

**SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT FOR
CABINET
Thursday, 8 December 2016 at 7.30 pm
Council Chamber, Civic Centre**

The attached documents are due to be considered at the meeting listed above and were unavailable for circulation when the agenda for the meeting was published. The agenda item to which the documents relate is noted below.

AGENDA

16. Communications from Committees/Working Groups/Parties and Panels
 - b) Referral from Cabinet Overview Working Group - Local Council Tax Support Scheme Proposals 2017/18 (Pages 2 - 41)

REPORT TO: CABINET

DATE: 8 DECEMBER 2016

TITLE: REFERRAL FROM CABINET OVERVIEW
WORKING GROUP– LOCAL COUNCIL TAX
SUPPORT SCHEME PROPOSALS 2017/18

PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S): COUNCILLOR MIKE DANVERS, PORTFOLIO
HOLDER FOR RESOURCES

LEAD OFFICER(S): SIMON FREEMAN, HEAD OF FINANCE
(01279) 446228

BRIAN KEANE, HEAD OF GOVERNANCE
(01279) 446037

This is a Key Decision

It is on the Forward Plan as Decision number I006015

This decision is not subject to Call-in procedures for the following reasons:

The decision stands as a recommendation to Council

This decision will affect no ward specifically

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** Cabinet considers the report referred to it from the Cabinet Overview Working Group and recommends to Council that the amendments set out in recommendations B, C and D in respect of the 2017/18 Local Council Tax Support Scheme below are approved.
- B** The 2017/18 Local Council Tax Support Scheme is amended as follows:
- (i) Reduce the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Support to 4 weeks
 - (ii) Remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants
 - (iii) Remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them
- C** The proposal to remove the Family Premium in calculating an award of Local Council Tax Support is deferred for a further 12 months.

- D** The proposal to limit the number of dependent children within the calculation for Council Tax Support to a maximum of two is deferred for 12 months.

REASON FOR DECISION

- A** The Cabinet Overview Working Group considered a report on the review of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS) at its last meeting. The Overview Working Group has asked the Cabinet to agree several changes to the scheme for 2017/18.

BACKGROUND

1. At its meeting on 1 December 2016, the Cabinet Overview Working Group received a report on a review of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2016/17.
2. The Cabinet Overview Working Group noted the responses received from the public consultation on the LCTSS.
3. The Cabinet Overview Working Group has made a recommendation to the Cabinet that proposes some changes to the LCTSS in 2017/18 as detailed within the report.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications of the recommended decision are outlined in the 'Implications' section of the original report, which is attached as Appendix 1.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Original report to the Cabinet Overview Working Group, 'Annual Review of Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS)'

BACKGROUND PAPERS

All original reports to the Cabinet Overview Working Group can be viewed from <http://moderndb/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=250&MId=817&Ver=4>

REPORT TO: CABINET OVERVIEW WORKING GROUP

DATE: 1 DECEMBER 2016

TITLE: ANNUAL REVIEW OF LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME (LCTSS)

LEAD OFFICER: SIMON FREEMAN, HEAD OF FINANCE
(01279) 446228

CONTRIBUTING OFFICER: DONNA P BEECHENER, REVENUES & BENEFITS MANAGER (01279) 446245

RECOMMENDED that Overview Working Group:

- A** Acknowledges the current position regarding the 2016/17 Local Council Tax Support Scheme and endorses continuing stability within the scheme for 2017/18.
- B** Recommends to Cabinet that, following the results of the consultation process, the scheme is amended with effect from 1 April 2017 as follows:
 - (i) Reduce the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Support to four weeks
 - (ii) Remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants
 - (iii) Remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them
- C** Recommends to Cabinet that the proposal to remove the Family Premium in calculating an award of Local Council Tax Support is deferred for a further 12 months.
- D** Recommends to Cabinet that the proposal to limit the number of dependent children within the calculation for Council Tax Support to a maximum of two is deferred for 12 months.

BACKGROUND

1. In accordance with the Welfare Reform Act 2012, and the Local Government Finance Act 2012, councils are required to implement a Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS) annually, and by 31 January each year at the latest for the forthcoming financial year.
2. The Pan Essex working group, originally established to consider a County wide approach to the localisation of council tax support, has continued to work

effectively and has been looking at other aspects of collection. Having focussed on the development of the local schemes, more recently the work has been looking at those exemptions and discounts awarded to council tax payers. As a result the group has now implemented a range of measures targeted at ensuring that each authority across Essex undertakes work on a consistent basis to help protect the tax base in each district. Work will continue to be undertaken in 2017/18 to ensure compliance and to check and challenge council tax reductions awarded for which entitlement may have subsequently changed or be no longer appropriate.

Local Council Tax Support (LCTS)

3. The national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme, which was wholly funded by Central Government and administered locally by billing authorities, was abolished with effect from 1 April 2013. Each local authority was charged with designing and implementing its own local scheme for the 2013/14 financial year against a backdrop of a 10% reduction in national funding when compared with CTB. The scheme must be reviewed annually and the Council approved its local scheme for the 2016/17 financial year at its meeting held on 17 December 2015.
4. Prior to the introduction of LCTS there had been no cap on CTB expenditure under the national scheme. However, with the introduction of LCTS Government funding was restricted through the introduction of a cash limit in the form of a fixed grant. In addition the grant was set at a level which was 10% less than the previous council tax benefit expenditure estimated from 2012/13. For Harlow this represents a reduction in funding of around £1.3 million per annum from April 2013.
5. The grant for LCTS was originally identified specifically within the Council's overall Revenue Support Grant and retained Business Rates income for 2013/14. The level of funding for 2014/15 and future years has not been identified in the same way and has been included in the Council's overall Revenue Support Grant and Retained Business Rates – overall Formula Funding. As a result of this there is no protection for the LCTS funding and it is subject to the wider Government cuts to local government funding. Since the introduction of the scheme the Councils overall funding has reduced by over 38% but there has been no reduction in the Councils support of its LCTS scheme.
6. In order to ensure that Pensionable Age customers should be no worse off under the local scheme, national rules remain in place for this group of claimants. As protection remains in place for those of Pensionable Age, the impact of the reduction in funding has fallen upon Working Age claimants as reported during the implementation of the 2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 schemes.
7. Harlow Council is part of a Pan Essex Project Group, with a remit to design an Essex Framework for LCTS. The principles of the framework were reported to Cabinet on 12 July 2012. On 22 November 2012 Harlow Council adopted a

LCTS scheme following public consultation during the summer of 2012 based on these principles, which are detailed below:

- The scheme will be cost neutral.
- Council tax support will continue to be assessed on a means tested basis.
- Council tax support will not be paid above Council tax band H.
- Council tax support is capped at 76% of council tax liability.
- The first £25 of weekly earnings are disregarded in the calculation of support.
- There is no entitlement to support where the applicant has capital of over £6,000
- Second adult rebate and underlying entitlement were abolished to remove the administrative burden of these.

For comparison purposes, the LCTS schemes for the other Essex District Councils are attached at Appendix A.

8. Harlow has ensured that in the development of the local scheme the eligibility criteria for LCTS remains aligned with the previous national council tax benefit scheme, with specific protection for families and persons with disabilities. In addition and despite the reductions in overall Government grant received by the Council the scheme has been supported and maintained without variation to the above principles for its third full year of operation.
9. The 2013/14 scheme was designed to deliver savings of £1,361,235 to ensure that expenditure on LCTS did not exceed the total Government funding allocated for the scheme. At the time of writing this report the LCTS scheme costs for the current and previous financial years are as follows:

LCTS Award	1 April 2013	31 March 2014	31 March 2015	31 March 2016	30 September 2016
Pensionable Age					
Live Caseload	3,819	3,673	3,547	3,291	3,177
LCTS Award	£3,535,031	£3,483,230	£3,240,964	£2,941,981	£2,939,661
Working Age					
Live Caseload	5,302	5,189	4,890	4,469	4,244
LCTS Award	£3,810,068	£3,741,202	£3,363,313	£3,184,219	£3,105,988
Total LCTS Award	£7,345,099	£7,117,494	£6,604,277	£6,126,200	£6,045,649

- 10 It was estimated that the in-year council tax collection rate for 2013/14 in Harlow would be affected by the introduction of LCTS and could fall by over 3% compared to the collection rate in 2012/13. Council tax collection at the end of the second quarter in 2015/16 is reported at 56.71%, compared to a collection rate of 56.83% for the same period in the 2012/13 financial year.

	30 September 2012	30 September 2013	30 September 2014	30 September 2015	30 September 2016
Council Tax Collection Rate	56.83%	56.60%	56.28%	56.71%	56.75%

At the time of writing this report –

- Council tax collection rate is currently exceeding original forecasts. The introduction of a 12 month instalment scheme by the Government in 2014 will also be impacting on the collection statistics when compared with prior years with income having been collected predominantly over 10 months.
 - The additional funding provided within the agreement with the precepting bodies has enabled employment of extra staff dedicated to working with LCTS claimants. This has meant that the normal collection processes on the remaining non LCTS clients has not been compromised.
 - There is continuing good engagement with LCTS claimants meaning that it has been possible to agree payment arrangements with residents at an early stage, and reducing avoiding the need for further recovery action.
- 11 Recovery action for council tax in LCTS cases has been taken in accordance with legislation with the addition of the specialist advice from the LCTS officers. Of all working age LCTS claimants, including those with closed LCTS claims, 1,169 (23.36%) have received a final notice where a payment has not been received and 768 (15.34%) claimants have been summonsed. Where a summons has been issued, the Council continues to work to engage with those affected to provide support and advice to reach a payment solution wherever possible, subject to the claimant's willingness to disclose relevant information and work with Council officers. The table below provides a comparison with previous years.

	30 October 2013	30 October 2014	30 October 2015	30 September 2016
Percentage of all working age LCTS claimants receiving a Final Notice	26.7%	29.8%	25.6%	23.36%
Percentage of all working age LCTS claimants receiving a Summons	16.6%	18.4%	23.1%	15.34%

- 12 Whilst the collection position is currently higher than expected and the level of support being awarded has fallen, recovery of amounts falling due can take several years to collect and it is currently still early in the operation of the new scheme to be able to forecast what the overall collection position will be as the scheme matures and settles over the next two or three years.

LCTS 2017/18 Proposals

- 13 Officers are keeping the performance of the LCTS scheme under review but as the Council plans for 2017/18 the scheme is still only in its fourth year of operation. Given the complexities of the scheme, the large claimant base and other national factors outside of the Council's control this is still seen as a relatively short period on which to base judgements and future estimates. There are ongoing significant Government led welfare reforms being either proposed or implemented, the impacts of which are difficult to analyse and quantify at this time.
- 14 Monitoring of the local scheme indicates that it is operating well and that collection of the amounts billed to claimants is being maintained. Engagement with residents impacted by the changes has also been extremely good. In order to maintain certainty for both claimants and the Council, the proposals for the scheme in 2017/18 are to maintain the restriction on the entitlement to support at 24% for a fifth year and that the reductions to the Councils core Formula Funding will not be passed on to claimants despite further reductions being forecast for 2017/18 as part of the Government's measures to reduce expenditure.

Public Consultation

- 15 A public consultation on the LCTS scheme for 2017/18 was conducted during September 2016. Consultation ended on 5 October 2015 and the results are shown at Appendix B. The consultation made five proposals for change to the scheme all of which are intended to simplify its operation and administration. The options and the consultation response to them are set out in the following paragraphs of the report.

16 **Option 1 – Removing the Family Premium for all new working age applicants**

The removal of family premium from 1st April 2017 for new claims will bring the Council Tax Support scheme in line with Housing Benefit. When assessing the 'needs' (Applicable Amounts) of any claimant, a Family Premium is normally included where a claimant has at least one dependant child living with them. Removing the family premium will mean that when assessing a claimant's needs, the family premium (currently £17.45 per week), will not be included in the applicable amount. This change would **not** affect those on Universal Credit, Income Support, Income Related Employment and Support Allowance or Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance.

The benefit of this is:

- It brings the working age Council Tax Support Scheme in line with Housing Benefit changes proposed by Central Government. The change has already been introduced for pension age claimants by Central Government;

The drawbacks of doing this are:

- New working age claimants may see a reduction in the amount of support they received.
- Some households with dependant children may pay more

44% of respondents to the consultation question agreed with this proposal.

This proposal was previously consulted on in regards to the scheme for 2016/17 but was deferred for 12 months, and It is recommended that this proposal be deferred for a further 12 months. The number of households affected by this change is fairly low, and a number of exceptions apply. The removal of the family premium for claimants of Housing Benefit has been introduced by Government and whilst the change is aimed at new claimants, existing claimants of Housing Benefit can see a reduction in entitlement as a result of a short break in their claim. This leads to increased enquiries and complaints which increases administration costs.

17 **Option 2 Reducing the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Support to 4 weeks**

Within the current LCTS scheme, applicants can be temporarily absent from their homes for 13 weeks (or 52 weeks in certain cases) without it affecting their Council Tax Support. This replicated the Housing Benefit rules. The Housing Benefit rules have now been changed so that if a person is absent from Great Britain for a period of more than 4 weeks, their Housing Benefit will cease. It is proposed that the Council's Local Council Tax Council scheme is amended to reflect the changes in Housing Benefit. There will be exceptions for certain occupations such as mariners and the armed forces, or where a person has to go abroad due to the death of a close relative.

The benefits of this are:

- The treatment of temporary absence will be brought into line with Housing Benefit
- It is seen as fair
- There are exceptions for certain occupations including the armed forces and mariners. Exceptions will also apply if a person leaves Great Britain due to the death of a close relative.

The drawback of this is:

- If a person is absent from Great Britain for a period which is likely to exceed 4 weeks, their Council Tax Support will cease from when they leave the Country. They will need to re-apply on return.

50% of respondents agreed with the proposal.

Housing Benefit legislation is in place.

18 Option 3 - To remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants.

From April 2017, all new applicants of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) who fall within the Work Related Activity Group will no longer receive the work related activity component in either their ESA or within the calculation of Housing Benefit. It is proposed that the Council's Council Tax Support scheme is amended to reflect the changes.

The benefits of the Council doing this are:

- The treatment of ESA will be brought into line with Housing Benefit
- It avoids additional costs to the Council Tax Reduction scheme.
- Persons receiving ESA will not experience any reduction in Council Tax Reduction.

There are no drawbacks to this change

47% of respondents agreed with the proposal

There are no circumstances envisaged where the level of council tax support received would reduce as a result of this change.

19 Option 4 - To limit the number of dependant children within the calculation for Council Tax Support to a maximum of two

Within the current scheme, claimants who have children are awarded a dependant's addition of £66.90 per child within the calculation of their needs (Applicable Amounts). There is no limit to the number of dependant's additions that can be awarded. From April 2017 Central Government intend limiting dependant's additions in Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and Tax Credits to a maximum of two. This will only affect households who have a

third or subsequent child on or after 1st April 2017. It is proposed that the Council's Local Council Tax Support scheme is amended to reflect the changes in Housing Benefit and Central Government Benefits. There will be exceptions where there are multiple births after 1st April 2017 (and the household is not already at their maximum of two dependants within the calculation); adopted children or where households merge.

The benefits of the Council doing this are:

- Council Tax Reduction will be brought into line with Housing Benefit, Universal Credit and Tax Credits
- It is simple and administratively easy

The drawbacks of doing this are:

- Claimants who have a third or subsequent child after 1st April 2017 (and are not excepted from the rules) may receive less Council Tax support than claimants who have more children born before 1st April 2017.

47% of respondents agreed with this change

At the time of writing this report the proposed change to Housing Benefit has not yet been laid in Parliament, and therefore may not be implemented as planned in April 2017. It has not been possible to assess the potential impact of this change and therefore it is recommended that this proposal be deferred for 12 months.

20 Option 5 – To remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them

Currently when another person is paid Carers Allowance to look after a person in receipt of Council Tax Support, a Severe Disability Premium is not included in assessing their needs (Applicable Amount). This approach avoids paying for the same care twice. This proposed change will align the scheme with Housing Benefit by treating persons who receive the Universal Credit (Carers Element) in the same way as others receiving Carers Allowance.

The benefit of this is:

- Council Tax Reduction will be brought into line with Housing Benefit;
- It is simple and administratively easy

The drawbacks of doing this are:

- There are no drawbacks to this change as persons receiving Universal Credit (Carers Element) will be treated in the same way as those receiving Carers Allowance who look after any person who claims Council Tax Reduction.

80% of respondents agreed with this proposal.

- 21 A full equalities impact assessment was carried out on the current 2015/16 scheme. This has been reviewed to take account of the proposed changes to the scheme for 2016/17 and is attached to this report at Appendix C.

CONCLUSIONS

- 22 The LCTS scheme operated by the Council has performed well in its first four years of operation with claimants being helped significantly through the support officers appointed at the outset of the scheme through the funding agreement with the key precepting bodies.
- 23 Following consultation on the 2017/18 scheme it is again proposed to retain the scheme largely unchanged with the exception of the options set out in the report to reduce the temporary absence period, remove the work related activity component and remove the severe disability premium where someone receives the care element in Universal Credit. The changes will improve the administrative arrangements for the scheme and will also help to align the scheme with Housing Benefit administration.

IMPLICATIONS

Place (includes Sustainability)

No implications specifically arise from the Council Tax Benefit reforms. Welfare Reform more widely will have a range of different impacts on delivery of service objectives.

Author: **Graeme Bloomer, Head of Place**

Finance (Includes ICT)

Financial impacts of the LCTSS scheme are being considered as part of the wider budget process and development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. If the Council agrees the final scheme in line with the agreed principles then it is expected to be broadly cost neutral although there will be uncertainties regarding recovery rates and the impact upon the Collection Fund until the scheme is actually in operation.

Author: **Simon Freeman, Head of Finance**

Housing

None Specific

Author: **Andrew Murray, Head of Housing**

Community Wellbeing (includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)

Contained within the report at this stage. The implications of the final scheme will be assessed for impact on vulnerable groups, as outlined in the report

Author: **Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing**

Governance (includes HR)

The Council must have the LCTSS in place by 31 January 2017 and having carried out a consultation exercise it will minimise the risk of challenges to the Council.

Author: **Brian Keane, Head of Governance**

Background Papers

Harlow

<http://www.harlow.gov.uk/council-tax-support-scheme-2016-17pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/annual-fraud-indicator--2>

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

CTB – Council Tax Benefit

LCTS – Local Council Tax Support

**APPENDIX A
Proposed
Essex
Schemes
2017/18**

	Basildon	Braintree	Brentwood	Castle Point	Chelmsford	Colchester	Epping Forest	Harlow	Maldon	Rochford	Southeast-on-Sea	Tendring	Thurrock	Uttlesford
Minimum council tax payment?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
% Minimum council tax payment level 2017/18	25	24	20	30	23	20	25	24	20	28	25	20	25	12.5
Savings limit	16000	16000	16000	6000	6000	6000	6000	6000	6000	6000	6000	16000	6000	16000
Other benefits counted as income?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Second adult rebate reduced or abolished?	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Changes made to non-dependent deductions?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Support restricted to a particular council tax band?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Council Tax band support is restricted to	D	D	D	D	D	-	D	H	D	D	D	-	-	-

Introduce minimum council tax support payment?	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Minimum weekly council tax support payment	£2.50	-	-	-	-	-	£0.50	-	-	-	-	-	-	£2.00
Taper rate	20%	24%	15%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%
Changes made to conditions around starting work?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Hardship fund	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Mirror all changes in Housing Benefit	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K	N/K	no	consulting	consulting	yes	yes	Yes	No	yes	yes
Remove Family Premium		yes				yes	consulting	consulting	yes	yes	Yes		Yes	yes
Changes to Minimum Income Floor		yes				no	yes	yes	yes	yes	No	yes	Yes	yes
Dependents reduced to two						no	consulting	consulting	yes	consulting	yes		Yes	yes
Changes made to backdating rules to one month	No	yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	yes	consulting	Yes	Yes	consulting	yes	No	Yes	yes
Change Temporary Absence rules						yes	consulting	consulting	yes	yes	yes		Yes	yes

APPENDIX B

LCTS Consultation Results

Consultation Closed 05 October 2015

1. I have reviewed the background information about the Council Tax Support Scheme.

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		21	91%
No		2	9%
		Total Respondents	23
		(skipped this question)	126

2. Should the Council keep the current Council Tax Scheme? (Should it continue to administer the scheme and have the same level of support as it does at the moment?)

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		8	44%
No		6	33%
Don't know		4	22%
		Total Respondents	18
		(skipped this question)	131

3. Please use the space below to make any comments you have on protecting the Council Tax Support Scheme from these changes.

Minimum protection should be provided for this discretionary spend	
Total Respondents	1
Skipped this question	148

Option 1 – Removing the Family Premium for all new working age applicants

The removal of family premium from 1st April 2017 for new claims will bring the Council Tax Support scheme in line with Housing Benefit. When assessing the 'needs' (Applicable Amounts) of any claimant, a Family Premium is normally included where a claimant has at least one dependant child living with them. Removing the family premium will mean that when assessing a claimant's needs, the family premium (currently £17.45 per week), will not be included in the applicable amount. This change would **not** affect those on Universal Credit, Income Support, Income Related Employment and Support Allowance or Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance.

The benefit of this is:

- It brings the working age Council Tax Support Scheme in line with Housing Benefit changes proposed by Central Government. The change has already been introduced for pension age claimants by Central Government;

The drawbacks of doing this are:

- New working age claimants may see a reduction in the amount of support they received.
- Some households with dependant children may pay more.

4. Do you agree with option 1?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		7	44%
No		5	31%
Don't know		4	25%
		Total Respondents	16
		(skipped this question)	133

5. If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

Total Respondents	0
Skipped this question	149

Option 2 - Reducing the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Support to 4 weeks

Within the current scheme, applicants can be temporarily absent from their homes for 13 weeks (or 52 weeks in certain cases) without it affecting their Council Tax Support. This replicated the Housing Benefit rules. The Housing Benefit rules have now been changed so that if a person is absent from Great Britain for a period of more than 4 weeks, their Housing Benefit will cease. It is proposed that the Council's Local Council Tax Council scheme is amended to reflect the changes in Housing Benefit. There will be exceptions for certain occupations such as mariners and the armed forces, or where a person has to go abroad due to the death of a close relative.

The benefits of this are:

- The treatment of temporary absence will be brought into line with Housing Benefit
- It is seen as fair
- There are exceptions for certain occupations including the armed forces and mariners. Exceptions will also apply if a person leaves Great Britain due to the death of a close relative.

The drawback of this is:

- If a person is absent from Great Britain for a period which is likely to exceed 4 weeks, their Council Tax Support will cease from when they leave the Country. They will need to re-apply on return

6. Do you agree with the change to the temporary absence rule?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		8	50%
No		5	31%
Don't know		3	19%
		Total Respondents	16
		(skipped this question)	133

7. If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

If people can afford to leave the country they can afford to pay their council tax, no absence should be allowed.	
It's a waste of time and resources for a small number of claims it affects and nobody is going to tell you've they've gone abroad after the first time they've been hit by this measure.	
Stop targeting foreign people living in UK. It is so obvious they are more likely to visit families and friends in their mother country. It is a disgraceful proposal. Shame on you Harlow Council. One Polish man killed in the Stow already, another 2 guys attacked last nigh.	
Total Respondents	3
Skipped this question	146

Option 3 - To remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants.

From April 2017, all new applicants of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) who fall within the Work Related Activity Group will no longer receive the work related activity component in either their ESA or within the calculation of Housing Benefit. It is proposed that the Council's Council Tax Support scheme is amended to reflect the changes.

The benefits of the Council doing this are:

- The treatment of ESA will be brought into line with Housing Benefit
- It avoids additional costs to the Council Tax Reduction scheme.
- Persons receiving ESA will not experience any reduction in Council Tax Reduction.

There are no drawbacks to this change

8. Do you agree with this change to the scheme?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		7	47%
No		4	27%
Don't know		4	27%
		Total Respondents	15
		(skipped this question)	134

9. If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

Total Respondents	
Skipped this question	149

Option 4 - To limit the number of dependant children within the calculation for Council Tax Support to a maximum of two

Within the current scheme, claimants who have children are awarded a dependant's addition of £66.90 per child within the calculation of their needs (Applicable Amounts). There is no limit to the number of dependant's additions that can be awarded. From April 2017 Central Government will be limiting dependant's additions in Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and Tax Credits to a maximum of two. This will only affect households who have a third or subsequent child on or after 1st April 2017. It is proposed that the Council's Local Council Tax Support

scheme is amended to reflect the changes in Housing Benefit and Central Government Benefits. There will be exceptions where there are multiple births after 1st April 2017 (and the household is not already at their maximum of two dependants within the calculation); adopted children or where households merge.

The benefits of the Council doing this are:

- Council Tax Reduction will be brought into line with Housing Benefit, Universal Credit and Tax Credits
- It is simple and administratively easy

The drawbacks of doing this are:

- Claimants who have a third or subsequent child after 1st April 2017 (and are not excepted from the rules) may receive less Council Tax support than claimants who have more children born before 1st April 2017

10. Do you agree with this change to the scheme?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		7	47%
No		5	33%
Don't know		3	20%
		Total Respondents	15
		(skipped this question)	134

11. If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

The tax payer should not subsidise any children. People choose to have children and should pay for them.	
Leaving it as it is. How much will this measure save and who decided that two children was an acceptable maximum?	

Total Respondents	2
Skipped this question	147

Option 5 – To remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them

Currently when another person is paid Carers Allowance to look after a person in receipt of Council Tax Support, a Severe Disability Premium is not included in assessing their needs (Applicable Amount). This approach avoids paying for the same care twice. This proposed change will align the scheme with Housing Benefit by treating persons who receive the Universal Credit (Carers Element) in the same way as others receiving Carers Allowance

The benefit of this is:

- Council Tax Reduction will be brought into line with Housing Benefit;
- It is simple and administratively easy

The drawbacks of doing this are:

- There are no drawbacks to this change as persons receiving Universal Credit (Carers Element) will be treated in the same was as those receiving Carers Allowance who look after any person who claims Council Tax Reduction

12. Do you agree with this change to the scheme?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		12	80%
No		0	0%
Don't know		3	20%
Total Respondents			15
(skipped this question)			134

13. If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

Total Respondents	2
Skipped this question	147

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

If the Council keeps the current Council Tax Support scheme, it will be administratively more complex (as it will not align with Housing Benefit which is also administered by the Council) and it will cost taxpayers more. The Council may need to find savings from other services to help meet any increase in costs. The proposals set out in this consultation could deliver savings. The alternatives are set out in the background information

14. Do you think the Council should choose any of the following options rather than the proposed changes to the Local Council Tax Support scheme? Please select one answer for each source of funding

	Yes	No	Don't know	Response total
Increase the level of council tax	15.38% (2)	61.54% (8)	23.08% (3)	13
Find savings from cutting other Council Services	38.46% (5)	38.46% (5)	23.08% (3)	13
Total respondents				13
(skipped this question)				136

15. If the Council were to choose these other options to make savings, what would be your order of preference? Please rank in order of preference by selecting a number from 1-2 next to the statements below, where 1 is the option that you would most prefer and 2 is the least

	1	2	Response total
Increase the level of council tax	30.77% (4)	69.23% (9)	13
Reduce funding available	76.92% (10)	23.08% (3)	13

for other Council Services			
		Total Respondents	13
		(skipped this question)	136

16. Please use the space below to make any other comments on the scheme:

Axe play house funding for a start to save money	
The council funds a page number of discretionary services and already fails to fulfil statutory duties (e.g. separate collection of recyclables). These should all be cut before raising council tax.	
You are targeting foreign people. Brexit gave u green light, but we don't go anywhere! We will fight for respect and fair treatment. Shame on you Harlow Council	
Total Respondents	3
Skipped this question	146

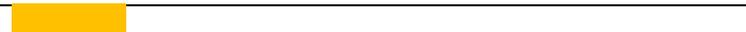
17. Please use the space below to make any other comments on the scheme:

The council makes very limited use of shared services, preferring expensive solo working. The council also spends time and money overriding policy decisions of other elected bodies (e.g. ECC). These should be considered.	
Stop helping fat people who are disabled because they are fat, drug and alcohol addicts as it is their choice.	
Total Respondents	2
Skipped this question	147

18. If you have any further comments or questions to make regarding the Council Tax Support Scheme that you haven't had opportunity to raise elsewhere, please use this space below.

Council tax support should not be provided	
Total Respondents	1
Skipped this question	148

19. Are you, or someone in your household, getting a Council Tax Reduction at this time?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		1	9%
No		10	91%
Don't know		0	0%
Total Respondents		11	
(skipped this question)		138	

20. Are you...?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Male		4	40%
Female		6	60%
Prefer not to say		0	0%
Total Respondents		10	
(skipped this question)		139	

21. Age

		Response Total	Response Percent
18-24		0	0%

25-34		3	27%
35-44		4	36%
45-54		1	9%
55-64		1	9%
65-74		1	9%
75-84		0	0%
85+		0	0%
Prefer not to say		1	9%
		Total Respondents	11
		(skipped this question)	138

22. Do you consider yourself to have a physical impairment?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		0	0%
No		10	91%
Not sure		0	0%
Prefer not to say		1	9%
		Total Respondents	11
		(skipped this question)	138

23. Do you consider yourself to have a sensory impairment?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		0	0%
No		10	91%
Not sure		0	0%
Prefer not to say		1	9%
		Total Respondents	11
		(skipped this question)	138

24. Do you consider yourself to have a learning difficulty or disability?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		0	0%
No		10	91%
Not sure		0	0%
Prefer not to say		1	9%
Total Respondents		11	
(skipped this question)		138	

25. Do you consider yourself to have any mental health needs?

		Response Total	Response Percent
Yes		0	0%
No		9	82%
Not sure		1	9%
Prefer not to say		1	9%
Total Respondents		11	
(skipped this question)		138	

26. What is your ethnic group?

		Response Total	Response Percent
White British		7	70%
White Irish		0	0%
White Other		1	10%
Gypsy/Roma		0	0%
Traveller of Irish Heritage		0	0%
Black or Black British African		0	0%

Black or Black British Caribbean		0	0%
Mixed White/Black African		0	0%
Mixed White/Black Caribbean		0	0%
Black Other		0	0%
Asian or Asian British Pakistani		0	0%
Asian or Asian British Indian		0	0%
Asian or Asian British Other		0	0%
Mixed White/Asian		0	0%
Asian Other		0	0%
Chinese		0	0%
Mixed Other		0	0%
Not Known		0	0%
Prefer not to say	■	1	10%
Other, please specify	■	1	10%
Total Respondents			10
(skipped this question)			139

APPENDIX C**Harlow District Council****Equality Impact Assessment – Local council tax support scheme**

Name of service, function or policy being assessed	<p>Localised Council Tax Support Policy 2017-18</p> <p>This Equality Impact Assessment has been developed considering the following national Equality Impact Assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Government Finance Bill: Localising support for council tax • Local Government Finance Bill: Technical reforms to council tax • Local Government Finance Bill: Summary impact assessment
Service/Department	Finance / Revenues and Benefits
Names and roles of officers completing the assessment (indicate Lead officer)	Donna Beechener, Revenues and Benefits Manager (Lead Officer)
Contact telephone number of Lead officer	01279 446245
Date assessment completed	11 October 2016

1. Aims of the policy/service/function and how implemented

	Key Questions	Notes
1.1	Is this a new policy/service/function or a review of an existing one?	This is a review of an existing policy and function
1.2	Briefly state the main purpose of the policy/service/function?	To help people with low incomes to afford their Council Tax liability, in line with the Local Government Finance Act 2012.
1.3	Briefly state the main activities of the policy/service/function?	Payment of Council Tax Discounting of Council Tax
1.4	Who are the main beneficiaries? Whose need's is it designed to meet?	Those liable for Council Tax within Harlow. Adults on a low income with low savings Any authority that can levy a Council Tax
1.5	Which staff carry out the policy/service/function?	Revenues And Benefits staff

2. Information Gathering and Data Collection

	Key Questions	Notes	If further data collection is needed – state by whom, when and how is it going to be done?
2.1	<p>What quantitative (numerical) data do you already have (e.g. national and local demographic data, equality monitoring data, employee data, customer profile data etc) about those who use or will use the policy or service? What gaps are there in the data? What else do you need?</p> <p>NB. Attach copies of the relevant data that you are using for this assessment</p>	<p>The scheme was originally modelled based on existing costs, taking account of a potential council tax increase, demand for the scheme and the reduction in Revenue Support Grant. The scheme was originally modelled to be cost neutral, but current estimates are that the scheme costs more than the current level of grant received. .</p>	<p>It is not possible to identify the actual grant received to support the scheme as this has been subsumed into overall formula funding.</p>
2.2	<p>What qualitative data do you already have (e.g. results of customer satisfaction surveys, results of previous consultations, staff surveys, analysis of customer complaints/comments, feedback from community groups or individuals etc) about those who use or will use the policy or service? What gaps are there in the data? What else do you need?</p>	<p>The proposed scheme for 2017/18 working age claimants varies little from the current scheme apart from proposals to;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Align with national Housing Benefit Change regarding temporary absence from GB. 2) Align with Housing Benefit changes in regards to the removal of the work related activity component for ESA applicants 3) Align with Housing Benefit changes to remove the severe disability premium where another 	

		<p>person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element)</p> <p>The majority of respondents to the consultation agreed that with the concept that all people of working age should have to pay some council tax, currently set at a minimum of 76%, and with the proposals for change</p>	
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3. Consultation

Please state below what formal or informal consultation has taken place or that you are planning to hold with appropriate stakeholders in relation to this policy/function			
	Key Questions	Notes	If further consultations are needed/ planned – state with whom, by whom, when and how is this going to be done?
3.1	What consultations have been held and with whom did you consult? What were the main issues raised?	A public consultation was conducted for a period of six weeks, commencing on 25 August 2016 and closing on 5 October 2016. The consultation was conducted by way of an online questionnaire. The consultation was publicly announced.	The scheme will be reviewed annually, and if changes are proposed, then further public consultation will be conducted.
3.2	What consultations were held specifically with the equality target groups? What were the main issues raised?	In introducing a local council tax support scheme in 2013, representatives of equality target groups were identified and contacted electronically alerting them to the consultation and asking them to participate. Locally and nationally concerns were raised about the new liabilities created for those unable to work due to disability. We have addressed these by confirming that the current system of applicable amounts which protect these groups will remain in place.	As 3.1

	Key Questions	Notes	If further consultations are needed/ planned – state with whom, by whom, when and how is this going to be done?
3.3	<p>Is the Council working in Partnership with other organisations to implement this policy/function?</p> <p>Should this be taken into consideration? (E.g. Agreeing the equalities monitoring categories)</p> <p>Should the partnership arrangements have an EIA?</p>	<p>All major precepting authorities in Essex, which work together to devise the support scheme. HDC – Corporate Housing; Resource Management Department for Work and Pensions Department for Communities and Local Government .</p> <p>Each LA participating in the Essex project will conduct their own EQIA. DWP & DCLG have undertaken EQIA's which are publicly available.</p>	As 3.1

Note

- It is a legal requirement that consultation takes place with appropriate stakeholders as part of the EIA process.
- You must ensure that you record all the main areas of concern raised by equality and customer groups during consultations and how you aim to address these concerns.

4. Assessment of Impact

Based on the data you have analysed and provided, and the results of the consultation or research you have undertaken, list below how the policy or function will or does work for each of the following equalities groups.

Identify any differential impact and consider whether the policy/function meets any particular needs identified for each of the six equalities groups.

NB:If you do identify any adverse impact you must:

- a) **Seek appropriate advice as to whether it is highlighting unlawful discrimination or is potentially discriminatory, and**
- b) **Identify steps to mitigate any adverse impact**

Include any examples of how the policy or function helps to promote race, disability, age and/or gender equality.

		State evidence of impact or potential impact/How helps to promote equality
4.1	<p>Gender – identify the impact/potential impact of the policy/function on women, men and transgender people And/or</p> <p>Proposed measures to mitigate any adverse impacts</p>	None identified
		State evidence of impact or potential impact/How helps to promote equality

4.2	<p>Disability – identify the impact/potential impact of the policy on disabled people (ensure consideration of a range of impairments including visual and hearing impairments, mobility impairments, learning disability etc) And/or</p> <p>Proposed measures to mitigate any adverse impacts</p>	<p>All Disability Living Allowance Benefits will continue to be disregarded thereby protecting those with specific long term conditions who fall within this group. People with disabilities will continue to receive additional premiums as part of the calculation.</p> <p>The above helps to “advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.”</p>
4.3	<p>Age – identify the impact/potential impact of the policy/function on different age groups And/or</p> <p>Proposed measures to mitigate any adverse impacts</p>	<p>Older people (Pensionable Age); This group is specifically protected under Government Regulations.</p> <p>Younger people (17-25); 17 year olds may be disadvantaged indirectly if their parents have to pay more as a result of this policy. People over 18 of working age will be required to pay more.</p> <p>The Council has agreed an exceptional hardship fund to assist those in extreme hardship.</p> <p>Children (0-16); Removing the Family Premium for new claims, may affect those under 16.</p>
4.4	<p>Race – identify the impact/potential impact of the policy/function on different black and minority ethnic groups, including Gypsy and Traveller communities And/or</p> <p>Proposed measures to mitigate any adverse impacts</p>	<p>None identified</p>
		<p>State evidence of impact or potential impact/How helps to promote equality</p>

4.5	<p>Sexual orientation – identify the impact/potential impact of the policy on lesbians, gay men, bisexual and heterosexual people</p> <p>And/or</p> <p>Proposed measures to mitigate any adverse impacts</p>	None identified
4.6	<p>Religion/belief – identify the impact/potential impact of the policy on people of different religious/faith groups and also upon those with no faith</p> <p>And/or</p> <p>Proposed measures to mitigate any adverse impacts</p>	None identified
4.7	<p>Socio-economic disadvantage – identify any impact on those who have a low income, or whose family circumstances/history may affect their ability to access services eg. carers and the cared for; pensioners; single-parents; long-term unemployed; history of abuse/domestic violence; benefits claimants; housebound; chronically ill;</p>	<p>The impact of the proposed scheme will be felt most by those of working age who are not disabled, some of the affects will be mitigated by more generous incentives to work.</p> <p>The Council has agreed an exceptional hardship fund to assist those in extreme need.</p>

4.8	<p>Any other groups, if appropriate e.g. children leaving care; pregnant or breast-feeding mothers; carers etc</p>	<p>Parents will continue to receive a child allowance. Working parents receive a higher disregard of their earnings reflecting their childcare costs.</p> <p>The Council has agreed an exceptional hardship fund to assist those in extreme hardship.</p> <p>The above helps to “advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.”</p>
		<p>Notes</p>
4.9	<p>Are there any additional measures that could be adopted to further equality of opportunity in the context of this policy/service/function and to meet the particular needs of equalities groups that you have identified?</p>	<p>None identified.</p>

NB

Please provide a summary overview by completing the Section overleaf, ticking the relevant boxes to confirm the outcome and findings of this assessment process

It is also essential that you complete an action plan based on your assessment (see form EIA.2) and attach this to your Equality Impact Assessment form (EIA.1) form. This is a vital component of the equalities impact assessment process.

Include all of the measures that you will take to improve the policy/function for the different equalities characteristics, e.g. staff training, positive action, revisions to policy, monitoring of your action plan, etc.

Once you have completed the forms EIA.1 and EIA.2 please sign and date and:

- a) Send a copy to your Head of Service for endorsement
- b) Keep a copy as a record of the processes you have been through in carrying out the EIA
- c) Send a PDF copy of the signed and endorsed EIA form plus enclosed action plans to the Corporate Equalities Group via the HDC Community Liaison Officer equalities@harlow.gov.uk

5. Summary Overview of EIA

As a summary overview of information and findings provided in the earlier sections of this Equality Impact Assessment, please tick the relevant boxes as appropriate to denote the OUTCOME of this process for each of the Equality Characteristics.

Equalities category	No adverse impact AND promotes equality and diversity <i>Please tick ✓ if appropriate</i>	No adverse impact BUT equality and diversity NOT promoted <i>Please tick ✓ if appropriate</i>	Evidence of adverse impact <i>Please tick ✓ if appropriate</i>
Gender and transgender	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Age			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sexual orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Religion and belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Socio-economic disadvantage			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

NB: Tick relevant box as appropriate and based on information provided in section

Note

- If you are unsure of any aspect of this Equality Impact Assessment process you can seek guidance from your service representative on the Corporate Equalities Group or from the HDC Community Liaison Officer who can be contacted on equalities@harlow.gov.uk and extension 6388.
- Once the EIA form has been completed please ensure all enclosures are attached then sign and date the form, ensure it is countersigned by your Head of Service, keep a copy for your records and send a PDF to equalities@harlow.gov.uk

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Signed Project Manager Countersigned Head of Service

Print Name Print Name

Date Date

Under the Freedom of Information Act, this completed EIA form will be placed on the Harloweb and be available on request to the general public.