

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 18th January 2016

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WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Cllr Anderson – Finance & Strategy

PART I **KEY DECISION**

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2016-17

1 Purpose of Report

The Council must have a Council Tax Support scheme in place each year. This report and appendix is the Council's scheme for 2016-17. The main items within the scheme are not recommended to change significantly from previous schemes.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The Cabinet is requested to resolve that the Council Tax Support scheme, as detailed in appendix A, be approved.

3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

Priorities:

- *Health*
- *Economy and Skills*
- *Regeneration and Environment*
- *Housing*
- *Safer Communities*

3b Five Year Plan Outcomes

This does not support a specific outcome, as this is a statutory requirement to have a scheme in place.

4 Other Implications

(a) Financial

There are no direct financial implications of this paper; however, if the number of claimants of Council Tax Support increases there will be a financial pressure, and if the levels fall, there will be a financial benefit to the Council compared to the current level of claimants.

(b) Risk Management

Risk	Mitigating action	Opportunities
Legal	Legal review of the scheme before the 30 th January	
Property	none	
Human Rights	See EIA	
Health and Safety	None	
Employment Issues	Local employment levels will impact on the scheme as a risk and opportunity. The less people receiving CTX Support will mean the lower the cost of the scheme	
Equalities Issues	See EIA	
Community Support	None	
Communications	Consultation completed with much higher response level than before	
Community Safety	None	
Financial	See above	
Timetable for delivery	None	
Project Capacity	None	
Other		

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

The final scheme will be subject to external legal review before the new scheme comes into place.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

See appendix B – EIA completed

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The Council Tax Support scheme was introduced in April 2013. At this time the government changed it from a national scheme for all Customers to a local scheme for working age customers. The national scheme remained for all non working age customers.
- 5.2 Slough Borough Council in line with the legislation consulted on the proposed scheme in September to November 2012 and a Local Council Tax Support scheme was approved by members on 10th December 2012.
- 5.3 The legislation demands that the Local Council Tax Support scheme is approved by members each year before 31st January of the financial year preceding the start of the scheme.

- 5.4 If the scheme is going to change then a full consultation must be carried out with the chargepayers prior to a decision being made, unless the change is for uprating purposes only.
- 5.5 SBC did not make any changes (apart from uprating) to the scheme for 2014-15 or 2015-16, which means we have been operating the same scheme for three years.
- 5.6 As there have been a number of changes to welfare benefits that impact on the current scheme a consultation was carried out in October, November and December 2015.

The consultation

- 5.7 The consultation was carried out as part of the budget simulator exercise and chargepayers were asked how they wanted the scheme to operate going forward.
- 5.8 As the legislation has changed regarding consultation, we now have to offer chargepayers a range of options, there were four proposals made:
 - 1. to build on the current scheme taking into consideration the welfare reform changes that had taken place and the ones proposed,
 - 2. to maintain the current scheme with no changes,
 - 3. to provide full Council Tax support to those claiming to or maintain
 - 4. to fund the full scheme from Council reserves
- 5.9 Each proposal was costed and the impact shown.
- 5.10 The budget simulator consultation has now closed and we received 140 responses specifically on the Council Tax Support scheme which is a vast improvement on the consultation in 2012 when we received 14.

The responses

The following table shows the responses

Option	No of Responses	%
1.	71	51
2.	22	15
3	18	13
4	29	21

- 5.11 The majority of responses were to Option A which is the proposal that was put forward by the Council.

Council Tax Support scheme 2016-17

- 5.12 The Council Tax Support scheme for 2016-17 is included in appendix A.
- 5.13 The Council Tax support scheme is based on the national legislation for non working age applicants taking into consideration the proposals in the current scheme and those consulted on

- 5.14 The intention was that the scheme for 2016-17 would cost no more than 2015-16 but that we would not look to make savings as the impact on Council Tax collection would potentially negate any savings. The changes include
1. That all working age customers will have to pay a minimum of 20% of the council tax charge (as per current scheme) we did consult on raising this to 25%.
 2. Maintain maximum CTS at band C.
 3. Maintain protection for all those claims where there is a disabled person in the household.
 4. Maintain Protection for War Widows.
 5. introduce the removal of Family Premiums in line with housing benefit for new claims or new births from May 2016.
 6. Reduce the amount of time a claim can be backdated in line with the changes to housing benefit.
 7. Bring CTS in line with housing benefit (HB) for claims from EEA Nationals.
 8. Removal of automatic entitlement to 18-21 year olds in line with HB except those with a vulnerability e.g. Care Leavers.
 9. Include Universal Credit in the income calculation.
 10. Only adjust the income calculation for Universal credit if above a tolerance – suggested £10.
 11. Changes to the income calculation for Self employed people who have been self employed for more than 12 months.
 12. We also consulted on bringing the CTS scheme in line with the proposed changes to tax credits but these have been removed from the welfare reform bill but remain for people on Universal Credit and this needs to be taken into account on the income.

6 **Comments of Other Committees**

None.

7 **Conclusion**

For members to approve the revised Council Tax Support scheme that maintains individual contributions at a minimum level of 20% of Council Tax (dependent upon the scheme and Government protections).

8 **Appendices Attached**

- 'A' Council Tax Support scheme (included in Appendix Pack, not reproduced)
- 'B' Equality Impact Assessment