Consultation on proposed changes to our Council Tax Support Scheme from 1 April 2017

What is Council Tax Support (CTS)?

Council Tax Support helps those customers on low incomes to pay their council tax. In 2013, CTS replaced the Council Tax Benefit scheme. CTS is now designed and controlled by Warrington Borough Council.

Each year the Council has to consider whether its local Council Tax Support scheme requires updating.

If any changes are being suggested we have a responsibility to consult with residents, stakeholders and current customers on the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme.

The Council is looking to make changes to the local scheme from April 2017 and would like your views to help us make an informed decision.

The proposed changes are as follows:

- To reduce backdating of Council Tax Support to one month in line with the changes in Housing Benefit announced by Central Government.
- To remove the Family Premium for new claims to bring the Council Tax Support Scheme in line with the changes in Housing Benefit announced by Central Government

We have not looked at making significant changes to the scheme but we have specifically looked at areas which will help to maintain or reduce administration costs. The less we spend on administration the more we can continue to provide support to those who most need it.

Our aim is to keep the Council Tax Support Scheme in line with Housing Benefit to ensure the scheme is as simple as possible for customers and to reduce the administration costs enabling focused support and advice.

The scheme for Pension Age customers is set by Government and is not affected by any of the options set out in this consultation. You can find out when you will be considered to be of pensionable age here

This consultation will enable anybody in Warrington, whether they are a recipient of CTS or not, to help shape the future of the Scheme by having their say.

Your views

We would like to hear your views and you can take part in a number of ways:

- Complete our online survey here
- Email your views to benefits@warrington.gov.uk
- Download, complete and return a paper copy
- Write to us at Council Tax Support Scheme Consultation, PO Box 5, New Town House, Buttermarket Street, Warrington, WA1 2NH.
To ask for a paper copy of the survey or if you have any concerns or questions about the survey, require the questionnaire in another language or format including large print, Braille, audio or British Sign Language or simply require assistance in completing it please call 01925 443331 or email us using the address above.

The closing date for responses is Friday 4th November 2016.

The information from this consultation will be used by the council to assist in making its decision on the changes to Council Tax Support scheme from 1st April 2017. The results from the consultation will be published later this year on our website and the council’s executive board will also receive a report of findings and recommendations.

The final decision on the scheme will be made by the council no later than January 2017.

Warrington’s Options

Option 1  Remove the family premium for all new working age claimants.

The amount of help someone receives is based on their household circumstance. This is used to establish a series of allowances and premiums.

The family premium reflects the additional needs a customer with children has (currently assumed to be £17.45 a week). It has previously been used to work out how much help customers get in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.

From 2016 this premium is no longer used in the calculation of Housing Benefit for new claims. Under this proposal, from April 2017 we would also no longer include the family premium in calculating Council Tax Support for new claims.

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 Council Tax Support Scheme in line with Housing Benefit changes introduced by the government.
- It means that software and administration costs are minimised to implement the change

The drawbacks of doing this are:

- New working age customers may see a reduction in the amount of support they would have received.
- Some households with children will pay more.
- Existing customers will be affected if they have a break in their claim after April 2017.
An example of the impact for this proposal is:

Mr and Mrs Arnold have 2 children, one 5 year old and a 7 year old.

Mr Arnold is employed and receives wages of £200.00 each week. In addition to his wages the family receives child tax credit of £153.54 and child benefit of £48.10 each week making a total weekly income of £401.64.

They live in a house that is a band A property meaning that the full annual Council Tax would be £991.05 or £19.06 per week.

Under the current rules they would receive a Council Tax Reduction of £6.99 each week meaning they would have to pay £12.07 each week.

**How it the applicable amount calculated?**

£114.85 Couple over the age of 18 yrs old allowance
£66.90 Dependent Children allowance aged 5
£66.90 Dependent Children allowance aged 7
£17.45 Family Premium

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£266.10 This is a minimum level of income

=====

Under the proposal to revise the Council Tax Reduction scheme they would receive a Council Tax Reduction of £3.50 each week meaning they would have to pay £15.56 each week.

**How it is calculated?**

£114.85 Couple over the age of 18 yrs old allowance
£66.90 Dependent Children allowance aged 5
£66.90 Dependent Children allowance aged 7

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£248.65 This is a minimum level of income

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Council Tax Reduction award What they need to pay each week
With family premium £6.99 per week £12.07 a week
Without family premium £3.50 per week £15.56 a week
Q1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 1? Please select one option.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree

Q1.1 If you disagree or strongly disagree, what alternative would you propose?
Please write in the box below.

Option 1a  Reduce backdating of new claims to one month.

Currently claims for Council Tax Support from working age customers can be backdated for up to six months where an applicant shows they could not claim at an earlier time. The government has reduced the period for Housing Benefit claims to one month.

It is proposed that the Council Tax Support scheme is aligned with the changes for Housing Benefit.

The benefit of this is:
- It is a simple alteration to the scheme which is easy to understand when claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.

The drawback of this is:
- New working age residents may see a reduction in the amount of support they receive if they are unable to claim on time.

Q2 To what extent do you agree or disagree with option 1a? Please select one option.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree

Q2.1 If you disagree or strongly disagree what alternative would you propose? Please write in the box below.

These changes if implemented will not result in a reduction in entitlement to existing claims. The changes only apply to new claims made by working age persons on or after the 1st April 2017. We cannot at this stage estimate the complete impact of these changes.
Option 2  Continue with the current Council Tax Support scheme

We could decide to continue with the current Council Tax Support scheme and make no further changes to the proportion of Council Tax paid.

The benefit of this is:
Over the last year the number of people claiming Council Tax Support has reduced by 4%
The reduction can be attributed in part to the improving local economy where jobs are being created in the Borough

The drawback of this is:
If the Council retains the current scheme, it will be administratively more complex and confusing for customers (as it will not align with Housing Benefit which is also administered by the Council).

Q3 To what extent do you agree or disagree with Option 2? Please select one option.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree

Q3.1 If you disagree or strongly disagree, what alternative would you propose?
Please write in the box below.

Q4 If would like to add any further comments about the Council Tax Scheme then please write in the box below.

Glossary

CTS - Means Council Tax Support, (i.e. the Council's proposed local schemes)

Backdating - Pay benefit for a period of time before the claim was made where good cause is shown.

Family Premium - where the applicant is part of a family of which at least one member is a child or young person

Working Age - Somebody over the age of 18 but below the qualifying age for state pension credit
Equality and Diversity
The Council Tax Support scheme looks to ensure that no particular group or individuals will be adversely affected by the change as far as possible. It will also take into account that customers of state pension credit age will be protected.

This will involve the council’s benefits team carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment and this consultation document forms part of that process. Any necessary changes following the consultation stage will be factored into the final proposals to best fit the needs of the residents of Warrington.

Customer Questionnaire
Warrington Borough Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and respect for diversity in the services we provide.

It is not compulsory to answer the questions but providing this information will help us to monitor how effectively we are talking to a range of people right across the communities we serve. It allows us to understand if any of our proposals are affecting people/communities differently.

If you want to know more about why we collect this information please view our website www.warrington.gov.uk.

Thank you for helping us to deliver better quality services to you. Please complete the following:

Q5. Are you…? Please select one option
- Male □
- Female □
- Other □

Q6. Is your gender identity the same as you were assigned at birth? Please select one option.
- Yes □
- No □

Q7. What is your age? Please select one option
- Below 16 □
- 16 - 24 □
- 25 - 34 □
- 35 - 44 □
- 45 - 54 □
- 55 - 64 □
- 65 - 74 □
- 75 - 84 □
- 85 or over □

Q8. How would you describe yourself? Please select one option
- Heterosexual or straight □
- Bisexual □
- Prefer not to say □
- Lesbian □
- Gay Man □

Q9. Do you consider yourself to have a disability, or a long-term illness, physical or mental health condition? Please select one option
- Yes □
- No (Go to question 11) □
**Q10. What is the nature of your disability, long-term limiting condition or health problem? Please select all that apply**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical disability</th>
<th>Hearing disability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning disability</td>
<td>Visual disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental ill health</td>
<td>Other (please state)</td>
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</tbody>
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**Q11. What is your religion? Please select one option**

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<tr>
<th>None</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Jewish</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>Other religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
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</tbody>
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**Q12. What is your ethnic group? Please select one option**

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<th>Mixed / multiple ethnic group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British</td>
<td>White and Black Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>White and Black African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gypsy or Irish Traveller</td>
<td>White and Asian</td>
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<td>Eastern European</td>
<td>Any other mixed / multiple ethnic background (please describe)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other White background (please describe)</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
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<th>Asian / Asian British</th>
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</thead>
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<td>African</td>
<td>Indian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
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<td>Any other Black / African / Caribbean background (please describe)</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any other Asian background (please describe)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other ethnic group</th>
<th>Any other ethnic group (please describe)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
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