry standard guidance on best practice in consultation.
- 2.5 The results of the consultation are contained in this report. They will be considered by the Council as part of the process of designing a local scheme.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 Residents, businesses and other stakeholders were invited to provide feedback on the proposals during the consultation period and support was made available to maximise involvement and understanding of the proposals.
- 3.2 People were able to engage using a range of methods:
 - Public Open Day Event -2 Open public meetings held at the Guildhall on 10 October 2012;
 - Council's proposals debated at Community Forums (Disabled People Forum 17/10/2012; Northampton LGBT and Q Forum 18/09/2012; Northampton Pensioner Forum 13/09/2012)
 - Information about forthcoming changes, consultation proposals and questionnaire were available on the Council's website. A dedicated e-mail address and consultation phone line were set up to receive comments/views etc.
 - On-line survey;
 - Questionnaires made available in public locations ;
 - Promotion of consultation using social media (Facebook, twitter, etc).

- All responses to e-mail communication from the benefit mailbox, included an invitation to take-part in the consultation.
 - Staff via intranet;
 - Agenda item at Multi Agency Forum and 3rd Party Sector Meeting 12/09/2012
 - Invitation to participate was sent to key stakeholders, including Precepting Authorities, parishes and Member of Parliaments
 - Invitation to participate was sent to the business community via the Chamber of Commerce, their network and the Federation of Small Businesses;
 - Invitation to members of the Sounding Board (tenants);
 - Engagement with the housing association and voluntary and community sector via their various networks ;
 - Engagement with our key stakeholder and partners ;
 - Meeting with Northampton Chief Finance Officers.
- 3.3 The consultation was advertised widely through the media including, mail shots, press releases and radio interviews to raise awareness. Two radio broadcasts were held with Inspiration FM and BBC Northamptonshire.
- 3.4 Interim weekly consultation reports containing full details, including potential impacts and alternative proposals, were circulated to the Localisation Programme Board to maximise awareness and action in relation to issues and concerns raised during the consultation.

4.0 RESULTS

- 4.1 A total of 23 responses were received by 22nd October 2012 (21 electronically, 1 via paper questionnaire and 1 letter by email). There has been 1 further response outside of the closing date.
- 4.2 Nationally, the response to Local Authority engagement on local Council Tax schemes has been low. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities has established that this is the case.
- 4.3 It should be noted that additional activity has been undertaken independently of this consultation in respect of wider welfare reforms and has included local press, public attendance at meetings and forums. Views expressed during such events are not included in this report as they do not affect the scheme design, but national issues surrounding welfare reform.

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Results are indicative of the views of individuals that have responded, but due to the low response level to the consultation, this data is insufficient to provide a definitive view.

- 5.2 The website was viewed 433 times during the consultation period and the average time spent was over three minutes. This demonstrates that media coverage of the consultation was active, however members of the public, did not complete the form to air their views, once reading the detail.

5.3 Table of key results.

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation						
To what extent to do agree or disagree with the following statements?						
Answer Options	Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't know	Response Count
Restrict award to a percentage of the charge	4	9	3	1	1	18
Reduce weekly award by £5 per week	4	6	4	4	2	20
The scheme should incentivise work	12	2	4	2	0	20
Everybody in the household should contribute	8	2	8	1	0	19
Increase proportion of income to be taken into account when making an award from 20% to 30% (Increase the taper)	3	7	3	3	3	19
Withdraw award for those holding over £6,000 in capital instead of £16,000	4	7	5	4	0	20
Removal of Second Adult Rebate (also known as Alternative Maximum Benefit)	2	6	6	2	2	18
Freeze allowances and premiums in 2013/14 (at 2012/13 levels)	6	4	6	1	2	19
Removal of backdating awards	7	5	5	3	0	20
Restrict award to Band D	5	4	9	1	1	20
Restrict minimum weekly award from £0.50p per week to £1.00 per week	6	7	4	0	3	20

5.4 Comments made during face to face meetings from the public included;

- Scheme should clearly recognise those difficulties for disabled and the unemployed to obtain additional income in order to meet the shortfall of entitlement.
- Details of the scheme need to be conveyed recognizing varying need within the community.
- Concerns were raised for future people to be affected from scheme. Consideration to be given that communication is not wholly directed to those affected in the initial period, but shared wider to the community.

Comments made through consultation and the opportunity for these views to be used in designing the scheme.

Comments	Opportunity to Include in scheme
Extend time for many disabled households unable to access the net, use the phone, etc.	NBC can write in own scheme, how long information is required to be provided to determine entitlement to a reduction
Consider looking into the savings/properties owned by household members this doesn't seem to be done currently and many large family groups living with elderly parents my own numerous other properties with incomes.	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this
Remove many of the exemptions that allow landlords to pay little or no council tax on their properties	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this
Those with long-life illnesses, disability, not able to work.....how will they be supported?	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this
My husband is currently on ESA for a long term back problem so perhaps these people and other disabled groups should also have their council tax benefit protected like the pensioners.	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this
If you're single, regardless of size of house, you should continue to receive at least 25% off. There is no way one could afford to lose this with everything else going up in price - the whole economic crisis needs to be taken into consideration to see that people are at the end of their budgets !!	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this
The size of property shouldn't necessarily affect the benefit but the value of the property combined with the household income - a two faceted approach.	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this
People have different size properties for all sorts of reasons and this does not mean they are well off financial, often it is the reverse as the property is costly to maintain and heat.	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this
Changes should be tapered so that those in Council Band F upwards are paying a higher percentage. It is more likely that these properties are for the wealthier, but the income also needs to be taken into consideration.	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this
Low paid families	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this
What about those unable to handle their own personal affairs cope?	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this

As a single mother of 2 young children who worked for 15 years before becoming unemployed last year, I think it is fair that those of us who rely on state benefits should pay £5 per week towards council tax.	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this
The only ones who are likely to complain about it are the minority who 'have no money' yet manage to be able afford 20 cigarettes a day and drink alcohol most nights! However not all of us on benefits are like that and any more than £5 a week would cause a big impact on our ability to feed and clothe our children.	
A total revamp of the Property Banding for Council Tax needs to take place. All properties should be revalued as the current scheme does not reflect today's market. Some large town houses are worth less than a property of similar size on the outskirts of town and the state of the area, i.e. Ward demographics, crime etc. needs to be reflected. Some town properties have a much higher Council Tax than should be applied as the property has a low value. Also there are many instances where houses in the same street with the same configuration are charged different rates!!!!	This is a national decision to be taken by the Department for Communities and Local Government and NBC is not able to amend or influence this decision.
Consider removing the disabled restriction. Just because somebody receives DLA / AA doesn't mean that their non-deps should automatically be disregarded. They may have large incomes/savings or own properties	Consideration can be given to the local scheme to include this

6.0 ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION

- 6.1 On 16th October, The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) announced that an additional £100 million of funding for councils to be available. These additional funds are aimed at supporting the development of local schemes and to maintain positive incentives to work. Conditions for funding and timescales will be published shortly by DCLG.

7.0 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 Following the public consultation, the Equality Impact Assessment screening has been reviewed to include these comments. Please see Appendix 1.