

## Council Tax Support 2019/20 Consultation Results

### Background

Now the roll out of Universal Credit has commenced across the Test Valley area the Council needs to review the way the current Council Tax support (also known as Council Tax reduction) scheme works. The Council has consulted on a range of options to take effect from 1 April 2019 and has encouraged Council Tax payers and local partners, groups and organisations to submit a response.

The consultation document was published on the website between 17 September and 12 November 2018. A press release was issued by the Council and all working age customers in receipt of Council Tax Support were sent a paper questionnaire form.

### Summary of Results

These are the results received up to 25 October 2018.

There were 72 online forms completed and 58 paper forms returned, this gives a total number of 130 responses.

#### Should the Council Keep the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme?

Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
Yes	40	32	<b>72</b>	<b>55%</b>
No	12	10	<b>22</b>	<b>17%</b>
Don't know/ No answer	20	16	<b>36</b>	<b>28%</b>

#### Comments on protecting the scheme:

Comment	Number
The scheme protects the most vulnerable people/ people are already struggling to pay bills	34
Keep the scheme/it is a good scheme	4
Protect those that cannot work	3
Make everyone pay something	3
Simplify the scheme	2
Other – not relevant to the scheme	6

## Reducing the maximum levels of support from 100%

Reduce to:	Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
<b>90%</b>	Yes	30	20	<b>50</b>	<b>38%</b>
	No	16	24	<b>40</b>	<b>31%</b>
	Don't know/ No answer	26	14	<b>40</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>85%</b>	Yes	19	13	<b>32</b>	<b>25%</b>
	No	28	29	<b>57</b>	<b>44%</b>
	Don't know/ No answer	25	16	<b>41</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>80%</b>	Yes	18	10	<b>28</b>	<b>22%</b>
	No	26	30	<b>56</b>	<b>43%</b>
	Don't know/ No answer	28	18	<b>46</b>	<b>35%</b>

## Comments on alternative proposals:

Comment
90% is high enough
Keep existing scheme
Contribute small fee to services such as rubbish collection
Tax people who can afford it/increase tax on large houses
Have a smaller reduction say 95%
Have a larger percentage at least 45%
Cut pay for upper management
Get funding from Government
Include it in Universal Credit
Make those that can work pay something
Make people pay who have 2 properties
Increase minimum amount to £5 per week
Give financial support to those in low paid essential jobs

**Do you agree with the principle that the minimum level of Council Tax Reduction payable should be £1 per week?**

Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
Yes	31	28	<b>59</b>	<b>45%</b>
No	12	9	<b>21</b>	<b>16%</b>
Don't know/ No answer	29	21	<b>50</b>	<b>39%</b>

**Comments on alternative proposals:**

Comment
Benefits should be rounded to the nearest pound to save administrative costs
Suggest this is increased every year until the administrative costs start paying for themselves
Reducing the minimum payment to £5 per week would save a lot of money and protect the people who need it most

**Do you agree that there should be a tolerance level of £30 per week?**

Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
Yes	27	21	<b>48</b>	<b>37%</b>
No	10	14	<b>24</b>	<b>18%</b>
Don't know/ No answer	35	23	<b>58</b>	<b>45%</b>

**Comments on alternative proposals:**

Comment
Take it up with the Government
Quarterly or biannual reassessment rather than every month
Reducing the minimum payment to £5 per week would save a lot of money and protect the people who need it most

## Alternatives to reducing the amount of help provided by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme

### Increase level of Council Tax

Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
Yes	9	5	14	11%
No	26	21	47	36%
Don't know/No answer	37	32	69	53%

### Find savings from other Council services?

Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
Yes	20	20	40	31%
No	19	7	26	20%
Don't know/No answer	33	31	64	49%

### Use the Council's reserves?

Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
Yes	18	20	38	29%
No	21	10	31	24%
Don't know/No answer	33	28	61	47%

### Order of preference

	Option	Online	Paper	Total
<b>1</b>	Increase Council Tax	17	11	28
	Reduce funding other services	19	15	34
	Use reserves	13	23	36
<b>2</b>	Increase Council Tax	7	6	13
	Reduce funding other services	17	20	37
	Use reserves	21	13	34
<b>3</b>	Increase Council Tax	21	24	45
	Reduce funding other services	9	9	18
	Use reserves	14	7	21

## Monitoring Questions

### Currently getting a Council Tax Reduction

Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
Yes	38	47	85	65%
No	7	2	9	7%
Don't know/ No answer	27	9	61	28%

### Gender

Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
Male	13	20	33	25%
Female	34	31	65	50%
Prefer not to say/ No answer	25	7	61	25%

### Age

Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
16-24	0	1	1	1%
25-34	9	4	13	10%
35-44	8	8	16	13%
45-54	18	8	26	20%
55-64	13	29	42	32%
65+	0	3	3	2%
Prefer not to say/ No answer	24	5	29	22%

### Health Problem/Disability

Answer	Online	Paper	Total	Percentage
Yes	23	30	53	41%
No	20	13	33	25%
Prefer not to say/ No answer	29	15	44	34%

## Comments on the scheme

1. Surely some of the highest earners in the council could have a pay freeze. Reduce council expenditure for example on utilities. All the things the government expect people of working age to do.
2. Don't force people into criminality.
3. Using Council's reserves vs. reducing other Council Services raises some ambiguity because we do not know if or how much money is wasted or spent unnecessarily. Whilst I understand the wish to maintain the historic charm of a market town like Romsey, the Council stands out for it's minimal refuse and recycling collections. Once a fortnight for black bins is, in warmer months, a health hazard. No glass collection scheme for a town with so many elderly residents? The NFDC scheme is superb: can we learn something from them? The problem is, of course, funding and this is where the ambiguity comes in. A delightful market town which features an almost overwhelming amount of social and cultural events, (bringing even more rubbish to) already overflowing rubbish bins, smells, maggots, wasps and flies, is not good. Overall, it seems to me that residents in Test Valley are more inclined to have higher incomes, bigger properties and higher Council Tax rates so why does Council Tax not cover such basics as environmental waste and it's associated health hazards? Eg. our retirement development has 37 flats, some with couples. We have 8 black bins between us. How can a fortnightly collection be adequate? Surely Council Tax should be enabling this fundamental service?
4. It sounds as if substantial savings could be made simply from making the administration more sensible. That should be done before anything else. My preferred next option would be an increase in the level of council tax, with a greater increase for the highest rates and little or no increase for those at the bottom. Only after all that has been done would I then think it appropriate to make the very poorest pay more, especially given the potential for very serious harm to those who are vulnerable due to mental health or other conditions that are not properly reflected in their ESA/Universal Credit award. (It almost sounds as if central government hasn't considered the implications of their policy for local councils... surely not!)
5. i think its a good scheme
6. We agree with T.V.B.C. that U.C. is a complete & utter failure. J.S.A. & E.S.A. was less volatile and resulted in us not receiving a continuous flow of differing C.T. bills. (We have admin as well.)
7. There are many council funding schemes that I would vote as un-necessary or over funded. There are also many schemes that I would vote to have increased. Un-happily the amount of recourses demanded by the population serviced by our Council is out of balance with the income the Council receives. May be look elsewhere for additional funds by closer management of Sub Contracts that bleed Cash with little return or the correlation between Debit collection Cost and actual cash reclaimed. Its a hard world and its going to get tighter. Please stop overpaying contracted services that provide inefficient or substandard returns.
8. This problem isnt a local problem but a national one, companies and the well off that use tax havens to avoide paying little to no tax are the reason as a country we are failing. Tax the rich or let them face imprisonment protect the poor and needy. Stop government employees taking back handers to crew our economy and persecute the needy.
9. Working aged people on benefits who already pay spare room tax are unable to move as there is no other homes to exchange to, Families on very low incomes should not be left to get into council tax debt to save tvbc admin charges!!!!
10. Too many people get full relief from council tax. Everyone can pay . even a small amount. to even out the payments would help the whole budget.I have had sometimes 10 letters in one week about different changes in my council tax.If the first check was done properly and with the truth from people every one would benefit. Less admin. less people getting 100% help more people getting a small amount. Every thing would equal out

11. as long as an increase in council tax was ringfenced to provide help to those in most need (for reduction / 100% relief) i would be in favour of a small increase in what i pay
12. Increase council to everyone that is on universal credit and reduce to the people that actually is working hard to pay 100% or more
13. This entire matter is an utter disgrace. Roll on the next General and local elections
14. a change in government will probably mean a change
15. people don't ask for help unless they truly need it
16. don't understand some of the questions
17. wish I did not have to pay this as income is low
18. change the Government
19. when you move into part time work will you still get support?
20. making an increase in council tax would be devastating for people because wages are staying the same and does not allow for income to be put anywhere else
21. send notifications by email or text message to save money
22. sadly it will be the poorest in society that feel the sharp end, the cuts are too deep, roll out universal credit before you decide

### **Other Options the Council should consider**

1. Lean six-sigma is a proven methodology for eliminating waste. There will be a lot to go at and each project is usually targeted at £1,000,000. If this is not palatable, then evidence that this has been tried is imperative, before targeting the poor.
2. Larger families use more Council services, why not charge them? Vulnerable persons have no choice but to obey U.C. rules. Why pick on us (about the lowest & most ignored) group of citizens?
3. Increase taxation on the rich
4. i do not understand why tvbc feels it need to change the scheme, More and more people are moving to Andover and paying Council tax, TVBC are cutting services every year
5. Reduct 100% reduction for household with 2 adults on benefits whatever benefits they are on. Unemployed should be paying at least 20% towards, there are MANY jobs out there so they're being fussy or just don't want to work. However what about care leavers, will they see 100% reductions when/if needed? They don't have family to fall back on and I think they should really be included in this too, of course if they're working full time then yes they should pay but when they struggle they have no one to fall back on so I think they should be thought about.
6. i would like to see private landlords share the burden of the council tax reduction scheme, particularly if the rents they charge are considerably higher than social housing rents. This may encourage landlords to revise/reduce their rental rates thus potentially save on housing benefit costs too. council tax; is afterall; determined by property value which is not exactly fair on those who rent.
7. Like before everyone that receives universal credit needs to pay their council tax at least to 35% of the cost of the area that are living in
8. fine people for anti social behaviour and use this money
9. reduce benefit to 80% and people pay 20% seem fair
10. challenge central government instead of putting politics first
11. get 10% back from the recycling contract
12. too much money goes to library refit, managers could take less wages
13. I am happy to pay £24 per week
14. send fewer letters by post
15. stop penalising people who are trying but struggling to find work
16. consider asking the government for that money that has been taken away that may pay towards your admin fees

### **Other comments or questions regarding the scheme**

1. *When will this be discussed publicly? What will happen to non-payers? Who will decide on affordability and how? What would be the impact on the general population of funding the GAP? Not the scheme, but the required amount to keep the scheme as is. A more detailed breakdown is required to make a fully informed decision. Otherwise, the COUNCIL are asking the completers of this questionnaire to make a vote similar to turkeys voting for Christmas. I am sure the COUNCIL expect a rough ride for this proposal, as those affected don't have the means to find the money. The COUNCIL's breakdown of affordability for claimants (i.e. living expenses vs Benefits) would help everyone to see how easy (or difficult) it would be for benefits claimants to absorb the impact of this change. An interesting read I am sure.*
2. *Thank you for giving us the chance to comment on the proposals.*
3. *Possible cash saving: Abolish mayoral cars, Sell the Old magistrates court, town hall & Duttons Road sites in Romsey & relocate to Portacabins near Beech Hurst in Andover.*
4. *This scheme is yet another attack on the poor and dissabled just as universal credit is. The poor are not to blame for the state of our economy thats the fault of big buisness and the banks Instead of sending out notifications via post, email people, or at least let it be an option for notifications as it would save money on stationery and postage costs.*
5. *i would like the council to explore what "tax liabilities" private landlords have with regards rental incomes, capital gains etc. And the rents they charge. Any rent set at an annual yield above a set % (15% as eg) of property value should incur a council tax levy/charge of some description. My feeling is that private rental rates can be too high, coupled with lack of social housing – this certainly has a detrimental effect on those on low income. as above - council tax is grossly unfair to those who have to rent*
6. *please sort out potholes*
7. *the scheme has been an amazing help I hope it is protected*
8. *I found this hard to fill in and make sense of*
9. *calculate changes 6 monthly*
10. *you will do what you want regardless of what other people think, I don't support this because you cut back all the time*
11. *try not to make it any harder for low income people, don't let them lose even more. They need to eat and keep warm please remember this when you make your final decision, far more important than admin costs*