

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 6 SEPTEMBER 2016
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (FINANCE AND OPERATIONS)

LOCALISED COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME – 2017/18 CHANGES

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council's Council Tax Support Scheme replaced council tax benefit from April 2013. Our scheme was based on a broad framework agreed as part of a consultation undertaken with Hertfordshire County Council, Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner and other interested parties.
- 1.2 On 2 February 2016 Cabinet agreed to consult on minor proposed changes to our 2017/18 Council Tax Support Scheme. These changes involve removal of the family premium, for all new claimants; restrictions with the backdating of council tax support, from 6 months to 1 month, for working age claimants, and the removal of second adult rebate. Further details on these changes are shown in appendix A.
- 1.3 Consultation on our proposed changes was undertaken through the Council's Performance & Strategy team using SurveyMonkey.com and reference to the survey was made in the council tax leaflet which was sent to every household. The consultation was also publicised on the council's and the Housing Trust's websites and letters and emails went out to Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner, the Town and Parish councils, stakeholders the alliance group and the Borough panel.
- 1.4 A summary of the responses to the consultation can be found in appendix B. There have been 61 complete responses and 3 incomplete responses to the on line survey. 54% of respondents were in agreement to remove family premium; 63% were in agreement to restrict the backdating of council tax support to one month and 60% were in agreement to remove second adult rebate.
- 1.5 Appendices to the report are:
- | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Appendix A - | Description of the consulted changes |
| Appendix B - | Support Scheme Consultation Summary |
| Appendix C - | Equalities Impact Assessment |

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet review the results from the consultation exercise and the outcome of equalities impact assessment, as set out in appendix B and C respectively.
- 2.2 Having reviewed the consultation results and the equalities impact assessment Cabinet agree to the changes in our council tax support scheme for 2017/18 in relation to abolishing family premium for new claimants; reducing the backdating

of council tax support for working age claimants, from six months to one month, and abolishing the payment of second adult rebate.

- 2.3 Cabinet recommend to Council that our localised council tax support scheme for 2017/18 abolish family premium for new claimants, reduce the backdating of council tax support for working age claimants, from six months to one month, and abolish the payment of second adult rebate. All the other elements of our scheme will remain the same and continue to help vulnerable claimants and those on low/no income to receive a reduction on their council tax.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 Welwyn Hatfield Council's localised council tax support scheme is calculated on a reduction of 25% in the council tax liability for working age claimants, whilst still protecting vulnerable groups. Our scheme fully protects pensioners and families with children under 5 and those in receipt Personal Independence Payments (PIP) (formerly disability living allowance) so that they continue to receive the same level of protection, and do not have to pay anymore council tax than they paid under the old council tax benefit system. The scheme extends this protection to claimants with a disability premium, severe disability premium, child disability and families with young children.
- 3.2 Our scheme has been in operation since April 2013 and our initial fears on the impact of the changes made have been unfounded. Our council tax collection rate has been maintained and support has been provided to those working age claimants struggling to meet an increase in their council tax payments through the award of hardship relief, which compensates for a reduction in the level of council tax support awarded. Our local scheme has been delivered within budget with the cost of council tax support reducing since the start of the scheme. This is due to the number of claimants reducing from 7,951 to 7,106 since April 2013, and expenditure reducing from £7.1m to £6.7m.
- 3.3 The Local Government Finance Act 2012 required local authorities to consult on their localised council tax support schemes and any changes made to these schemes. Our initial consultation in 2012 was based around our suggestion to reduce the level of council tax support we paid by 25%. We asked for views on raising income through reductions to council tax discounts and exemptions and for suggestions on any alternatives that the council should consider to help make the required saving. Our consultation questionnaire made it clear that we wanted participants to help us shape our scheme and have the opportunity to have their say on changes to council tax benefit. We made the point about the funding we received being reduced but stressed that we would continue to protect families with children under 5, those in receipt of disability benefit and pensioners.
- 3.4 Our public consultation for changes to our 2017/18 scheme was based around our suggestion to remove family premium, for all new claimants; restrictions with the backdating of council tax support, for working age claimants, and the removal of second adult rebate. These changes would bring our local council tax support scheme in line with housing benefit regulations, apart from second adult rebate payments which do not apply to housing benefit and universal credit. Our consultation questionnaire made it clear that we wanted participants to help us shape our scheme and have the opportunity to have their say on the proposed

changes, but stressed that we would continue to protect families with children under 5, those in receipt of disability benefit and pensioners.

- 3.5 The response to our consultation has been favourable with the changes we are consulting on. Over 50% of respondents were in agreement to remove family premium, restrict the backdating of council tax support and remove second adult rebate, with over 60% in agreement to continue protecting our most vulnerable claimants from making a minimal contribution instead of protecting the aforementioned three categories.
- 3.6 79% of respondents agreed with working age claimants paying something towards their council tax but over 50% of respondents did not want to increase the council tax paid by working age claimants. 41% of respondents wanted to continue to protect disabled claimants but there were a slightly higher percentage of respondents that wanted to remove the protection provided to families with children under five.
- 3.7 Families with children under five fall into one of the vulnerable group categories and are on a low income if they are in receipt of council tax support. Our local council tax support scheme needs to protect support for pensioners and help to reduce poverty and reliance on council tax support in the long term. Other duties and responsibilities include the need to mitigate the effects of child poverty.
- 3.8 Comments were invited on what other changes residents may like to see but we do not have the power to implement some of the suggestions. E.g. we must continue to protect pensioners and we cannot remove single person discounts based on income.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 The Local Government Finance Act 2012 (LGFA 2012) came into force on 31 October 2012 and imposed a duty on local billing authorities to introduce a localised council tax reduction scheme by January 2013. The scheme should align with universal credits and support work incentives, and in particular avoid disincentives to move into work. For pensioners there is no change in their level of awards and local authorities were also required to consider ensuring support for other vulnerable groups.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 The removal of family premium for new claimants would result in an eventual reduction in expenditure of approximately £51,800 per annum. The family premium to existing claimants would not change.
- 5.2 Based on the backdating of council tax support that has taken place in 2015/16, a change to the backdating provision, from six months to one month, would result in a reduction in expenditure of £6,600 per annum.
- 5.3 The removal of second adult rebate payments would result in a reduction in expenditure of £16,500.
- 5.4 Based on the latest data available, the expenditure on the 2016/17 council tax support scheme currently stands at £6.7m, of which £2.8m is paid to pensioners;

£1.7m to claimants with disabilities; £800,000 to families with children under 5 and £1.4m to the remaining working age group. This expenditure is approximately £100,000 lower than the original assumed expenditure, at the start of the year, following a decrease in the caseload.

- 5.5 The cost of the council tax support scheme is met from within the collection fund through a reduced tax base. The cost therefore has to be estimated prior to the setting of the tax base which will then inform the Council Tax Resolution.
- 5.6 The cost of the council tax support scheme in Welwyn Hatfield for 2017/18 is forecast to continue at a similar level to the current year. However, the accuracy of this forecast will depend on the wider economic conditions outside the Council's control.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 The risks related to our council tax support scheme is the possible loss of revenue from council tax that may not be collected due to the requirement for the less well off residents to pay some charge. The Council needs to manage any possible financial pressures as a result of a fall in collection rates or unexpectedly high levels of demand for support from residents which exceeds the forecasts at the point where the budgets and council tax levels were set.
- 6.2 If demand is higher than estimated this would result in a deficit on the collection fund and if demand is lower than estimated this would result in a surplus on the collection fund.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications with the recommendation in this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 There are none.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 The proposals in this report will not impact on green house gas emissions.

10 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 10.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority: Engage with our communities and provide value for money.

11 Equality and Diversity

- 11.1 A full and detailed Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out in connection with the Council's localised council tax reduction scheme. An initial impact assessment on the proposed changes in the report has been carried out and there were not any differential impacts identified. Over the period of the consultation we monitored any concerns identified to ensure that our proposed changes did not discriminate against any disadvantaged or vulnerable people.
- 11.2 56% of respondents were over 61 with 33% working full time. 87% of respondents were White British, 4% African, 2% Irish, 2% White and Black

African, 2% Chinese British, 2% other white background, with 1% preferring not to say.

Name of author	Farhad Cantel
Title	Client Support Services Manager
Date	July 2016

Council tax support claimants with children receive a premium of £17.45 per week in their personal allowance and were included as part of our original local council tax support scheme which mirrored housing benefit regulations. The housing benefit regulations changed from May 2016 and this premium will be abolished for new claimants. This premium provides these households with a higher amount to live on each week. From May 2016, this premium will no longer be included as part of the personal allowance to any new housing benefit claimants. The removal of family premium will not apply to existing claimants.

Backdating Council Tax Support - Restrictions

The rules on backdating housing benefit have changed. Under the previous Regulations benefit paid to working age claimants could be backdated to a maximum period of six months. From April 2016, housing benefit can only be backdated to one month. This will only apply to working age claimants, and not pensioners. It is proposed to reduce the backdating rules for council tax support time limits in line with the new housing benefit changes.

Up to December 2015 there had been 100 cases where council tax support was backdated. If this was restricted to one month the reduction in expenditure would be £6,600.

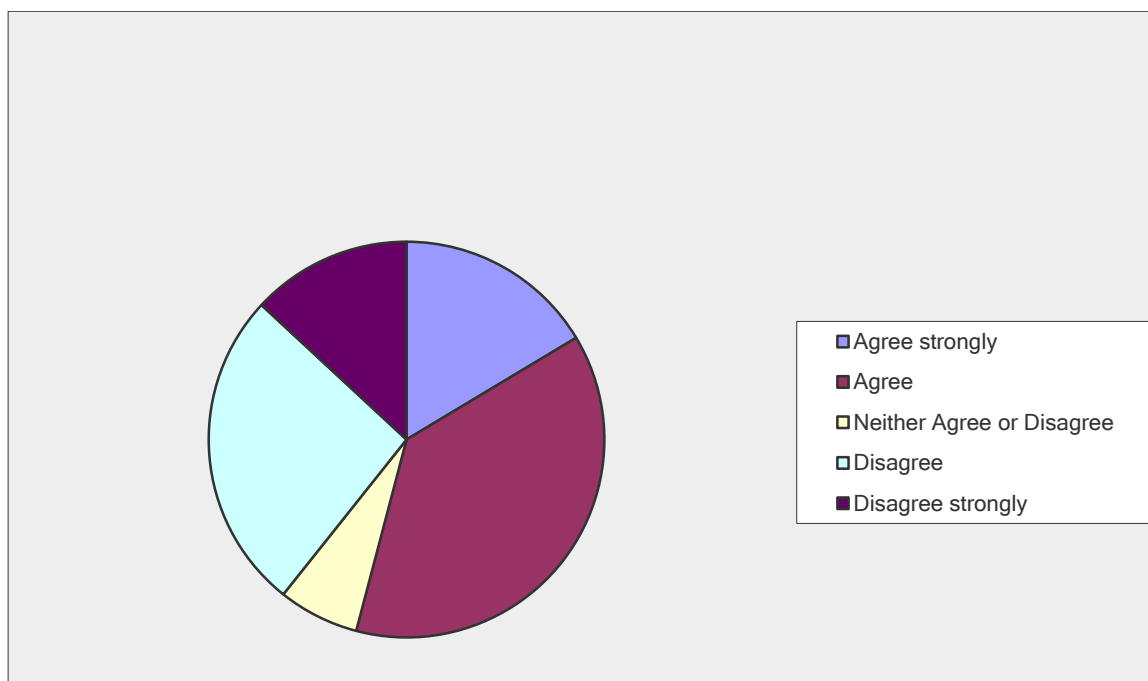
Second Adult Rebate

Second Adult Rebate is council tax support paid to the person who is liable to pay council tax when there is another adult on a low income also living in the property. This means that the amount of council tax a claimant pays could be reduced by up to 25%, depending on the second adults' income.

There are currently 67 households in receipt of second adult rebate. The reduction in expenditure if this was abolished would be of £16,512.

Our council tax support scheme closely mirrors the national housing benefit regulations and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has made some changes to housing benefit around some of the premiums and backdating. The DWP will be removing the weekly Family Premium for new claimants in receipt of housing benefit, reducing the amount a family needs to live on each week. Do you agree that this premium should be removed for our local council tax support scheme for all new claimants?

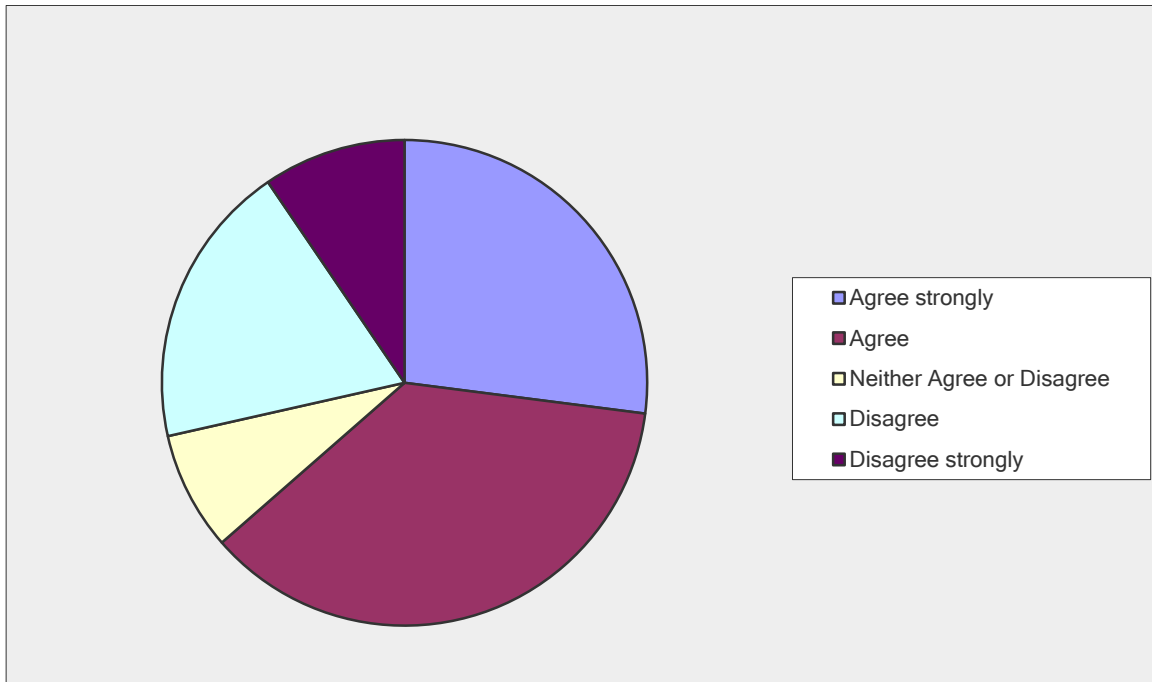
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Agree strongly	16.4%	10
Agree	37.7%	23
Neither Agree or Disagree	6.6%	4
Disagree	26.2%	16
Disagree strongly	13.1%	8
<i>answered question</i>		61
<i>skipped question</i>		3



Question 2

The DWP will be reducing the number of months we can backdate a housing benefit claim from six months to one month, for working age claimants. Do you think that we should reduce the backdating provisions within our council tax support scheme to mirror this?

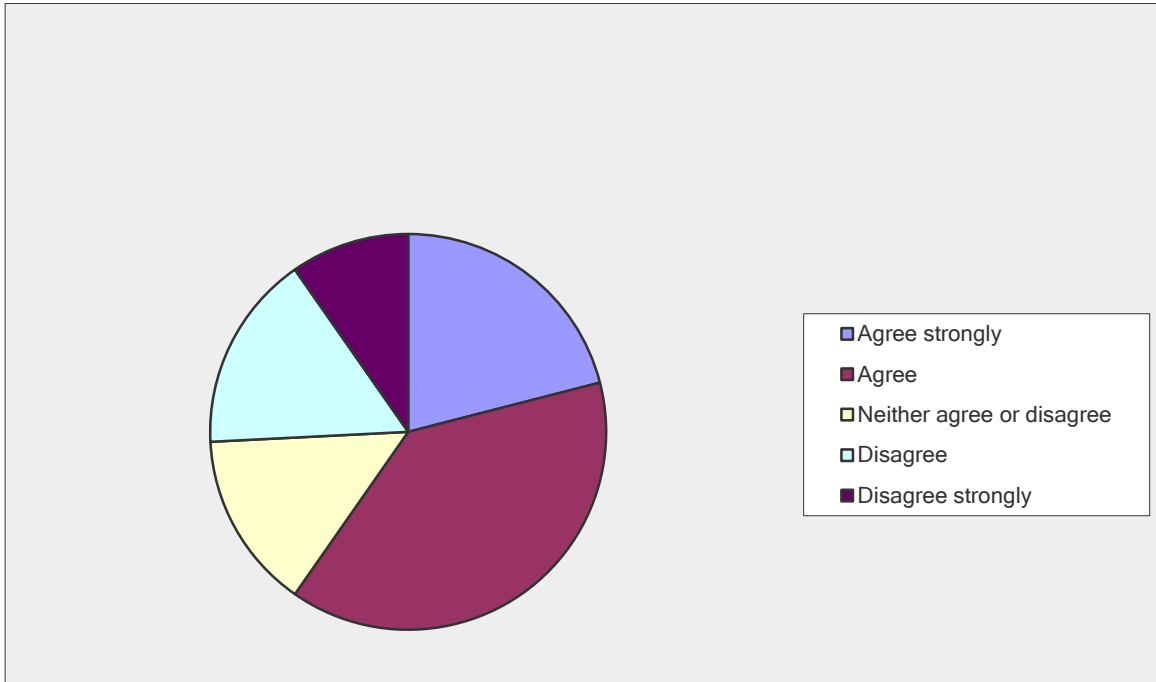
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Agree strongly	27.0%	17
Agree	36.5%	23
Neither Agree or Disagree	7.9%	5
Disagree	19.0%	12
Disagree strongly	9.5%	6
<i>answered question</i>		63
<i>skipped question</i>		1



Question 3

Our council tax support scheme has made provision for a second adult rebate. This rebate is not normally available for couples. If you are the only person liable to pay council tax and you have another adult on a low income living with you (who is not a partner or paying you rent) you can receive help towards your council tax, in the form of Second Adult Rebate. Do you agree to remove this form of rebate which will help reduce the expenditure and administrative burden of our council tax support scheme?

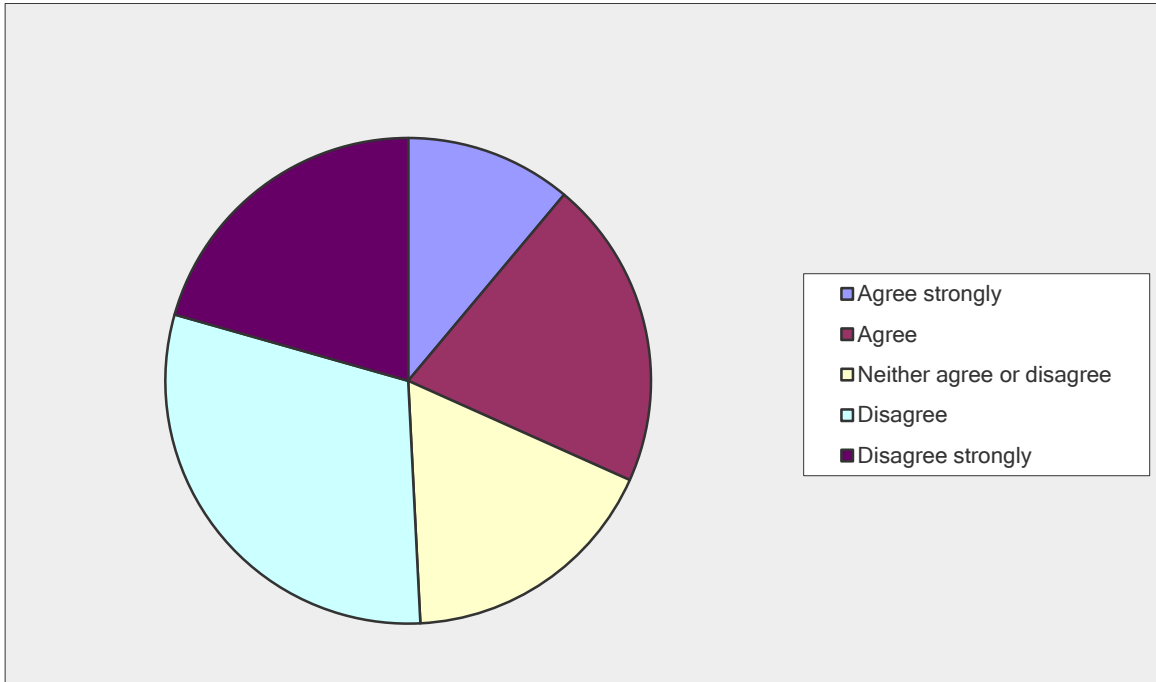
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Agree strongly	21.0%	13
Agree	38.7%	24
Neither agree or disagree	14.5%	9
Disagree	16.1%	10
Disagree strongly	9.7%	6
<i>answered question</i>		62
<i>skipped question</i>		2



Question 4

Instead of the changes described in questions 1 to 3 do you think that the council should instead calculate council tax support based on 70%, or less, of the council tax liability to working age claimants and not 75%? This would mean that working age claimants would have more council tax to pay.

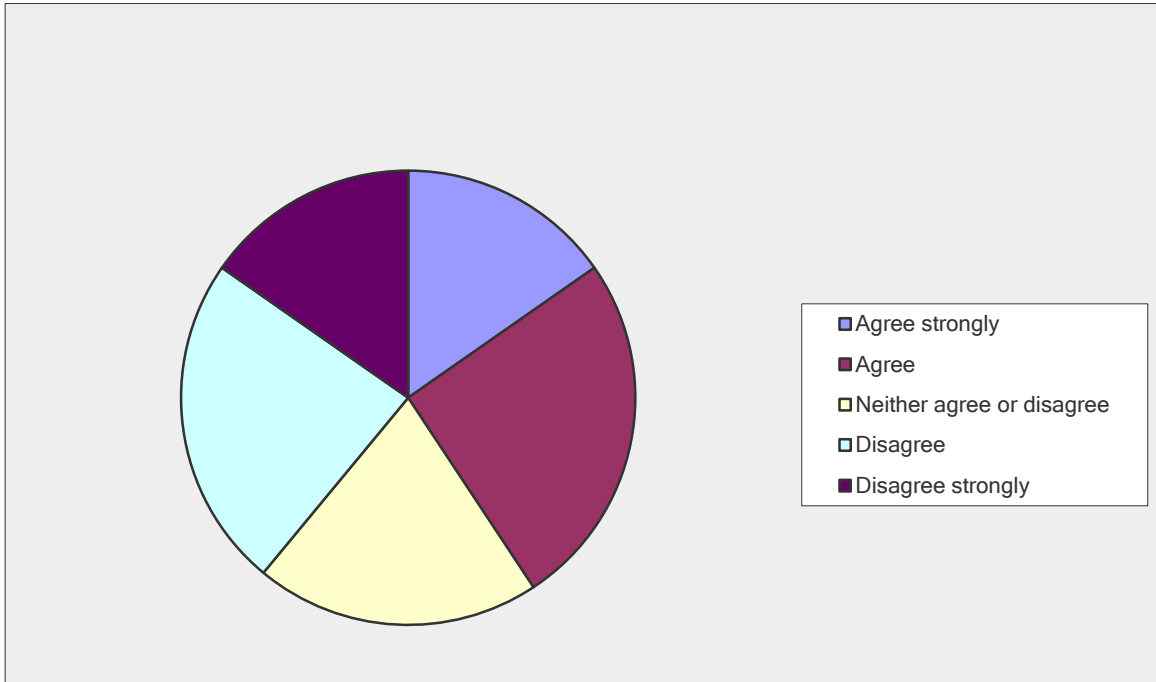
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Agree strongly	11.1%	7
Agree	20.6%	13
Neither agree or disagree	17.5%	11
Disagree	30.2%	19
Disagree strongly	20.6%	13
<i>answered question</i>		63
<i>skipped question</i>		1



Question 5

Should people who are in receipt of a disability premium continue to receive protection with the calculation of their council tax support? This could be removed instead of the family premium allowance for new claimants, second adult rebate or changes to backdating rules for working age claimants. This would mean that those in receipt of a disability premium would have more council tax to pay.

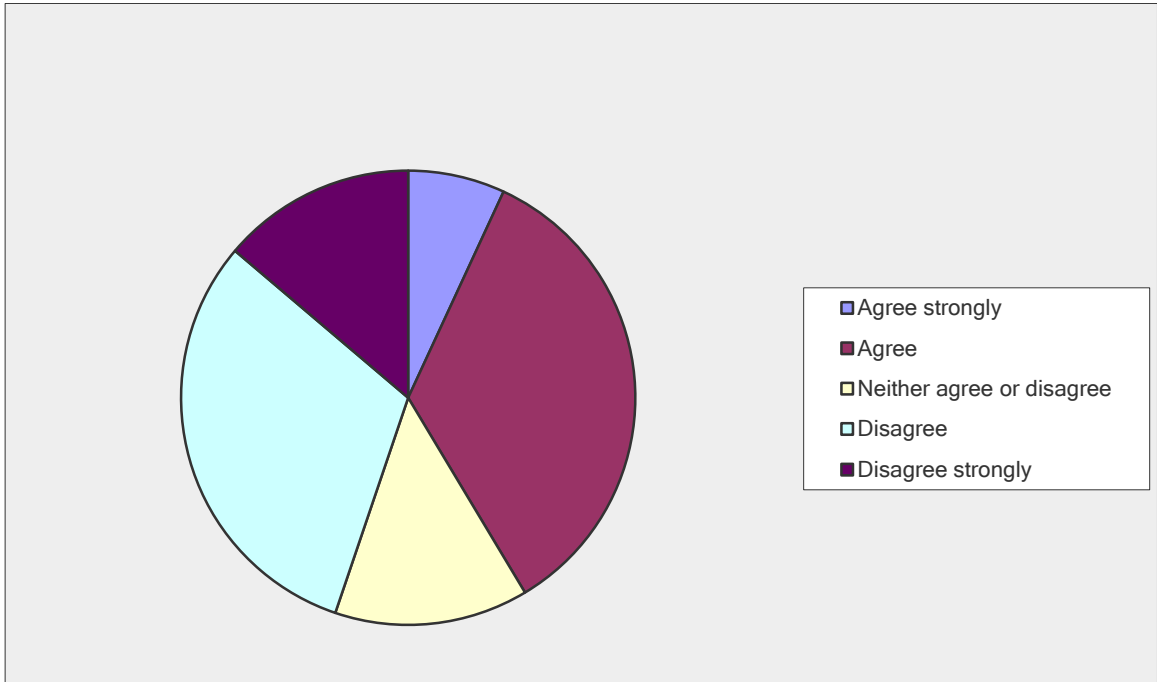
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Agree strongly	15.3%	9
Agree	25.4%	15
Neither agree or disagree	20.3%	12
Disagree	23.7%	14
Disagree strongly	15.3%	9
<i>answered question</i>		59
<i>skipped question</i>		5



Question 6

Should families with children under 5 continue to receive protection with the calculation of their council tax support? This could be removed instead of the family premium allowance for new claimants, second adult rebate or changes to backdating rules for working age claimants. This would mean that those families with children under 5 would have more council tax to pay.

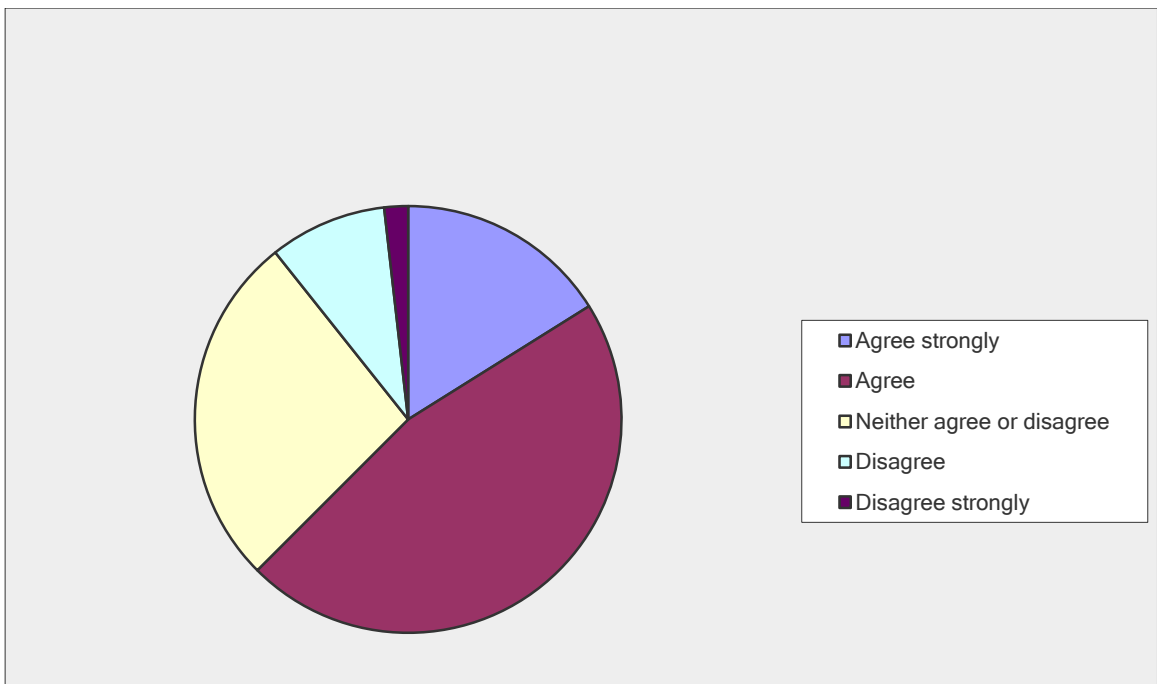
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Agree strongly	6.9%	4
Agree	34.5%	20
Neither agree or disagree	13.8%	8
Disagree	31.0%	18
Disagree strongly	13.8%	8
<i>answered question</i>		58
<i>skipped question</i>		6



Question 7

Do you think that the most vulnerable claimants should be protected from a minimal contribution instead of those in receipt of a family premium, second adult rebate or changes to backdating rules?

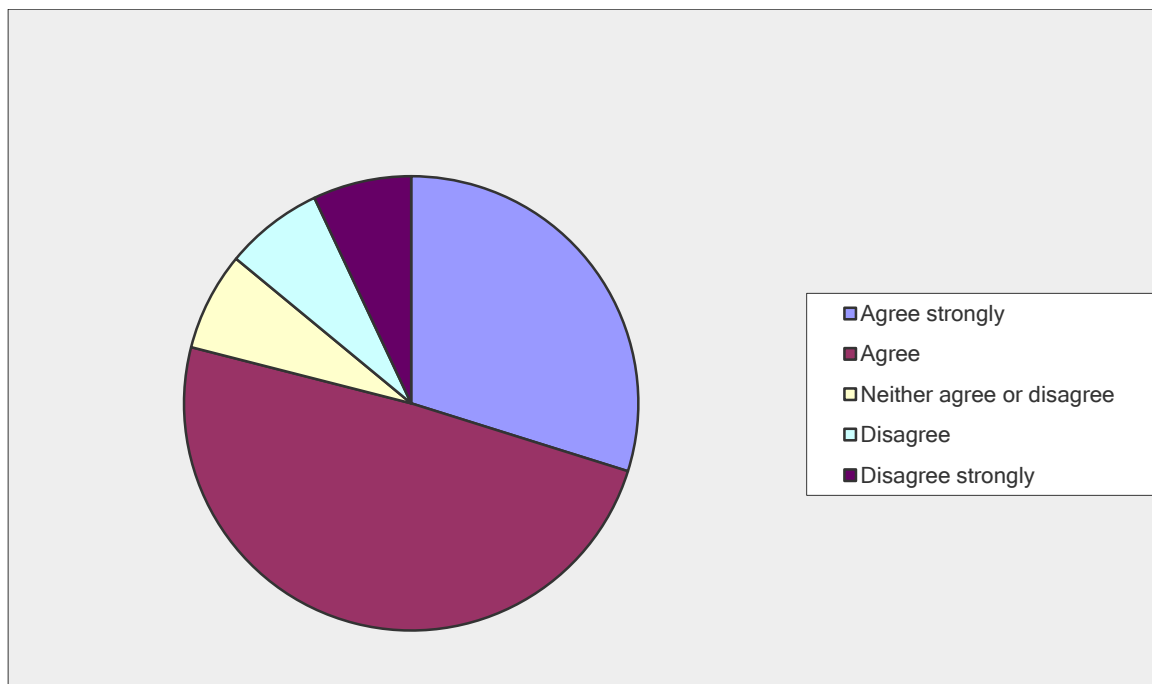
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Agree strongly	16.1%	9
Agree	46.4%	26
Neither agree or disagree	26.8%	15
Disagree	8.9%	5
Disagree strongly	1.8%	1
<i>answered question</i>		56
<i>skipped question</i>		8



Question 8

Do you think that all other working age claimants should pay a minimum amount towards their council tax?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Agree strongly	29.8%	17
Agree	49.1%	28
Neither agree or disagree	7.0%	4
Disagree	7.0%	4
Disagree strongly	7.0%	4
<i>answered question</i>		57
<i>skipped question</i>		7



Question 9

If we did not remove the family premium for new claimants; change the backdating provisions for working age claimants and remove the payment of second adult rebate are there any other changes you believe that the council should make to our local council tax support scheme that would reduce the cost of our scheme?

Answer Options	Response Count
	16
<i>answered question</i>	16
<i>skipped question</i>	48

Have one Council instead of three

Unfortunately, I do not know enough about the local council support tax support scheme (other than what has been laid out in this survey) to be able to make a suggestion. However, could the backdating provisions for working age claimants be changed to 3 months (instead of the one month currently being proposed)?

Investigate fraudulent claims more thoroughly and also verify Single Person Discounts to generate additional revenue. Scrap DHPs. Stop protecting pensioners who already benefit from

generous premiums and free NHS, TV licence, bus passes and are not rigorously means tested. Reduce admin by making people apply online. Disabled applicants generally receive generous provision in PIP, ESA and non dependant allowances therefore do not need additional protection. Limit allowances for larger families e.g. three or more children. Restrict CTS for higher banded properties.
no
Not aware of anything
No
Yes
stop pensioners being protected
Chase non payers
don't know
What would be the cost to council tax payers of maintaining current rates of rebate Would accept reasonable increase to help those those in need and those unable to work through illness or in need
ALL people in Welwyn Hatfield who live in the borough, and have waste either recycled or landfill SHOULD contribute to Council tax. That means students and/or landlords should contribute. Landlords are receiving good money for their properties, do not upkeep it and students get away with murder. It is not fair that the working tax paying tenants have to keep paying. All in or all out is my moto! The same goes for all the young mother's and people on job seekers allowance - they all live and eat in the borough - they need to contribute as well. I am a single parent, low earner and have children teenage children working and at University and we have to pay- and go without at times to pay our bills!! so should everyone else.
Why should you be looking to reduce the cost of the scheme?
No
Not automatically taking people to court for Council Tax arrears but seeking to get them to submit an acceptable repayment plan.
Remove single person discount for owner-occupiers with an income over £20000 per annum including pensioners

Question 10

How do you think you will be affected by these proposals? Can you describe how they will affect you?	
Answer Options	Response Count
	29
<i>answered question</i>	29
<i>skipped question</i>	35

I probably will not be affected
i am coming on for 62 been made redundant finding it impossible to find suitable full time work so claiming JSA not something i wish to do. My retirement age has been increased by 6 years with no notice so i am not prepared for this having to use my savings which are small and disappearing fast,
I will not be affected by any of these proposals, as I do not have children, do not claim housing benefit and do not benefit from a second adult rebate.
Not at all. I don't receive CTS but feel the burden should be spread across all types of household in the borough. There may come a time when I will need assistance should my circumstances change.
no
No effect.
I will not be affected
N/A
not impacted
No

They won't affect me
I am nearer to being a pensioner than the other types of claimants.
Nil affect
no affect
Shouldn't affect me as I am an OAP
Not sure
No
not at all
They will not affect me
no effect
Not too sure.
As a person in receipt of the State Pension I frankly find it offensive when I constantly hear people wittering on about "poor old pensioners". I believe if people haven't made provision for their retirement it should not be incumbent on the rest of us to make it for them.
not affected at all
It won't affect me because I and my family pay our way. The present system is not fair and as much sympathy as I have for the pensioners, should they be continually protected when they are one of the wealthiest sections in the borough. I am all in favour of helping the real needy, but some expect too much and everyone else to pay.
Higher council tax payment
Presumably I/We would have to pay more
not at all
probably won't effect me and my family
I will not be directly affected at all.

Question 11

Do you think there are any groups of people in the community who would be affected more than others, if everyone currently in receipt of council tax support has to pay something towards their council tax? (tick one)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	39.6%	19
No	18.8%	9
Don't know	41.7%	20
If yes, who are these groups?		18
<i>answered question</i>		48
<i>skipped question</i>		16

People who over the age of 60 who have worked all there lives but been made redundant and due to there age are unable to find work, specially women over 60 who now have to work to 66 but had no notice of this so are not prepared for being in this situation
Young people who are working in low paid employment sometimes zero hours contracts and have no other means of support.
no
The disabled
Disabled
yes, pensioners and they should be affected just like other people
OAPs and others on low incomes on low incomes and many with disabilities
Disabled and vulnerable
Disabled claimants
The disabled who are elderly or unable to work
Those that don't declare earned income.
See answer 9
genuinely handicapped and long-term sick unable to work.
The poor, pensioners and single parents.

The small group of people who always seem to expect, and get, something for nothing.
The real genuine/disabled people who try to contribute but have difficulties.
Children and disabled people
Unemployed, low income families, disabled people

Question 12

If you answered yes to Q11, why do you think these groups would be affected more?	
Answer Options	Response Count
	18
<i>answered question</i>	18
<i>skipped question</i>	46

Women born in the Mid 1950's have had their pension age increased by 6 years with no warning and are now ill prepared for being out of work in their 60's having to use their savings to pay bills until they are left with none. No body will employ someone in there 60's so have no choice but to claim benifits a very degrading thing when you have been working all your life
Because they don't get any benefits for having children and are often lacking in support from family, are already disadvantaged by lower minimum wage and sometimes difficult working patterns (travel costs, lack of access etc)
no
They are the most vulnerable.
not enough consideration for a limited income
because at present they are have protection against the rules applied to working age people
insufficient incomes to cope
Any reduction in their benefits could cause them problems
Most will be unable to physically work and earn their own money
Yes, as they have no opportunity to souplike the their income in any other way.
Because their opportunity to get a free ride could be reduced.
Removal of financial cushion in very difficult tomes
Likely to need more income in a slightly inflating economy now forecast.
The system makes them more vulnerable.
Because as recipients of council services they will be obliged to make a modest contribution towards the cost of providing those services.
mental health possibly and disabled people who find life really difficult. Abled bodied individuals sometimes do not understand how easy our lives are. I have a disabled son who would just like to be "normal" like other people but daily intensive physio and medication tasks are tough and time consuming in their lives. They do not need other pressures as well.
Because they are the most vulnerable
Because they are already affected by welfare reforms which have reduced household income

Question 13

Do you have any general comments that you wish to make about these proposed changes?	
Answer Options	Response Count
	18
<i>answered question</i>	18
<i>skipped question</i>	46

While I understand the need for fiscal responsibility, I would like the council to ensure that the most vulnerable residents in Welwyn Hatfield continue to get the help they need in terms of their council tax bills
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Government are constantly protecting pensioners, some of whom are financially very comfortable, especially in Welwyn Hatfield. Why don't the council have the courage to go against this and focus on helping our young people who are struggling? If you are an owner occupier in receipt of CTS, sell your property and downsize!
no
They seem to be appropriate in the current financial climate.
no
Pensioners already penalised under present scheme, if a member of family is living with them without an income.....very nasty
As I am a sole occupier my council tax is slightly lower than a couple, hope this continues they should not go ahead. savings should be looked at elsewhere. perhaps look to see if councillors pay and expenses could be reduced.
the changes need to be considered carefully to ensure current genuine benefits are not lost.
everyone working should pay
Sympathy should be shown to those in need
No
There are too many "dependent" individuals in Hatfield at least, who have money to spend on drink and drugs but no money to contribute to rent and council tax.
They sound reasonable changes bearing in mind that money does not grow on trees and we do need to reduce spending to get rid of our Country's Debts
when you are not personally involved in receiving benefits of any kind I am not qualified to speak knowledgably about these effects
n/a
Your focus is on the admin and costs of the scheme and not on the impact it will have on real people who receive Council Tax support. Your changes will make their lives more difficult.
Given the rigour with which Council Tax Recovery pursues those with arrears it is likely that they will be pushed further into debt and may be liable to imprisonment. This is a waste of public funds when they do not have the means to pay and may result in possible eviction and homelessness applications. The net result is more administrative cost without any net gain to council finances.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING

Title	Council Tax Support Scheme Changes
Lead Officer	Farhad Cantel
Service	Client Support Services
Date Created	30 December 2015 and 2 February 2016
Review Date	

1. What is the title of policy, strategy, function, procedure or project?

Council Tax Support Scheme Changes

2. Is this a new or existing process?

Existing

3. What is the aim and key objectives of this process?

Welwyn Hatfield Council's localised council tax support scheme is based on a reduction of 25% in council tax liability whilst still protecting vulnerable groups. Our scheme fully protects pensioners and families with children under 5 and those in receipt Personal Independence Payments so that they continue to receive the same level of protection, and do not have to pay anymore council tax than they paid under the old council tax benefit system.

4. What are the main activities of this process?

The purpose of this is to make minor changes to our 2017/18 Council Tax Support Scheme. These changes involve removal of the family premium, for all new claimants; restrictions with the backdating of council tax support, for working age claimants, and the removal of second adult rebate. These proposed changes follow on from a number of welfare measures announced in the Summer Budget.

5. Who are the main stakeholders of this process (e.g. councillors, employees, residents, Housing Trust / other housing providers, police, health, etc.)?

Residents, council tax payers

6. What outcomes are wanted from the process?

Bring our local council tax support scheme in line with housing benefit regulations which will make it easier to administer and understand, rather than having to work to two different sets of rules for the same claimant, whilst continuing to protect the most vulnerable in society.

7. Are there any factors that might prevent the outcomes being achieved (e.g. funding, staffing, political, economic change)?

Funding is limited. The council has to meet the full cost of awarding this relief. There is a limited amount of funding available.

8. Describe what consultation has been undertaken on this process, who was involved and the main outcomes.

There has been public scrutiny and consultation with stakeholders, benefit claimants, major preceptors and interested parties which helped shape and devise our localised council tax reduction scheme.

9. Has any other data been used to help with the process development or review? Please outline what and how.

Information from the Department for Works and Pensions on their changes to housing benefit regulations. The family premium removal only applies to new claimants.

10. Do you consider the process could have a negative, positive or neutral / no impact on age? Why is this?

Our council tax support scheme already has a positive and negative impact on age as pensioners are protected from any reductions in their benefit. Hardship relief would be available to all claimants of council tax support should any changes have an adverse impact upon them and if someone came forward we would try to address any issues that may be raised.

11. Do you consider the process could have a negative, positive or neutral / no impact on gender? Why is this?

There is no evidence to suggest that anyone would be specifically disadvantaged due to their gender. Our software does not provide information on the sex of lone parents. However, the family premium applies to all cases that have dependent children irrespective of whether they are male or female.

I am satisfied that this process will not have a differential impact on gender. If someone came forward we would try to address any issues that may be raised.

12. Do you consider the process could have a negative, positive or neutral / no impact on sexual orientation? Why is this?

There is no evidence to suggest that anyone would be specifically disadvantaged due to their sexual orientation. I am satisfied that this process will not have a differential impact on sexual orientation. If someone came forward we would try to address any issues that may be raised.

13. Do you consider the process could have a negative, positive or neutral / no impact on race? Why is this?

There is no evidence to suggest that anyone would be specifically disadvantaged due to their race. We are trying to reach every household with our consultation survey so that we can hear from all members of our community. I am satisfied that this process will not have a differential impact on race. Any language issues would be addressed through Herts Interpretation service or language line.

14. Do you consider the process could have a negative, positive or neutral / no impact on religion / belief? Why is this?

There is no evidence to suggest that anyone would be specifically disadvantaged due to their religious belief. We are trying to reach every household with our consultation survey so that we can hear from all members of our community. I am satisfied that this process will not have a differential impact on religious beliefs. If someone came forward we would try to address any issues that may be raised.

15. Do you consider the process could have a negative, positive or neutral / no impact on disability? Why is this?

There is no evidence to suggest that anyone would be specifically disadvantaged due to their disability. I am satisfied that this process will not have a differential impact on disability. Our local council tax support scheme protects claimants with disabilities so they would continue to receive the same level of protection and support.

16. Do you consider the process could have a negative, positive or neutral / no impact on gender reassignment? Why is this?

There is no evidence to suggest that anyone would be specifically disadvantaged due to their gender reassignment. I am satisfied that this process will not have a differential impact on gender reassignment. If someone came forward we would try to address any issues that may be raised.

17. Do you consider the process could have a negative, positive or neutral / no impact on marriage / civil partnership? Why is this?

There is no evidence to suggest that anyone would be specifically disadvantaged due to their marriage/civil partnership. I am satisfied that this process will not have a differential impact on marriage/civil partnership. If someone came forward we would try to address any issues that may be raised.

18. Do you consider the process could have a negative, positive or neutral / no impact on pregnancy and maternity? Why is this?

There is no evidence to suggest that anyone would be specifically disadvantaged due to pregnancy and maternity. I am satisfied that this process will not have a differential impact on pregnancy and maternity. In December 2015 we had 690 claimants where a family premium was included in the personal allowance who were lone parents with children under 5. 488 of these still qualified for the maximum amount of council tax support based on 100% of the council tax liability as they fall into one of our under fives protected group. The figure of 690 also includes a disabled child premium and is therefore also a protected group. These cases would not receive any less council tax support despite the reduction in their family premium. If someone came forward we would try to address any issues that may be raised.

19. Please outline from the questions 10 -18 whether the proposed process either disadvantages or puts any group(s) at risk.

Our proposed changes do not put any of the above groups at risk. Vulnerable groups have been taken into account when devising our local council tax support scheme and our hardship relief scheme will act as a protection mechanism for those who may fall outside the already protected groups.

20. If, in your judgment, the proposed process has a negative impact, can this impact be justified?

Our proposed changes will not have a negative impact on any groups.

21. If the impact cannot be justified, what can be done to improve access / take up of the process or remove the risk?

N/A

22. If there is no evidence to show the process promotes equality, equal opportunity or improved relations, can it be adapted so it does?

23. Does this process need to go on to a full assessment?

No.