Results of consultation on local council tax support scheme 2012
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This consultation ran 23 July to 20 October 2012. Respondents were asked to read three summary approaches (see section 3) and say how much they support or oppose each one and to comment on each.

There were 89 responses:
- 87 North Somerset residents
- 1 organisational response
- 1 resident from a neighbouring area (their free text comments are included here but their answers are not counted as part of the quantitative reporting - charts and tables).

The one organisational response is presented in section 1. The responses from individuals are presented in section 2.

The charts show results as numbers of responses (not percentages). All charts are based on those answering the question at hand. All free text responses were subject to a word limit of about 200 words.

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1. Organisational responses (1 response)
The only organisation responding was Weston and North Somerset Disability Information
Advice Line (D.I.A.L). Their response was as follows.

Approach 1: Strongly oppose.
I work as a welfare rights adviser for disabled people. I have observed many severely disabled
people having there benefits stopped or reduced. Having to pay towards their council tax when
they already have less to live on would be a big blow for them at this time.

Approach 2. Strongly support
It would be most preferable to keep entitlement roughly the same.

Obviously it would be more preferable to keep entitlement roughly the same but I understand
this may not be possible. This approach which protects vulnerable groups such as the disabled
would be preferable to the first approach. I think it is absolutely essential to protect these
groups at this time of economic upheaval and welfare reform.

2. Individuals’ responses

2.1. Overall levels of support/acceptance/opposition
The three approaches attract roughly similar levels of support, with around 30-40 of the 80 or so
respondents-per-approach supporting or supporting strongly.

Fig 1.
Approach 1 has a slightly higher level of opposition than Approach 2 or 3.

So, most respondents (57 out of 81 responding) support or accept Approach 2, compared to 52 out of 80 for Approach 3 and 41 out of 81 for Approach 1.

Fig 2 shows this, using the same data as Fig 1, summarised.

**Fig 2.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Support strongly, support or accept</th>
<th>Oppose strongly or oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approach 1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach 2</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach 3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. Comments about Approach 1 (35 responses).

From those who support strongly, support or accept Approach 1 (19 responses)

Council tax should be raised by 10-15%

Do not spend any more money on benefits! At least make those people contribute.

I am a single mother who is in full time employment with one young person in the household who is unemployed so am having to support them. I have to pay full council tax with no help. I have not had a pay rise for over two years now so am struggling. S

Council tax benefit should be aimed at pensioners, working families and those who are unable to work. It should not go to "benefit scroungers" who avoid work.

There are many services that the council could drop and allow charities etc to take over

There are no doubt other services which could be cut however difficult these may be. Id suggest looking at spend on community playground equipment. lovely as this is, much can be seriously under used and if not maintained then certainly there are community.

Whilst this will reduce funding for the unemployed (as vulnerable groups will be protected) I see no reason not to set a minimum council tax level of say 12.5% for the unemployed as per Bristol proposals.

The burden should NOT fall on the rate payers instead the shortfall should be balanced by a combination of cuts in services and reduced subsidy to eligible C T benefit clients

Tax payers should not be funding the lifestyles of those who do not participate in society if they are able bodied and of working age. Loss of services nor benefits for the disabled should be affected.
I pay my CT in full every year, but I know of someone who is genuinely unable to pay his (not working, not able to claim benefits etc so is penniless) and I would be happy to increase my tax to help those in this situation.

The only people who should be entitled to the funding should be the elderly or the people who have worked throughout their lives and suddenly have to go on unemployment benefit of £65 per week with no additional increases. Not widows whose husbands have

People on benefit have already been hit by rising prices and a squeeze on benefits and support services they shouldn't be punished further for their misfortune we are supposed to be living in a civilised society that cares and supports the less fortunate.

Families are already struggling, removing council tax benefit is not an option unless you want to push people in to debt and poverty.

Some of the shortfall could be funded, even if not all of it

The savings should not be to the detriment to vulnerable people

The council should not fund the shortfall.

Council tax should not be increased to fund the shortfall. The Council should only use the money which it is provided and this should be given to the elderly first and everyone else means tested on what monies they have coming into the property including child maintenance, child tax credits, disability etc without exceptions.

Perhaps you could sell the new furniture in the town hall

People currently paying the Council Tax should not have their bills increased to fund people who do not pay as this would be totally unfair as working people pay tax and national insurance and their own bills and money is extremely tight and therefore they should not be expected to pay more because others are not paying their bills.

From those who oppose strongly or oppose Approach 1 (16 responses)

I am a single mother and have always worked and now as I am on minimal wage I get penalised.....perhaps I should have a drug/drink habit and not work but have multiple children and maybe a few staffie dogs and get money thrown at me????

My first comment is that this is written badly! It does not clearly explain the proposal or adequately explain the effect on individuals. There is a risk that it will be misunderstood and this will effect the answers given - making the consultation worthless

I think there should be transition arrangements

How on earth will you find savings from other services? I think there are already enough cuts in other areas, and to increase the Council Tax for those who do pay would seem unfair. How are you going to police or manage fraudulent CT rebate cases?

This approach would leave some very vulnerable low income people of working age with considerable sums to find. More debt and homelessness will result. A rise in Council Tax of 2% would fund the shortfall (£25 pa), while vulnerable people would need to fi [cuts off]

This proposal will leave the most vulnerable short of money for daily living.

Council Tax is already far too expensive, raising people's payments to fund others will only make things worse.

Problem with NS is there are too many "needy" people living here. Who pays the CT of the drug addicts/ alcoholics shipped in from elsewhere who don't work therefore don't pay?
CUT staff salaries - then there is no impact on anybody
Opposed to any further tax increases or further reductions in services
Those who can afford it should pay more. This is a disastrous Conservative government policy and will impose real harm on vulnerable people.

Tax payers who cannot pay must be supported
The Council Tax should not be increased to cover those who currently do not pay. The people who should have the benefit are the elderly and the people who suddenly come out of work and can only claim minimum monies as they have already been paying for the council tax and therefore if they suddenly are unable to because they lose their job it is only fair.

I do not think that working residents of the district should in any way be made to pay the shortfalls - including loss of services.

Everybody is struggling in the current financial situation. I agree that vulnerable people such as the elderly should be protected, but those people who are of working age should contribute across the board rather than handouts being given as a matter of course. We all consume the same services so everybody should pay for them.

Do not really like this as it seems imprecise.

2.3. Comments about Approach 2 (27 responses)

From those who Support strongly, support or accept Approach 2 (18 responses)
As stated above, it is vital that those on low income or benefits are protected from accruing debts for payment demands they could not afford.

I am confused as to how the rules will remain the same and yet the council does not propose to fund the shortfall. My assumption is the difference will be in the amounts paid?

Whilst I am in favour of this approach, I think you should take all disposable income into account - DLA, Child Benefit, Child Maintenance, War Widows... You do this for Discretionary Housing Payments so why not Council Tax Rebate?

I would strongly support this approach except that allowance should be made for people over 60 who can only find part time work as employers are reluctant to give over 60s full time employment.

The proposal is not as clearly stated as it could be - intentional? The windfall back payments likely aid middle incomers who discover ways of claiming rather being low wage earners who without the support would not be able to pay for the accommodation in

I feel it is very important to protect the elderly and the vulnerable and also those with children who are on low incomes.

I work in a local authority, albeit out of North Somerset, and even I have found this questionnaire very difficult to understand each approach.

Whilst a sensible approach for the claimants - how will this be funded and at what cost?

I currently receive full ctb and if it doesn't continue, it will put me in poverty when I have kids to look after

Why should I who have recently become a widower and out working to support myself be penalised and have to pay more, when I have no widow's pension and no husband pension support. I have worked since I was 17 and now going to be victimised with any help.
If it needs a small increase in council tax - do it but cut staff salaries first.

No vulnerable individuals should suffer. You should increase the council tax on the most expensive home owners.

Carers are a vulnerable group and should be protected accordingly by North Somerset Council.

I support a that the pensioners should be able to receive the benefit scheme but not the vulnerable groups as this includes a lot of people who are claiming a lot of benefits under the child credit scheme, disability, working minimum hours, foreign immigrants who are being placed into the community etc and some who have never worked and these should all be made to pay something towards the council tax especially when elderly people have to work past 65 and because they have their pension and a small income they still have to pay the council tax. The council tax should only be for the services which everyone uses and should not be used as a way for the council to make up the shortfall in their services.

Agree with the desirability of continuing to have the same Working Age and Pensioner criteria for entitlement

This sounds sensible enough

Cases will need to be looked at on a individual basis

Supported on the basis that the approach will not require additional finance or money taken from other services.

From those who oppose strongly or oppose Approach 2 (9 responses)

As above [staffie dogs]

Stop giving out benefits, money is needed elsewhere

Why should the employed subsidise those out of work any more than they already do.

I do not believe that the working residents should be made to pay for the non-working residents coming into the North Somerset area with absolutely no intention of working. The only people who should be guaranteed the council tax discount are the elderly.

It is not acceptable to only support pensioners.

It should stay at 6 months. It can be very difficult to obtain proof of eligibility from relevant government/secular departments/organizations within 13 weeks

I do not think that working residents of the district should in any way be made to pay the shortfalls - including loss of services

I only agree with the pensioners receiving the benefits.

The elderly element should stay in force as I believe the elderly should receive the council tax benefit but the other people claiming from whatever group should be means tested and all of their money taken into account i.e. disability allowance, child credit etc and working people or people paying the council tax should not be expected to pay any extra on the council tax bill to substitute for those who are not paying.

2.4. Comments about Approach 3 (30 responses)

From those who support strongly, support or accept Approach 3 (10 responses)

Benefit allowance for 'other' family members, apart from legal guardians appears to be a loop hole whereby wealthier grandparents could obtain relief via granny annex's, second homes actually owned and paid for by them but housing children and grand child.
This seems the most equitable proposal but again what are the implications for other services & council tax.

Those on these types of benefits struggle financially & rely on the discount on their Council Tax to provide a bit more disposable income.

The benefits currently ignored are all for specific reasons and because these people has additional costs so that income is already accounted for and if it has to go towards ct. Instead it will cause problems

How are "Child care Costs" an income?

Every effort should be made to maintain existing protection for these vulnerable groups, even if this means cuts elsewhere for less vulnerable groups.

I would also like to see the often excessive public transport costs for attending work at least partially disregarded

Seems to be a good solution as regards to the large cuts required

Whilst accepting this approach there is an argument that to some degree there ought to be some regard to the other forms of income mentioned.

Yes please define vulnerable groups as this is not obvious in the council very much depends which directorate you ask

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**From those who oppose strongly or oppose Approach 3 (18 responses)**

Council tax benefit should not be dished out to people who are on other benefits. Should take into account all the other benefits they receive.

Child care costs are an outgoing so should not be factored in - otherwise people who pay out maintenance will all be applying! However I do feel you should take all the other incomes listed into account when working out weekly household income.

All income should be taken into account when assessing council tax benefit.

I believe child maintenance should be taken into account as income

This is misleading. The income disregards do not protect people with disabilities or single parents from potentially having to find considerable extra funds for Council Tax if they move from an 'exempt' to a 20% payment category.

This would mean subsidy by the employed.

Child benefit Child maintenance and child care costs should not be taken into the equation when considering C T benefit

Tax payers should not be funding the lifestyles of those who do not participate in society if they are able bodied and of working age. Loss of services nor benefits for the disabled should be affected.

Egg my ex wife could receive £50,000 a year in child maintenance, why should she have the "single mum" allowance when she is more than able to pay the full cost??

Pensioners should be guaranteed help with the Council Tax but people claiming child benefit, child maintenance, child costs, disability living allowances can claim a large amount of money per child etc and already have their money made up considerably and

Many people on low income would be affected

Total household income should be considered with no 'disregards'
Any other income especially as people claiming child benefit, CSA payments from a spouse, disability living allowances goes up into the thousands so these people are receiving more money than a worker who has to pay for the council tax and therefore this is totally unfair. People receiving other benefits should have to pay the council tax just like other people going out to work. Pensions for the elderly should not be taken into consideration and they should receive the council tax discount as the pensions are not very much but other benefits should be taken into account and the people concerned should pay the council tax.

I am concerned that the definition of 'vulnerable groups' to whom you will provide assistance will not cover the actual amount of people who require help.

I do not think that working residents of the district should in any way be made to pay the shortfalls - including loss of services

Maintaining existing provision appears to imply that new applicants for CTB will not be considered. This is not reasonable

As previously stated the only people who should receive the council tax provisions first should be the elderly and everyone else should be means tested as the amount of monies now being claimed for child benefit, child maintenance, child care costs, child tax credit, disability it extremely high and actually equates to a full time wage without any tax and national insurance being paid out of it.

Anyone receiving benefits should be means tested and child benefit and child tax credits, housing credit etc should all be taken into account especially as someone claiming child benefit and child tax credits and disability allowance can actually have a higher income coming into a property than someone who is working and paying the council tax bill i.e. someone with two children and not working can claim on child tax credits at least £10,000 and then they have on top the child benefit each week including the money they claim on income support for themselves. Just on the child tax credits it is more than some working people get per year.

From those who did not say if they support, accept or oppose Approach 3 (2 responses)

This question is unclear unless you have a wide knowledge of the current system and income disregards. Clearly it would be immoral to include things like child benefit and disability living allowance in the assessment of income - these benefits are paid

Too many single parent families have more spare money in their back pockets than those who are working. If the can afford to drink/smoke/take drugs/buy tattoos then they can pay full council tax!

3. Profile of respondents

Of the 87 individual respondents..

37 respondents are male, 46 female (4 not stated).

About half of respondents are under 50, half over 50 (6 not stated).

29 are receiving council tax benefit, 53 not (5 not stated)

26 are carers, 57 not (4 not stated).

10 are lone parents/guardians of a child under 16, 73 not (4 not stated).

41 respondents are employed (27 full-time, 14 part-time), 7 self-employed, 16 retired, 3 homemakers and 3 doing other things. 12 are permanently sick/disabled and 1 is unemployed
in the formal sense of being available for work and that person has been unemployed for over 12 months. (4 respondents did not state occupation)

30 are disabled, 53 not (4 not stated).

6 respondents did not state ethnicity. Of the remaining 81, 75 are ‘White British’.

These figures are broadly in line with the North Somerset adult population, though numbers of respondents are too small to be definitive or to look at patterns of response among sub-populations.

Respondents were asked to describe their financial situation in terms of the categories in Fig 3.

Fig 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-described financial situation of respondents (number of responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ No reply □ Not or barely getting by □ Struggling □ Just about comfortable □ Comfortable □ Well-off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, respondent-numbers are too low to allow any meaningful analysis of results by ‘financial situation’.

Appendix: The approaches as described to respondents

**Approach 1: The council does not fund the grant shortfall**, and will develop a scheme to match the central government funding. At present the indicative shortfall between current spend (based on 2010/11) and example grant is £2m. If the council decided to fund the indicative £2m shortfall then this would need to be matched with a sustainable £2m savings from other council services or a rise in council tax.

**Approach 2: The council will seek to align the rules of the new discount scheme with the previous Council Benefit Scheme.** There are a number of factors that are persuasive of this approach:

a. the pensioner element of the scheme is being prescribed by the Department for Communities and Local Government and is based on the Council Tax Benefit Scheme and there is merit in keeping the rules for entitlement for both elements (pensioner and working age) the same;

b. the Council Tax Benefit Scheme has been developed over many years and the entitlement rules have been adapted to provide protection for vulnerable groups.

Start Dates: Align start dates for the commencement of council tax support to pensioner age rules. Currently council tax benefit can start from variable dates dependent on circumstances. It is the intention to align the commencement start date to the date on which the claim is received rather than rolling to the next Monday.
Backdating claim: Currently Council Tax Benefit can be backdated if “good cause” is satisfied and backdated for working age customers no more than 6 months previous to the written request.

It is intended to align with pensionable age rules, and allow 3 month retrospective award if liable for Council Tax and eligible.

**Approach 3: The council maintains existing protection for vulnerable groups but makes no further provisions.** As detailed above the existing Council Tax Benefit scheme rules include protections including: income disregards for Child Benefit, Child Maintenance, Child Care Costs, Disability Living Allowance, War widows/War disablement pensions and higher personal allowances for dependants allowances, family premium, disability premium, enhanced disability premium, severe disability premium.

Vulnerable groups and how we can protect them under the new scheme: To consider continuing the treatment of other income disregarded for current council tax benefit purposes.

Child benefit
Child maintenance
Child care costs
Disability Living Allowance
War widows/war disablement pensions.