

Maidstone Borough Council

Council Tax Support Consultation (2013)

Report Prepared by: ClareWood@maidstone.gov.uk



1. Introduction

In the 2010 Spending Review, the Government set out its intentions to abolish the national council tax benefit scheme and replace it with locally designed and prepared schemes.

The Local Government Finance Act (2012) specified that, before adopting a scheme, a billing authority must in the following order:

1. Consult any major precepting authority which has power to issue a precept to it.
2. Publish a draft scheme in such a manner as it thinks fit; and
3. Consult such other persons as it considers are likely to have an interest in the operation of the scheme.

Maidstone Borough Council undertook a consultation on its proposed changes to council tax benefit between 6 August and 8 October 2012. The consultation survey included council tax benefit claimants, as well as those who qualified for discounts and exemptions, such as empty home or second home discounts. The survey was mailed to home addresses. In addition there was a survey that could be carried out in person at the Maidstone Gateway, and an online version, which was put up on the council's website.

The results in this report relates to follow-up consultation that was undertaken in October 2013. The survey included a random sample of 500 benefit claimants who were sent a postal survey to complete and an online version that made available online through the councils website and promoted through the council's social media channels.

It is important to note that along with the abolition of the national council tax benefit scheme, and the replacement with locally designed and prepared schemes, there was also a reduction of 10% in funding for council tax benefit. This has meant that local authorities have had to make tough decisions on what parts of the previous scheme to keep in place and what areas to alter.

Consultation Results 2013¹

Q. Which of the options do you support?

- (a) Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%
- (b) Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%
- (c) None of the above options

Overall, there is a clear majority (55%) in favour of the option (Option 2) to reduce awards by 13.0%. The remaining options each had less than 25% of the responses.

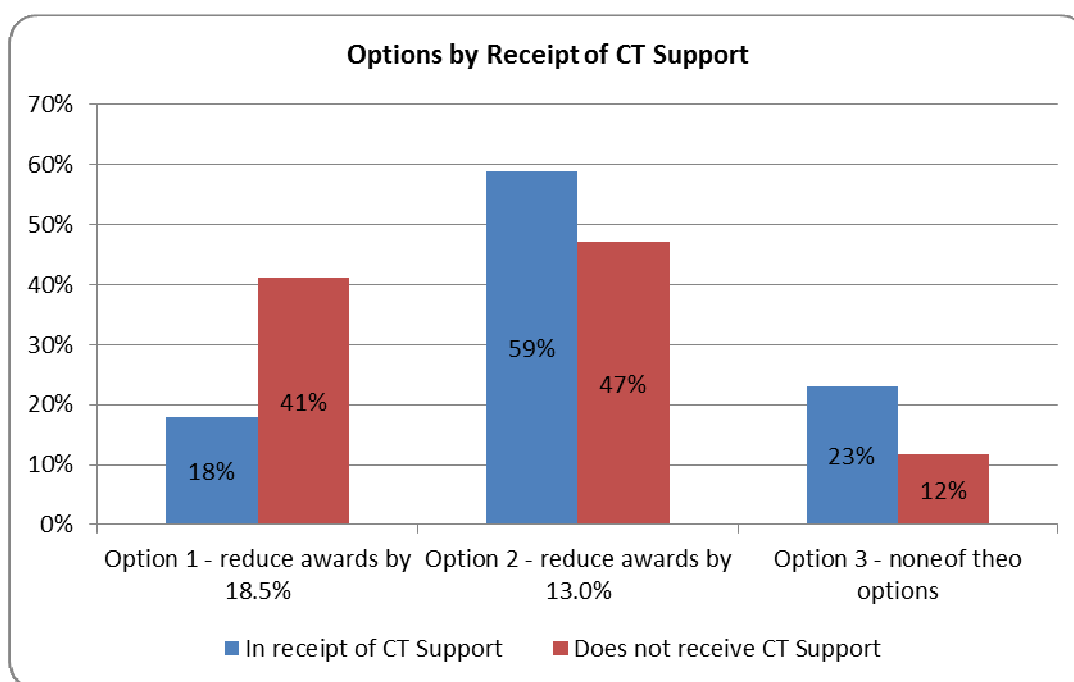
Which of the options do you support?	Total	%
Option 1- reduce awards by 18.5%	14	24%
Option 2 – reduce awards by 13.0%	32	55%
Option 3 – None of the options	12	21%
Total	58	
No response	3	

Once results are broken down by group and analysed using the different criteria, there is apparent support for option 2 across the board, between 50% and 71% within all of the groups, with one exception.

That exception is the responses from those that do not receive council tax support. In this category there is more support for option 1 – reduce awards by 18.5% at 41% with the proportion of people within this category choosing option 2 – reduce awards by 13% only slightly higher at 47%. This is the only group where there was no majority. This aligns with the results from 2012 where people in receipt of Council tax support were more likely to respond 'none of the options' than those who do not receive Council Tax support. Consequently, as also seen in the previous consultation, those who do not receive council tax support are more likely to select the higher rate of cuts to the award. The differences between these groups are illustrated in the graph on the next page.

When the responses are cross referenced with the demographics of the respondents there are less than 50 responders in each group however, there are no significant variances when the results of the 2013 survey is compared to the 2012 survey.

¹ Where there were less than 50 respondents for groups, the result cannot be relied on as there are not enough respondents for the result to be significant.



The following tables show the responses to question 1 cross referenced against the demographic questions. Please note that the tables of responses will not add up to 61 as the the 'no responses' to the demographic questions are not included.

Options by Receipt of Council Support					
Options	Yes		No		Total
Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%	7	18%	7	41%	14
Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%	23	59%	8	47%	31
Option 3 - none of the options	9	23%	2	12%	11
Total	39		17		56
No response	2				2

Options by 2nd Adult Rebate					
Options	Yes		No		Total
Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%	1	14%	11	24%	14
Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%	5	71%	26	58%	32
Option 3 - none of the options	1	14%	8	18%	12
Total	7		45		58
No response			1		1

Options by Gender							
Options	Male		Female		Prefer not to say		Total
Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%	7	28%	7	24%			14
Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%	14	56%	16	55%	1	50%	31
Option 3 - none of the options	4	16%	6	21%	1	50%	11
Grand Total	25		29		2		56
No response	1		2				3

Options by Ethnicity							
Options	White groups		BME		Prefer not to say		Total
	Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%	12	24%			1	
Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%	29	59%	2	50%	1	33.3%	32
Option 3 - none of the options	8	16%	2	50%	1	33.3%	11
Grand Total	49		4		3		56
No response	3						3

Options by Disability							
Options	Yes		No		Prefer not to say		Total
	Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%	3	16%	10	29%		
Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%	11	58%	19	56%	2	67%	32
Option 3 - none of the options	5	26%	5	15%	1	33%	11
Grand Total	19		34		3		56
No response	2		1				3

Option by Carers							
Option	Yes		No		Prefer not to say		Total
	Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%	1	25%	11	23%		
Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%	2	50%	27	57%	1	50%	30
Option 3 - none of the options	1	25%	9	19%	1	50%	11
Grand Total	4		47		2		53
No response	1		2				3

Option by age								
Options	18-24		25-34		35-44		45-54	
	Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%	1	100%	4	31%	3	23%	3
Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%			7	54%	9	69%	7	54%
Option 3 - none of the options			2	15%	1	8%	3	23%
Grand Total	1		13		13		13	
No response					1		2	

Options	55-64		65-74		Prefer not to say		Total
	Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%	3	25%				
Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%	7	58%			2	50%	32
Option 3 - none of the options	2	17%	1	100%	2	50%	11
Grand Total	12		1		4		57
No response							3

Q. Is there anything else you would like to add?

This section gave respondents the opportunity to add further comments to their responses to the survey. These comments were placed in a table, then read through individually and categorised. Some comments could be placed in more than one category as they may refer to several issues/themes. There were a total of 17 comments received.

The most common theme in the comment section was that people would struggle if their benefit award was cut with 5 comments received relating to this. An example of such a comment is:

'It is very difficult to pay my bills etc. gas/electricity/food have all gone up. I am sorry that I am ill. I am being penalised because I am ill. My income support of £101 a week has not risen. How am I supposed to pay any more on such a low income.'

Of these five comments four also made pleas not to cut the benefit award, which was the second most commented on category.

A further two comments suggested that the council cut wages and another two comments were about taking away all empty and second home discounts.

A table with the 17 comments show which categories they have been aligned is shown below.

Comment	Category
Just started the scheme in September. It has meant I can eat instead of going without. With gas and electric rising and finding it hard to pay any the reduction of council tax is vital to me at present. Don't want to get into debt but that was what was happening just to put food on table and pay household bills. I am very grateful to reduced council tax.	1. Grateful for CT Support
Yes I would like to not reduce the council tax benefit.	1. Don't reduce Benefit
As a 58 year old woman having lived in Maidstone ALL my life I think Maidstone council have always been one of the most unreasonable councils in United Kingdom and very UNHELPFUL.	1. MBC are unhelpful
Don't understand question 2. Council tax should be reduced more for all tax payers. My wife is a career.	1. Doesn't understand questionnaire 2. Reduce Council tax for all

Comment	Category
Should take into account DLA/ESA support. Applicant's circumstances in a constant state of flux.	1. Should take into account DLA/ESA
While I'm on benefits I hate it but haven't been able to get a job. I can't afford to live on the meagre amount the Government pays me now and if I have to pay more council tax we won't be able to afford to eat. It's a myth that people are well off on benefits and what do we pay it for anyway, roads are abysmal and damage cars and there are not toilets easily available in town. I won't go on as once I start I won't stop but believe me I'm not proud to be British and if I could somewhere else I would as this country has gone to the dogs and houses are in a state and Golding Homes doesn't do anything so what are we paying the council tax for, a crap service basically.	1. Don't reduce benefit 2. Would struggle if benefit was reduced
People like me try to live a proper life on little funds and always counting the pennies. I cannot afford the essential at present so any more changes that will increase my budget will be crippling. Thanks.	1. Don't reduce benefit 2. Would struggle if benefit was reduced
Don't really know enough about system to comment but thank you for asking.	1. Consultation itself
It is very difficult to pay my bills etc. gas/electricity/food have all gone up. I am sorry that I am ill. I am being penalised because I am ill. My income support of £101 a week has not risen. How am I supposed to pay any more on such a low income.	1. Don't reduce benefit 2. Would struggle if benefit was reduced
I am disabled so have no say. I have to put with what people with money decide for me. No one will care what a broke cripple has to say.	1. Don't feel listened to
Do not quite understand this form, sorry cannot complete it all.	1. Doesn't understand questionnaire
Do everything as a same, not for change.	1. Doesn't want change

Comment	Category
<p>I am unemployed and have been offered £71.70 per week as jobseeker's allowance. I have to repay a buddinging loan to the DWP at the rate of £8.60 per week because ISA does not allow for costs of clothing, ktichen and household applicances, furniture, bedding or any other 'extraordinary' expenses. Thus I receive £63.10 per week. Throughout recent winters I have used no form of heating, nor have I heated water and have been close to hypothermia whilse dressed in outdoor clothing inside the flat. I cannot afford to pay concil tax out of my total income of £63.10 per week,</p>	<p>1. would struggle if benefit was reduced</p>
<p>If you would stop giving such large quantities wage rises, money could be saved there, put a stop to all and sunry being allowed into the UK we wouldn't have these financial challenges</p>	<p>1. Cut Council wages</p>
<p>Any form of rebate for owners of multiple homes or homes with no occupants should be withdrawn completely - possibly even a surcharge levied.</p>	<p>1. Remove rebate and/or charge second & empty homes more</p>
<p>People who have multiple homes should pay full tax on all properties. People on benefits should pay full tax. Single people and elderly should have a reduction.</p>	<p>1. Remove rebate and/or charge second & empty homes more 2. protect elderly</p>
<p>Please how do you expect people to survive. I'm sorry I got ill, it wasn't my fault. I can not heat my home, buy the cheapest food and you want to cut my money even more, Why not make savings and cut directors pay - you won't do that though, better to make poor and sick starve.</p>	<p>1. would struggle if benefit was reduced 2. Cut Council wages</p>

Response Rates

The table on the following page shows response rates of our sample. This is compared to demographic data, taken from Office for National Statistics figures², and compared to the benefit claimant profile, taken from data submitted by Maidstone Borough Council Revenues & Benefits Department³.

It is therefore important to bear in mind that this does not necessarily reflect the amount of *individuals* who consider themselves as claiming Council Tax Benefit, as Council Tax Benefit is allocated on a per household basis and there may be several individuals in a household (thus leading to each individual in the household answering yes to the question of receiving housing benefit). It is for this reason, and the supplementary reason that the survey was sent out mainly to Council Tax Benefit Recipients, that Council Tax Benefit recipients were extremely over represented in our survey compared to the claimant profile that was assembled from our data.

The response rate was calculated by comparing the total amount of responses to the total amount of postal surveys sent out. This figure could potentially be misleading, as we also had surveys that could be filled out in online by anybody, whether they were sent a postal survey to fill out or not.

The online survey was posted on the council's website and social media sites. This means that we must assume that people other than those sent a survey in the post may well have filled out the survey, leading to the potential of the response rate figure to be slightly inaccurate. The response rate overall is 12.2%.

The sample group is much closer in terms of gender to the general population than the benefit claimant profile. This is surprising as the survey was sent out to Council Tax Benefit claimants, and it would be expected that the profile of our respondents would match the claimant profile more closely than the general population.

In terms of age, 18-24 year olds were under represented when compared to the proportion in the general population and the claimant profile. The 45-64 category is over represented also however it should be noted that the 24-44 years old are over represented when compared to the general population but under represented when compared to the claimant profile. Both the 65-74 year olds and over 75's align with the claimant profile.

Despite only receiving three responses from people from BME backgrounds (Black and Minority Ethnic) show as being marginally over represented. It is difficult to get a large enough sample of BME respondents for their results to be significant due to the extremely low number of those who are BME who live in the borough. The Council does not collect ethnicity data about benefit claimants.

² KCC 2011 Census Population Profiles

³ Data supplied from Maidstone Borough Council Revenue and Benefits Department on the 19/11/13

Those with a long standing illness or disability were also over represented in our sample, both compared to the population and the Council Tax Benefit claimant profile. It should be noted that this question is subjective and may change during a person's life time.

Response Rates Groups	Count	%	Percentage Difference v. Population Data	Percentage Difference v. Claimant Profile
Responses Received	61			
Council Tax Support Recipients				
Council Tax Support Recipients	41	70.7		
Non Council Tax Support Recipients	17	29.3		
Total	58			
No Response/Not Sure	8			
Survey Returned				
Postal	39	64.0		
Online	22	36.0		
Second Adult Rebate Recipients				
Yes	7	13.2		
No	46	86.8		
Total	53			
No Response	8			
Gender				
Male	26	45.6	-3.7	12.01
Female	31	54.4	3.7	-12.01
Total	57			
No Response/Prefer Not to Say	4			
Age Groups				
18-24*	1	1.8	-8.5	-10.2
25-44	27	48.2	21.6	-6.8
45-64	27	48.2	21.4	15.21
65-74	1	1.8	-7.4	1.7
75 +	0	0.0	-7.9	0.00
Grand Total	56			
No Response/Prefer Not to Say	5			
Ethnic Groups				
White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	49	87.5	-6.6	Comparative data unavailable
Other White background	3	5.4	0.5	
White & Black Caribbean	1	1.8	1.4	
Other mixed background	1	1.8	1.4	
Bangladeshi	1	1.8	1.6	
Other Asian background	1	1.8	0.2	
Grand Total	56			
No Response/Prefer Not to Say	5			
Long Term Illness, Disability or Infirmity				

Response Rates Groups	Count	%	Percentage Difference v. Population Data	Percentage Difference v. Claimant Profile
Yes	21	37.5	21.7	21.5
No	35	62.5	-21.7	-21.5
Grand Total	56			
No Response/Prefer Not to Say	5			
Carers				
Yes	5	9.3	-0.7	4.3
No	49	90.7	0.7	-4.3
Grand Total	54			
No Response/Prefer Not to Say	7			

* Census data shows 16-24 year olds

Dear Sir/Madam

Council Tax Support is changing – please have your say

In April 2013, the Government changed the support that was available to low income households to help them with their Council Tax. They withdrew the national scheme and replaced it with a scheme to be administered by local councils. We consulted those affected by the change in 2012.

As part of the change, the Government reduced the funding for the new scheme by 10%. It provided some additional financial help in the first year to limit the maximum increase for any household to 8.5% of the Council Tax charged. The government has now stopped this extra financial help and the council has to decide how to meet the shortfall. This leaves a tough choice between helping those that have an ongoing requirement for financial support and the wider interests of the Council Tax payer who would have to make up the funding gap if this cost is not passed on to those receiving council tax support.

The council has already taken action to alter other Council Tax discounts and exemptions to fund the shortfall but we still need to decide how the local scheme will work from 2014. We have sent you this survey to ask you how you think it should operate and how much support should be provided to low income households. We have set out two options:

- Reduce awards by 18.5%
- Reduce awards by 13.0%

The council's preferred option is to reduce awards by 13% as this would provide greater support in 2014. We will treat your views in confidence. We will use them, along with the views of a range of other stakeholders, to finalise our future Council Tax Support Scheme.

Please complete and return the survey in the postage paid envelope provided. You can also respond online at:

www.surveymonkey.com/s/CouncilTaxSupport2013. If you have any questions or concerns about this survey please contact our Benefits Team at benefits@maidstone.gov.uk or call (01622) 602557. They will be happy to help you. Please complete the survey by 19 November 2013. We very much hope you will be able to take part as your views are very important to us.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen McGinnes, Head of Revenues and Benefits

If you need this questionnaire in large print or another format please call 01622 602557.

Decisions still to be taken

This is where we welcome your views. We need to agree how the local Council Tax Support scheme will operate in 2014. We also want your views on some wider changes that could be made to how the benefit scheme works.

Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%

We would work out council tax support in the same way as at present and reduce the final award by 18.5%. In reducing the level of council tax support by 18.5% the council expects to be able to maintain the scheme in its current form taking into account expected demand and government funding for the scheme.

Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%

We would work out council tax support in the same way as at present and reduce the final award by 13.0%. Whilst the shortfall in funding would be met in 2014-15 through changes already planned to other council tax discounts and exemptions, the council would need to assess and increase the level of reduction annually to ensure demand matched the level of government funding for the scheme.

Making wider changes to the Council tax Support system

We would also like your views on other changes that could be made. This includes changes to reduce the level of savings allowed, capping the level of award for residents living in more expensive properties and removing support for households who receive a rebate because someone living with them is on a low income (second adult rebate).

Council Tax support is changing – please have your say

The council's preferred choice is Option 2. Whilst we recognise that this change could mean further changes and increases in the future, we think it is important to offer the extra support in the short term.

To help us make a final decision about these options please answer the following questions.

Q1. Which of the options do you support? (please select one only)

- (a) Option 1 - reduce awards by 18.5%
- (b) Option 2 - reduce awards by 13.0%
- (c) None of the above

Q2. Do you think the Council should make wider changes to the Council tax Support scheme?

- | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Reduce the level of savings allowed | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cap awards to the level of Council Tax band D | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Remove the rebate available for other occupiers | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q3. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Q4. Do you currently receive Council Tax support? Yes No

Q5. Do you currently receive second adult rebate? Yes No

Q6. Are you...?

Male Female Prefer not to say

Q7. Which of the following age groups do you fall into? (Please tick one box only)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18 - 24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 55 - 64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 - 34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65 - 74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 35 - 44 | <input type="checkbox"/> 75+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 45 - 54 | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

Q8. Which of these ethnic groups do you belong to? (Please tick one box only)

White British/other

- White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
 White Irish
 Other white background (please write in) _____

Mixed

- White and Black Caribbean
 White and Black African
 White & Asian
 Other mixed background (please write in) _____

Asian or Asian British

- Indian
 Pakistani
 Bangladeshi
 Chinese
 Other Asian background (please write in) _____

Black or Black British

- African
 Caribbean
 Other Black background (please write in) _____
 Prefer not to say

Disabilities

Q9. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

- Yes No Prefer not to say

Q10. Are you a carer?

By carer we mean someone who looks after and supports a friend, relative or neighbour who could not manage without their help. This could be due to age, physical or mental illness or disability. It does not mean a professional care-worker or personal assistant who gets paid for their work.

- Yes No Prefer not to say

Thank you

We comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 for the purpose of processing personal data in the performance of our legitimate business. Any information held by us will be processed in compliance with the principles set out in the Act. Any information collected will be only be used for the purposes of this consultation.