Q1 - What is Council Tax?

A - Council Tax is a local tax set by councils based on the value of your property at 1 April 1991. Your home is placed in one of eight valuation bands from A – H. Your council is responsible for collecting Council Tax and this money helps pay for local public services, including refuse collection, social care, environmental health and parks. Some of the money collected is passed to local police and fire authorities to pay for the services they provide.

Q2 - Who has to pay Council Tax?

A - Each home in North Somerset receives a Council Tax bill each year. People who own or rent a home usually have to pay Council Tax. Spouses and partners who live together are both responsible for paying the bill. Only adults pay Council Tax. If you're under 18, you won't have to pay.

If there is only one occupant in the home, they may be eligible for a single person discount of 25%.

Council Tax is also paid by the property owner where the property is unoccupied.

Q3 - What is Council Tax Support?

A - Council Tax Support helps people who on a low income to pay their Council Tax.

Q4 – Why are we consulting?

A - We are consulting with you to get your views for a change to Council Tax Support which would come into effect in April 2014.

Last April, the Government abolished Council Tax Benefit and gave responsibility for Council Tax Support to councils but cut the money given to councils to do this by at least 10% compared to their support for Council Tax Benefit.

Last year the council was required by the Government to implement a new scheme, known locally as Council Tax Support
The change meant that everyone, except low-income pensioners, had to pay at least 22% towards their Council Tax bills from 1\textsuperscript{st} April 2013.

The Government has indicated that, from April 2014, it will cut the money it provides to councils generally. In addition, the Government has also indicated that it will not provide the one-off grant next year.

This means that the Government is contributing less money to fund council services and local people and businesses in general are contributing more.

Therefore the Council must look again at how much it can help low income households with their Council Tax bills for 2014/15.

**Q5 – Who will be affected by the changes?**

A - Everyone of working age who currently receives Council Tax Support will be affected by the changes.

**Q6 – Who will not be affected by the changes?**

A - Low income pensioners will see no change to the amount of help they currently receive towards paying their council tax bill as prescribed by Central Government in the pensioner regulations.

**Q7 – What are the key changes in the proposed scheme?**

A – Due to restrictions in Government Funding the Council has to further reduce the cost of its council tax support scheme. It is proposed;

1) To increase the minimum contribution that all working age customers who claim or are in receipt of council tax support will rise from 22% to 24.5%

and

2) To take into account maintenance payments when calculating Council Tax Support.

And

3) To increase non-dependant deductions from an average of £4.85 to £6.22 a week.
Q8 - Will the single person discount change?

A – No. The 25% single person’s discount will not change and is not part of this consultation.

Q9 - Does this affect any other benefits that I currently receive?

A - No. These proposals for change only affect Council Tax Support.

Q10 - How can I have my say?

A - This consultation is now open until 10th January 2014. No decisions have been made about change to the Council Tax Support Scheme. Your views and ideas will help us to make these decisions.

To have your say during the consultation period you can:

- Complete the simple online questionnaire by visiting our website at: www.n-somerset.gov.uk/counciltaxsupport (there is free access to the internet at local libraries)

- Request a printed paper copy of the questionnaire and supporting information to be sent to an address of your choice by calling 01275 885116.

Q11 – What will happen next?

A - We have a duty to agree our Council Tax Support Scheme on or before 31 January 2014.

We will consider all of the feedback we receive when finalising our Council Tax Support Scheme. The council will make a final decision on the scheme for North Somerset in January 2014.