

Bolton Council

Report to:	Cabinet		
Date of meeting:	21 st December 2020		
Report of:	Sue Johnson, Deputy Chief Executive	Report number:	3482
Contact officer:	Phil Rimmer, AD, Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services	Telephone number	1541
Report title:	Local Council Tax Scheme 2020/21– Post Consultation Report		
Purpose:	To set out the result of consultation on proposals to review the Local Council Tax Top Slice		
Recommendations:	<p>The Cabinet is recommended, subject to the Council's approval on 17th February, 2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to increase the Local Council Tax Support top slice from 12.5% to 17.5% with effect from 1st April 2022 		
Decision:			
Background documents:	<u>NA</u>		
Appendices:	Appendix 1 Comparison of LCTS Schemes across Greater Manchester Appendix 2 Equality Impact Assessment Appendix 3 Consultation Response		
Signed:	Leader/Executive Cabinet Member	Monitoring Officer	
Date:			
Consultation with other officers			
Finance	Yes	Sue Johnson	
Legal	Yes	Helen Gorman	
HR	No	NA	
Climate Change	No	N/A	
Equality Impact Assessment required?	Yes	Ged Gallagher	
(a) Post consultation reports		Yes	
Please confirm that the consultation response has been taken into consideration in making the recommendations.			
Vision outcomes	1. Start Well		
Please identify the appropriate Vision outcome(s) that this report relates or contributes to by putting a cross in the relevant box.	2.Live Well		
	3.Age Well		
	4.Prosporous		
	5. Clean and Green		
	6.Strong and Distinctive		

1. Introduction

- 1.1** Under the Local Government Finance Act 2012 the council is required to provide a Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme that is administered locally for the residents of Bolton. This replaced a national Council Tax Benefit scheme which the council previously administered on behalf of central government.
- 1.2** The LCTS scheme is designed to provide financial support to people who are liable for council tax and meet the conditions of the scheme. The government implemented regulations that protect pension age claimants, ensuring that they continue to receive the same level of financial support that was received under the previous national Council Tax Benefit Scheme. The council has responsibility for setting out the conditions of entitlement for working age claimants in their LCTS scheme.

2. Context for change

- 2.1** With effect from 1st April 2013 the council introduced a LCTS scheme. Although this is subsidised by central government the level of subsidy that had been awarded under the previous Council Tax Benefit Scheme was reduced, leaving the council with a shortfall in budget. Since 2014/15 the amount of grant received from the government to pay for a LCTS scheme has been included within the general grant. This means that the amount the council receives to support a LCTS scheme is not specifically identified.
- 2.2** Several changes have been made to the working age LCTS scheme since its introduction in 2013. The most significant of these changes were the introduction of a 12.5% top slice of council tax liability and the reduction of the capital limit to £3000. These changes were introduced from 1st April 2017 following consideration of a range of options and a public consultation.
- 2.3** In response to the council's need to find further savings, it is proposed that the LCTS Scheme is amended with effect from 1st April 2021.

3. The current Local Council Tax Support Scheme

- 3.1** The government's prescribed LCTS scheme applies to pension age claimants who are protected under this scheme. As this is government regulated, the protection will remain a feature of any future scheme. This means that changes made by the council to the LCTS scheme apply to working age claimants only.
- 3.2** The current LCTS scheme is designed around a number of key principles:
- Support the incentive to work
 - Support the Child Poverty Agenda
 - Balance the costs of collecting additional council tax with the aim of maximising council tax income
 - Where possible reduce the administrative burden in determining entitlement to LCTS
- 3.3** Under the current LCTS scheme, pension age claimants receive a maximum of 100% of their council tax liability, subject to a means test. In comparison, working age claimants can receive a maximum of 87.5% of their council tax liability (top slice of 12.5%), subject to a means test. Currently 26,321 claimants receive support through LCTS; 9,394 are pension age and 16,927 are working age. In terms of expenditure, in 2020/21 the working age LCTS expenditure is currently £14,436,347.75. There has been an increase in the LCTS caseload from 15,901 in April 2020 to 16,927 in September 2020. If this trend continues, expenditure on CTS will rise further.

- 3.4** In addition to the support provided by the council's LCTS scheme, the government has provided additional grant funding in 2020/21 as part of its response to Covid-19. A hardship fund of £3,454,789 was awarded to the council to provide additional relief to council tax payers in receipt of working age LCTS. This funding was used to make a payment of up to £150 to each LCTS claimant to provide extra support towards their council tax bill. Part of this funding was also allocated to provide additional support through the council's LCTS discretionary reduction scheme and its Local Welfare Provision scheme. As far as we are aware, this additional funding was a one off grant and will not be available in 2021/2022.
- 3.5** The Council consulted on options to further increase the 12.5% top slice of council tax liability to either 17.5%, 20%, 22.5% or 25%. This would reduce the level of council tax liability that is used to calculate a working age customer's entitlement to LCTS and therefore reduce the amount of LCTS that they are entitled to.

4. Options for the 2021/2022 Local Council Tax Support Scheme

- 4.1** The following table sets out the options for amending the LCTS Scheme with effect from 1 April 2021 that went out to consultation

Option	Description	Annual Saving
1	17.5% top slice liability	£ 900,010.37
2	20% top slice liability	£1,344,069.77
3	22.5% top slice liability	£1,787,063.91
4	25% top slice liability	£2,229,080.17

Please note the annual savings are estimates based on the current working age LCTS scheme expenditure.

- 4.2** **Option 1** would increase the top slice liability from 12.5% to 17.5%. This will reduce the level of council tax liability that is used to calculate a working age customer's entitlement to LCTS from 87.5% to 82.5%
- 4.3** **Option 2** would increase the top slice liability from 12.5% to 20%. This will reduce the level of council tax liability that is used to calculate a working age customer's entitlement to LCTS from 87.5% to 80%.
- 4.4** **Option 3** would increase the top slice liability from 12.5% to 22.5%. This will reduce the level of council tax liability that is used to calculate a working age customer's entitlement to LCTS from 87.5% to 77.5%
- 4.5** **Option 4** would increase the top slice liability from 12.5% to 25%. This will reduce the level of council tax liability that is used to calculate a working age customer's entitlement to LCTS from 87.5% to 75%.
- 4.6** All options would lead to a decrease in the amount of LCTS that a working age claimant will receive and consequently there will be an increase in the amount they have to pay. This may impact on council tax collection levels and also increase recovery costs if recovery action has to be taken to recover the amount due.
- 4.7** The following examples demonstrate the impact the various options may have on an individual's entitlement to LCTS and consequently the amount they will have to pay.

Example 1

Lone parent with 2 dependants receiving Universal Credit with no earnings

Band A property - council tax liability with single person discount = £17.41 week / £907.70 annual bill

Current LCTS entitlement with 12.5% top slice = £15.23 per week / £794.24 annually

Total amount the customer has to pay is £2.18 per week / £113.46 annually

	Option 1 - 17.5% top slice	Option 2 - 20% top slice	Option 3 - 22.5% top slice	Option 4 - 25% top slice
New LCTS entitlement	£14.36 per week	£13.93 per week	£13.49 per week	£13.06 per week
Reduction in LCTS entitlement	£0.87 per week	£1.31 per week	£1.74 per week	£2.18 per week
Additional amount the customer would have to pay	£45.39 annually	£68.08 annually	£90.77 annually	£113.46 annually
Total amount the customer would have to pay	£158.85 annually	£181.54 annually	£204.23 annually	£226.92 annually

Example 2

Couple with 4 dependants receiving income of £510.92 week (Earnings, Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit)

Band A property - council tax liability = £23.21 week / £1210.27 annual bill

Current LCTS entitlement with 12.5% top slice = £20.31 per week / £1058.99 annually

Total amount the customer must pay is £2.90 per week / £151.28 annually

	Option 1 - 17.5% top slice	Option 2 - 20% top slice	Option 3 - 22.5% top slice	Option 4 - 25% top slice
New LCTS entitlement	£19.15 per week	£18.57 per week	£17.99 per week	£17.41 per week
Reduction in LCTS entitlement	£1.16 per week	£1.74 per week	£2.32 per week	£2.90 per week
Additional amount the customer would have to pay	£60.51 annually	£90.77 annually	£121.03 annually	£151.28 annually
Total amount the customer would have to pay	£211.79 annually	£242.05 annually	£272.31 annually	£302.56 annually

Example 3

Single claimant receiving Jobseekers Allowance Income Based

Band B property - council tax liability with single person discount = £20.31 per week / £1059.00 annual bill

Current LCTS entitlement with 12.5% top slice = £17.77 per week / £926.62 annually

Total amount the customer has to pay is £2.54 per week / £132.38 annually

	Option 1 - 17.5% top slice	Option 2 - 20% top slice	Option 3 - 22.5% top slice	Option 4 - 25% top slice
New LCTS entitlement	£16.76 per week	£16.25 per week	£15.74 per week	£15.23 per week
Weekly reduction in LCTS entitlement	£1.02 per week	£1.52 per week	£2.03 per week	£2.54 per week
Additional amount the	£52.95 annually	£79.43	£105.90	£132.38

customer would have to pay		annually	annually	annually
Total amount the customer would have to pay	£185.33 annually	£211.81 annually	£238.28 annually	£264.76 annually

Please note the amounts were calculated to six decimal places, but results are shown to two decimal places

4.8 The following tables show the additional weekly amount of council tax the customer will have to pay under each of these options, depending on the band of the property.

Option 1 increase the top slice liability from 12.5% to 17.5%.

The additional **weekly** amount they will have to pay is as follows:

	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H
Bolton - with single person discount	£0.87	£1.02	£1.16	£1.31	£1.60	£1.89	£2.18	£2.61
Bolton - full liability	£1.16	£1.35	£1.55	£1.74	£2.13	£2.51	£2.90	£3.48

Option 2 increase the top slice liability from 12.5% to 20%.

The additional **weekly** amount they will have to pay is as follows:

	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H
Bolton - with single person discount	£1.31	£1.52	£1.74	£1.96	£2.39	£2.83	£3.26	£3.92
Bolton - full liability	£1.74	£2.03	£2.32	£2.61	£3.19	£3.77	£4.35	£5.22

Option 3 increase the top slice liability from 12.5% to 22.5%.

The additional **weekly** amount they will have to pay is as follows:

	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H
Bolton - with single person discount	£1.74	£2.03	£2.32	£2.61	£3.19	£3.77	£4.35	£5.22
Bolton - full liability	£2.32	£2.71	£3.09	£3.48	£4.26	£5.03	£5.80	£6.96

Option 4 increase the top slice liability from 12.5% to 25%.

The additional **weekly** amount they will have to pay is as follows:

	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H
Bolton - with single person discount	£2.18	£2.54	£2.90	£3.26	£3.99	£4.71	£5.44	£6.53
Bolton - full liability	£2.90	£3.38	£3.87	£4.35	£5.32	£6.29	£7.25	£8.70

Please note – these calculations are based on the council tax charges for 2020/2021.

5. The Local Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Scheme

- 5.1** The council will continue to maintain a discretionary fund to provide additional support to LCTS claimants that need extra help paying their council tax or are affected by changes made to the LCTS scheme. Any additional reduction made under this scheme will be paid directly to their council tax account.
- 5.2** In terms of mitigation from an Equality Impact Assessment perspective, a discretionary fund would be seen as a positive approach to dealing with unforeseen consequences. However, it should be noted that the funds within this scheme are limited and as such may only be able to mitigate some of the impact that an increase in the top slice liability may have on working age LCTS claimants and their families.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1** Under the Equality Act 2010, the council must have due regard to:
- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
 - Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
 - Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- 6.2** It is therefore important to consider how the proposal contained within this report may positively or negatively affect this work. To support this analysis, an Equality Impact Assessment ("EIA") screening form has been completed for the proposals outlined in this report, and is attached at Appendix B.
- 6.3** The EIA looks at the anticipated (positive and/or negative) impacts of the proposal on people from Bolton's diverse communities, and whether any group (or groups) is likely to be directly or indirectly differentially affected. Due to the nature of the proposals, it is likely that there will be some adverse impact for people of working age who are in receipt of council tax support. Steps to mitigate this impact as far as possible have been identified and the EIA have been updated to take into account the results of the public consultation.

7. Consultation

- 7.1** The consultation process was an open public consultation, enabling any Bolton resident and stakeholders to make comment on the Council Tax Support Scheme using an online questionnaire (also available in hard copy). In addition, 6000 residents, in receipt of Council Tax support, were chosen at random to share their opinion on the proposals put forward to change the local Council Tax Support Scheme. A total of 355 individuals completed the survey.
- 7.2** Of the four options presented, 37% were opposed to any of the proposals put forward for an increase in the contribution to the Council Tax Support Scheme. 34% chose Option 1, to increase payments to 17.5%.
- 7.3** 36% (119) of individuals suggested alternatives to the four options outlined for consultation, with 74 respondents feeling that the current discount should not be altered. 30 respondents suggested that instead of lowering the discount, the council should make savings or obtain money from other sources, particularly from Central Government. 15 respondents suggested that residents who did not receive a discount should pay more Council Tax. 11 respondents felt that those on low income /

benefits should have no Council Tax liability or should pay less than the current 12.5% contribution. 11 respondents mentioned the effects of Covid-19.

7.4 Over 250 comments were received on the proposed options:

Option One 17.5% – 67 comments were received suggesting this was the fairest option, having the least impact on those benefiting from a discount. 13 respondents commented on the working status of those who would struggle to pay more, and 20 people said that they did not really think that the rise should be as large.

Option Two 20% - 12 respondents felt that this was the fairest, and a reasonable amount for people to contribute.

Option Three 22.5% - Only 4 respondents commented on this option, with all feeling that this was the fairest contribution for people to make.

Option Four 25% - 20 respondents felt that this option was the fairest contribution for people to make, with 15 pointing out the need to fund services. 10 felt that a 25% contribution would avoid unfair burden on those not benefitting from the discount.

None of the above – 97 respondents said that any increase would cause hardship or that people on benefits should be exempt from Council Tax. 36 respondents suggested that others should pay more Council Tax, or that money should be found elsewhere. 17 comments included the working status of those who would struggle with any increase, and 24 mentioned the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

7.5 Over two-fifths of respondents said the proposal would have a direct effect on their household, with a further 20% stating they were unsure as to the effect of the scheme. 117 people went on to describe the impact that they or those they knew would face if any of the options were implemented. Naturally, the major impact mentioned was a financial impact / hardship [95 respondents]. 17 said that they would struggle to buy food if their Council Tax discount reduced and 10 would struggle to pay utilities. A number of those who commented suffered from ill health, had a disability, were unable to work or received a low wage. Respondents worried for others, particularly children. Others were unsure if they would be affected or not, sometimes dependant on which proposal was adopted.

7.6 Over 120 respondents suggested how the Council could support them if the proposals were taken forward, although half said that this would best be done by not implementing any of the options. 22 felt that their benefits should be increased, or cost of outgoings be lowered to enable them to pay the increase Council Tax. Use of the discretionary fund was also suggested [17 respondents] and 11 people suggested offering different payment options such as weekly or monthly to allow them to budget. 12 respondents were unsure if they would need support – for some this depended on with option was approved, and 11 felt that it should be easier for more people to get help. 10 suggested that any increases be phased in

7.7 Just over one-fifth of the respondents said they were unable to work due to sickness or disability, while just under half were in some form of employment. 43% of respondents stated they had limitations based on health or disability. 47% currently received reduced council tax support and 5% of the respondents received full council tax support.

7.8 60% of respondents strongly agreed with the principle that those on the lowest incomes should be offered some protection and that a discretionary fund should be available to help the most vulnerable residents who would struggle financially.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That subject to the Council's approval on 17th February, 2021 and considering the feedback received from the consultation process, together with the recent allocation, the proposal to increase the Local Council Tax Support top slice from 12.5% to 17.5% be approved with effect from 1st April, 2022.**

Appendix A - Comparison of LCTS Schemes across Greater Manchester Authorities in relation to top slice reductions

Appendix B - Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix C – Consultation Response

Appendix 1 - Comparison of LCTS Schemes across GM Authorities in relation to top slice reductions.

Local Authority	Maximum council tax liability eligible for Local Council Tax Support
Bolton	87.5%
Bury	80% liability is capped at band B
Manchester	82.5%
Oldham	85%
Rochdale	85%
Salford	88%
Stockport	100% liability is capped to band A unless 3 or more bedrooms and then capped at band B
Tameside	75% liability is capped at band A
Trafford	100% liability is capped at band D
Wigan	80%

Please note this table only shows a comparison in relation to the limits placed on the amount of council tax liability that is used in the assessment of entitlement to LCTS. The schemes may also include a number of other differing rules which will impact on the amount of LCTS someone may receive.

Appendix 2

Equality Impact Assessment

Part 1: Screening Form

Title of report or proposal:
Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2021-2022

Department:	Chief Executives
Section/SIAP unit:	Revenues and Benefits
Date:	14 th December 2020

This report is for decision and is therefore subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. The following questions have been completed to ensure that this proposal, procedure or working practice does not discriminate against any particular social group.

Equality Impact Assessment Questions

1. Describe in summary the aims, objectives and purpose of the proposal, including desired outcomes:

The aim of this proposal is to amend the current Council Tax Support scheme to take effect from 1st April 2021.

The changes aim to achieve savings by reducing the amount of Local Council Tax Support awarded to working age claimants with effect from 1st April 2021.

Currently, 123,070 properties in the borough are charged council tax and around 26,321 of these receive financial support through Local Council Tax Support. Of these approximately 16,927 are working age and will therefore be affected by the changes proposed.

The report sets out the proposal for achieving the necessary savings, with the recommendation that Members approve an increase in the top slice for working age residents in receipt of Local Council Tax Support from 12.5% to 17.5%. The proposal, set out in Section 4 of the report, may impact on various groups in different ways, and these impacts are set out in this Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

2. In summary what are the anticipated (positive or negative) impacts of the proposal?

Context

Local Council Tax Support is currently paid to 16,927 working age individuals and families, whose personal circumstances mean that they are eligible for financial help to pay their council tax. The nature of the scheme means that it supports many people who are on low incomes and/or some who may be vulnerable due to their personal circumstances. Changes to the scheme will therefore have the potential to affect people from these groups.

It is important to stress that Bolton is committed to securing economic prosperity and narrowing the gap between the most and least well off. Protecting the most vulnerable is at the heart of this work; and this is also a central part of the way in which the council seeks to meet its duties under national equality legislation:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups of people
- Foster good relations between different groups of people

These considerations have therefore been central to the development of the proposal for Bolton's Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2021/2022, and the following principles have been used to shape the proposal:

- Subject to affordability support the incentive to work
- Subject to affordability support the Child Poverty Agenda
- Balance the costs of collecting additional Council Tax with the aim of maximising Council Tax income
- Where possible reduce the administrative burden in determining entitlement to the scheme

The proposal

The proposal for the new council tax support scheme seeks to achieve the required savings whilst limiting the impact on the most vulnerable as far as possible and practical. To support this:

- In line with national requirements, pension age claimants will be protected on the existing scheme

The proposal has been developed following modelling of financial data and claimants' circumstances.

It is important to explain that the nature of the support scheme means that there will be an adverse impact for working age customers. In the context of Covid-19 potentially increasing demand for Local Council Tax Support, wider national welfare reform, and a difficult jobs market, it is clear that outcomes for individual claimants could be very challenging. Mitigation will therefore be a key part of Bolton's local scheme, and this is discussed later in this section.

The proposal seeks to limit the scale of the impact on the most vulnerable, by continuing with the following aspects of the current scheme will continue:

- An extended payment of 4 weeks when a claimant moves off a legacy benefit into paid work continues, in order to incentivise work (this effectively extends the level of LCTS that a customer is receiving prior to starting work for a period of 4 weeks)
- Earnings disregards will remain in place to continue to provide work incentives
- Child benefit continues to be disregarded in full, in order to support the council's approach to reducing child poverty
- Disregards around certain disability benefits will continue (e.g. Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payments are currently disregarded in full), in order to mitigate the impact on those who are vulnerable as a result of their disability
- War pensions/widows' pensions continue to be disregarded in full

The proposal will make the following savings:

Description	Annual Saving
17.5% top slice liability	£ 900,010.37

Mitigation

It is recognised that the proposal set out in this report and EIA will have an impact on working age residents who are in receipt of LCTS, including families and those on low incomes. Mitigating the worst of these impacts as far as possible and practical is therefore an important consideration. While there will be some financial impact for claimants which cannot be avoided, several steps will be taken to offer support:

- The proposal seeks to protect vulnerable groups, including pensioners.
- The proposal will continue to include work incentives, for those who are able to take advantage of employment opportunities
- Effective welfare information will be central to ensuring that claimants are informed about the changes at the appropriate time; and are supported/ signposted to suitable advice and guidance if required. It is recognised that information may need to be tailored appropriately for different audiences.
- A discretionary fund will continue to be in place to help alleviate severe hardship caused by changes to the scheme.

4. With regard to the stakeholders identified above and the diversity groups set out below:

	Is there any potential for (positive or negative) differential impact?	Could this lead to adverse impact and if so what?	Can this adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group, or for any other reason?	Please detail what measures or changes you will put in place to remedy any identified adverse impact
Race	Some central and deprived wards within Bolton contain a higher proportion of BAME communities than others, so where individual households are impacted there may be some correlation between low income and ethnic group.	With the exception of the potential correlation set out in the previous column, it is hard to anticipate any direct impact due to race. The changes to the scheme will affect all working age individuals and their families from across Bolton's communities, including ethnic minority communities, who claim council tax support.	No direct adverse impact is anticipated in relation to race at this time	<p>As set out in section three, several steps will be taken to mitigate the impact of the proposal as far as possible - although it is recognised that there will be some financial impact for claimants that cannot be mitigated.</p> <p>The key steps for mitigation are set out in this column, and are relevant to all diversity groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposals seek to protect vulnerable groups, including pensioners. • The scheme will continue to include work incentives for those who are able to take advantage of employment opportunities. • The proposals have been subject to public consultation, helping to inform mitigation. • Effective welfare information will be central to ensuring that
Religion	No differential impact is anticipated in relation to religion.	No adverse impact is anticipated in relation to religion at this time	No adverse impact is anticipated in relation to religion at this time	
Disability	Customers in receipt of disability benefits will be impacted by a change to the percentage of the top slice in Council Tax liability.	Some customers may have already been affected by the introduction of Universal Credit. It is recognised that the changes to local council tax support could therefore have an additional (or cumulative) impact on some claimants who have already seen their benefits reduced.	The development of a local council tax support scheme is required under national policy. Some people who are affected by the new local scheme may also be affected by national welfare reform, but this is unfortunately unavoidable. Where possible, the local council tax support scheme has sought to offer a degree of protection to the most vulnerable.	
Gender (including gender reassignment)	No direct differential impact is anticipated in relation to gender.	No adverse impact is anticipated in relation to gender at this time	No adverse impact is anticipated in relation to gender at this time	

Age	Changes are to impact on working age claimants only. Pension age claimants will be protected under the prescribed scheme.	There will be an adverse impact for working age claimants.	The proposals protect pension age customers. However, this means that the reforms focus on the working age population, including those on low incomes and families, who will be asked to pay more towards their council tax and will therefore have less disposable income.	<p>claimants are informed about the changes at the appropriate time; and are supported/ signposted to suitable advice and guidance if required. It is recognised that information may need to be tailored appropriately for different audiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A discretionary fund will be provided to help alleviate severe hardship caused by changes to the scheme.
Sexuality	No differential impact is anticipated in relation to sexuality.	No adverse impact is anticipated in relation to sexuality at this time	No adverse impact is anticipated in relation to sexuality at this time	
Caring status (including pregnancy & maternity)	There are generally a larger proportion of women with caring responsibilities than men, meaning that women may be particularly affected by these changes. However, the child benefit disregard offers a degree of protection to families with young children.	For people with caring responsibilities, taking advantage of the work incentives built into the scheme may not be a viable option, meaning that they may feel a greater financial impact than someone who is able to take advantage of a work incentive.	<p>As with all these proposals there is a balance to be found between the savings to be made and the impact on customers, and the proposals seek to protect the most vulnerable as far as possible.</p> <p>It will be important to ensure that, as with all claimants, those who care for children and/or adults are effectively informed of the changes to the scheme and how they will be affected.</p>	
Marriage and civil partnership	No differential impact is anticipated in relation to marriage and civil partnership.	No adverse impact is anticipated in relation to marriage and civil partnership at this time	No adverse impact is anticipated in relation to marriage and civil partnership at this time	
Socio-economic	There will be a negative impact on those customers who are already on low incomes and who will be expected to pay more of their income towards council tax under	<p>There will be an adverse financial impact for all affected if they have to pay more Council Tax as a result of the changes.</p> <p>A decrease in disposable income</p>	The council tax support scheme provides financial assistance to people whose circumstances mean they are eligible for support in paying their council tax. By its nature, this includes people who are on low incomes, and it is therefore	

	<p>the new scheme.</p> <p>There is likely to be some impact in the more deprived areas of the borough where it is more likely for families who are on low incomes (and therefore who are most likely to be claiming council tax support) to live.</p>	<p>within any area of the borough could have some impact on the viability of local shops or businesses.</p>	<p>impossible to reform the scheme without having some effect on those who may be socio-economically deprived. As explained throughout this EIA, steps have been taken to protect the most financially vulnerable as far as possible, in the development of the proposed new scheme.</p>	
<p>Other comments or issues</p>	<p>As the scheme is new there is potential for all groups to not understand the changes and how they impact on them individually. Timely and effective information, advice and guidance will therefore be essential in making sure that claimants understand what the changes mean for them, and where they can go for support.</p> <p>To key areas of feedback from the consultation was the need to maintain a discretionary fund and the ability to be able to access a range of payment arrangements. This this has been included in the mitigation.</p> <p>The impact of the change has also been mitigated by the proposal to implement a 17.5% top slice as opposed to 20%, 22.5% or 25%.</p>			
<p>Please provide a list of the evidence used to inform this EIA, such as the results of consultation, service take-up, service monitoring, surveys, stakeholder comments and complaints where appropriate.</p> <p>If you have undertaken consultation as part of the proposal, the consultation manager will upload it on to the corporate database.</p>				<p><i>Evidence used:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government guidance • Detailed modelling based on financial information and claimants' circumstances, using in house & Capita modelling tools • Results of the public consultation – the response can be found at Appendix 3.

5.a Are there any gaps in your evidence or conclusions that make it difficult for you to quantify the potential adverse impact?

No

5.b If so, please explain how you will explore the proposal in greater depth or please explain why no further action is required at this time.

This EIA form and report has been checked and countersigned by the Departmental Equalities Officer before proceeding to Executive Member(s)

Please confirm the outcome of this EIA:

No major impact identified, therefore no major changes required – proceed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adjustments to remove barriers / promote equality (mitigate impact) have been identified – proceed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Continue despite having identified potential for adverse impact/missed opportunities for promoting equality – this requires a strong justification	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Stop and rethink - the EIA identifies actual or potential unlawful discrimination	<input type="checkbox"/>

Report Officer

Name: Phil Rimmer

Signature:

Phil Rimmer

Date and Contact No:

14th December, 01204 331541

Departmental Equalities Lead Officer

Name: Ged Gallagher

Signature:

Ged Gallagher

Date and Contact No:

14th December

Appendix 3 – Consultation Response

1. Background

The consultation period ran for six weeks from Friday 30th October 2020 to Friday 11th December 2020. The purpose of the consultation was to ascertain the impact of the proposed changes to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

2. Methodology

The consultation process was an open, public consultation, enabling any Bolton resident or stakeholder the opportunity to comment on the Council Tax Support Scheme. The rationale for choosing an open, public consultation, was to enable those that may be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, but currently not in receipt of Council Tax support, the opportunity to be consulted with. Participants were surveyed using a questionnaire tool made up of open and closed questions, over a period of six weeks, providing the respondents the opportunity to reflect and share their thoughts on the proposals.

The consultation was made available both digitally and offline, with the questionnaire being accessible on the council's consultation web page, as well as in hard copy format, on request. A communication plan was also implemented to raise awareness of the consultation across the borough, with the aim of raising engagement with residents and stakeholders most impacted. Engagement was monitored throughout the period for inclusivity.

In addition, a sample of 6000 people in receipt of Council Tax support, was randomly chosen in a ratio proportionate to the full sample of:

- 70 % (4200) working aged residents in receipt of Council Tax Support
- 10% (600) pension aged residents in receipt of Council Tax Support
- 20% (1200) residents not in receipt of Council Tax Support

*A copy of the questionnaire used is included at the end of this document.

3. Comments

A number of open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire to give respondents the opportunity to comment on the proposals, explain how they would be affected by them and suggest mitigation.

- Comments have been categorised where appropriate. Unless otherwise stated, only categories with 10 or more responses are shown.
- Sample quotes are given verbatim

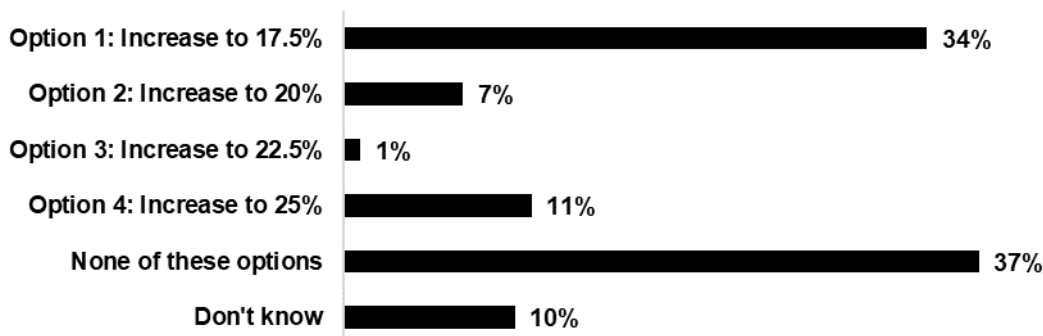
4. Number of respondents

343 responses were submitted using the online survey (97%)

12 responses were submitted via postal survey (3%)

5. Preferred option

Of the four options presented 37% were opposed to any of the proposals put forward for an increase in the contribution to the Council Tax Support Scheme. 34% chose Option 1, to increase payments to 17.5%.



Where individuals were opposed to any of the proposals, 119 comments were received offering alternative responses. The table below outlines the key issues and concerns.

Rank	Q1a Categorised comments	No. of respondents
1	No increase	74
2	Reduce outgoings / increase non-CT revenue	30
3	Raise CT for others	15
4=	Mentioned Covid-19	11
4=	Reduce to zero / lower current level	11

Q1a Key issues / concerns

1: No increase

Respondents felt that the discount should not decrease, but be maintained at 12.5%.

- *It's too high I will struggle with option one*
- *How about not increasing the burden on the poorest in society at all?*
- *No cuts to this type of assistance.*
- *No increase how can we afford*
- *No change necessary*
- *Stop increasing it should be the lowest it can be no increase*
- *People who are generally struggling through no fault of their own should get no increase. I understand C/T needs to be paid from all households, but increase, no matter how small, is still an increase to those already struggling.*
- *Keep it as it currently stands to avoid further financial disruption to the most financially vulnerable*
- *I don't agree with an increase for those with low income as this would put further financial burden at an already difficult time and would cause potential for reliance on things like food banks.*
- *Freeze*

2: Reduce outgoings / increase non-CT revenue

Respondents suggested that the council could make savings in other areas, or bring in additional revenue, especially from central Government.

- *Perhaps the council itself could stop being profligate*
- *Look at the money that the council waste every year*
- *Get central Government to properly fund Local Authorities. Enough is enough*
- *Funding should come from central government not households.*
- *Reduce the waste of council spending and give incentives to entrepreneurs to take over empty retail premises ...Also actively chasing up defaulters.*
- *Look inwardly to make greater savings, maybe the councillors could take a pay cut to fund this?*

3: Raise CT for others

Respondents felt that other people with a larger income or savings should bear more of the CT burden.

- *Increase higher band council taxes*
- *Do a percentage increase on higher bands*

- *Increase the tax bands higher up.*
- *Increase council tax on high end houses such as those in Heaton and Westhoughton*
- *Taxing the rich, proportionally, and fairly*

4=: Mentioned Covid-19

The effect of the pandemic on people's income and expenditure was cited by some respondents as a reason for not making changes.

- *Many people have really struggled during the pandemic. The "lucky" ones have been surviving on furlough, others have lost their job. Unemployed people are in a much bigger pool fighting for a smaller number of jobs. We have seen a huge increase of people using food banks. Life is grim for many people in Bolton. To add to their worries by increasing council tax seems draconian and I am afraid would lead to more suicides.*
- *Increases in taxation should not be taken from people on low incomes who are struggling, through no fault of their own, from the effects of the pandemic. Bolton has been hit harder than most places.*
- *Any increase needs to be delayed until after the pandemic.*

4=: Reduce to zero / lower current level

Respondents felt that people on low income / benefits should not have to pay any Council Tax, or should pay less than 12.5%.

- *Reduce the amount paid to zero..*
- *Reverse the support back to full council tax benefits for people on benefits*
- *Should not pay if not employed*

Respondents were given the opportunity to comment and why they had chosen their preferred option. Over 250 comments were received and coded, however those answering 'Don't know' are not included in the following analysis

Option one – increase to 17.5%

Rank	Q2 Option 1 Categorised comment	No. of respondents
1	Fairest / least impact	67
2	Working status	13
3	Shouldn't increase at all / by this much	10

Q2 Option 1 - Key issues / concerns

1: Fairest / least impact

Respondents felt that this was the most reasonable rise, which some could afford.

- *People who are on a low income already struggle to pay bills. If they increase the council tax by more than 10%. People will be suffering more financial difficulties.*
- *Please consider why we get this support ie, very low income. Anything above option 2 and we would feel the pinch as I'm sure many other households would also.*
- *Option one was the smallest increase to choose. It would be difficult to ask people to pay more in these financially difficult times.*
- *An increase of 5% in the current market conditions seems to be more than fair. The majority of benefit claimants will not see an increase of 5% in the value of their benefits*
- *Anyone like me who has £129 a week in benefits, used for electric/gas, clothing, shopping, internet and other such requirements can afford to pay an extra £2.90 a week.*
- *Seems the fairest to everyone*
- *If people are currently needing support any increase will be difficult to cope with so the lowest option is the most feasible*
- *Increasing the tax by too much too quickly will affect the most vulnerable taxpayers negatively.*
- *Most affordable for low-income households.*
- *More likely people would pay the smallest increase, it would be more difficult to find a larger amount.*

2: Working status

- *A lot of people have lost their jobs. So, while there should be an increase, it shouldn't be a large one.*
- *Cheapest, and paying council tax if you're still working age is fine, but a lot of people like myself are too ill to work*
- *People will be suffering more financial difficulties. Especially more so with what is happening with job losses*
- *I'm about to lose my job, possibly my home, and we are not eligible for any benefits*

3: Shouldn't increase at all / by this much

Respondents had chosen option one as the lowest rise, but would prefer that it was not implemented.

- *I don't agree with the increase at all. You are punishing the most vulnerable people to keep votes from people who are better off in society.*
- *There is no option not to raise*
- *I'd say don't increase anything, but you seem to have decided upon this - personally I feel this is the wrong time to be putting any extra pressure on people*
- *Cost of living has already risen beyond people pay grade, the whole of Bolton has got even worse and fees should not be rising*

Option two – Increase to 20%

Rank	Q2 – option 2 Categorised comment	No. of respondents
1	Fairest / reasonable contribution	12

Q2 – option 2

Key issues / concerns

1: Fairest / reasonable amount

Respondents felt that this was a fair amount for people to pay, and a good discount off the amount that was due.

- *I have chosen this option as it is not a large increase in the amount payable. It would be a fifth of the full bill total, which isn't a great amount in comparison to the services received.*
- *This is a realistic expectation and is affordable without having to radically replan the monthly budget.*
- *this is a fair amount taking into consideration Bolton Council's current financial circumstances*
- *I have chosen this option as I feel that the current discount of 87.5% is too much, although any increase must be sympathetically applied and be dependent upon individual circumstances.*

Option three – increase to 22.5%

Only four comments were received regarding this option, with all feeling this was the fairest increase “Seems a reasonable increase, especially in lower band properties”.

Option four – increase to 25%

Rank	Q2 Option 4 Categorised comment	No. of respondents
1	Fairest / reasonable contribution	20
2	Need to fund services	15
3	Avoids excessive burden on other residents	10

Q2 Option 4

Key issues / concerns

1. Fairest / reasonable contribution

Respondents felt that a 75% discount was generous, and affordable.

- *I have to pay full tax. I get no concessions.*
- *A 75% discount is extremely generous*
- *It seems a proportionate increase without over penalising but right the council should increase its baseline.*
- *Enough benefits are paid to cope with this minimal increase.*
- *Not huge amount increase per week I don't think and there is still a big discount despite the increase*
- *An increase of £2.90 per week on a band a home appears to be easily achieved*

2: Need to fund services

Services provided to help the vulnerable needed to be funded.

- *Everyone should have to contribute a fair amount of council tax in order for the council to provide all the services that the Borough needs.*
- *People are using the services that the money goes to, so contributing more should ensure the services are still offered*
- *Everyone should have to contribute a fair amount of council tax in order for the council to provide all the services that the Borough needs.*
- *All households in the borough need to pay for the services provided and not just people who are in gainful employment.*

3: Avoids excessive burden on other residents

Respondents felt that those who did not qualify for a discount were often struggling too, or that many who got a discount could afford to contribute more.

- *It is an increasing burden for residents who pay the full amount. Most of these recipients who claim Council Tax Support CAN afford to pay. If they can afford an expensive car then make them pay. Many who pay the full amount are going without*
- *Increasing the contribution to 25% for those needing support will also hopefully mean that those having to pay their full Council Tax bill will have to subsidise to a lesser extent those who pay reduced amounts.*
- *Having tried to ask for help with my council tax bill due to spouse having stage 4 cancer and me being out of work was told no chance as I had more than 3000 pounds savings. As c/tax will increase in the present climate I do not think it's fair that I will struggle to pay the extra when I tried to save during my spouse cancer treatment, even sold the car, yet I see neighbours with new cars and living on council handouts who will in effect pay less.*

None of the above

Rank	Q2 None of the above Categorised comment	No. of respondents
1	Increase will cause hardship / shouldn't pay anything	97
2	Others should pay more / fund elsewhere	36
3	Mentioned Covid-19	24
4	Mentioned working status	17

Q2 None of the above Key issues / concerns

1: Increase will cause hardship / shouldn't pay anything

Respondents felt that any increase was unfair, or that the amount paid should decrease

- *Anyone on benefits shouldn't have to take any money out of there limited funds to fund failing council*
- *The poorest in the Borough cannot afford an increase.*
- *Because poverty is already too high in the borough and reducing the most financially vulnerable people's financial support will have severe effects on the already struggling community.*
- *Council tax is enough as it is*
- *To make people poorer is immoral*
- *People on poverty wages will struggle where every penny counts*
- *People on low incomes are already suffering hardship, and increasing Council Tax contributions would make their situation worse*
- *Even the smallest increase would mean an increase of £1.16 per week, which is a significant amount for anyone on a low income*
- *Don't see much point in a country that doesn't support the least well off to have a decent standard of living*
- *Don't agree with charging more those people who can least afford it. I don't understand what the case is for doing this*

2: Others should pay more / fund elsewhere

Any increased funding should be sought elsewhere, such as from central Government or savings, or by raising Council Tax for those who do not receive a discount.

- *Tax those in the higher bands more*
- *Rich individuals and companies have massively increased their wealth. But it is*

ordinary people who have been paying and are being asked to pay now.

- Why make those without income have their payment increased while the working don't get an increase*
- Banding system is in need of revision to make the charges more fair and equitable.*
- Focus on further taxes for the highest earners instead of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.*
- Time to tell this government we demand better funding for local authorities and we aren't fighting each other for scraps*
- Why are you punishing the poor and not taxing the rich?*
- Maybe you should look inwardly for cost savings*

3: Mentioned Covid-19

- Many people are struggling because of the Corona virus.*
- Due to current Covid conditions with no improvement in sight adopting changes by Apr 2021 is not feasible*
- In an "unprecedented national emergency" Central Government is responsible for proper funding.*
- people in this town who are facing worse hardships than they already were because of Covid 19 should not be penalised but supported*
- The vulnerable and low income family's are already suffering due to the pandemic, the North are treated with contempt by this government. Bolton Council need to look after its residents.*

4: Mentioned working status

- Many working families are struggling already*
- Anyone can hit hard times particularly now when we are going to face mass redundancies*
- If they are on benefits or not working, then they would not be able to afford additional coats*
- I understand financially councils are suffering, but families and especially single households have taken pay drops & part-time work.*

6. Impact of the proposals

Residents were asked to explain the impact of the proposals on them and their household. 42% of respondents stated they would be impacted by any proposal being implemented, 20% of respondents were unsure. 117 individuals chose comment on how the proposals would impact them.

Rank	Categorised comment	No. of respondents
1	Financial / hardship	95
2	Struggle to buy food	17
3	Mentioned disability / illness	15
4	Mentioned employment status	14
5	Not sure if will be affected	11
6	Worries for others	11
7	Struggle to pay utilities	10

Key issues / concerns raised in consultation

1: Financial / hardship

The majority of comments were around the financial difficulties that respondents felt they would suffer should any of the options be approved.

- *I'll have to find an extra amount of money that I don't have. We already struggle to afford it every month.*
- *It's hard to live off with what we receive anyway with bills and everyday living*
- *Will be further into debt as our income will be effectively reduced.*
- *Will have to pay more which I will struggle to pay*
- *Already struggling on a low income and any increase will have a detrimental impact*
- *I have a hard time making my money last me I will not be able to afford the money to pay it they don't care about us and just take take take.*
- *Even less to live on....*
- *Pay more and get less*
- *Always affected as it's a mockery of a bill*
- *Have to pay more council tax and make cuts elsewhere.*
- *I will struggle paying any increase as I only receive universal credit*

2: Struggle to buy food

Respondents specifically mentioned that they or others would find it difficult to afford food should the Council Tax discount reduce.

- *We are already struggling to feed our families.*
- *We will have to choose between food and paying our household bills*
- *Will have to make cutbacks on what we eat and spend if the Council Tax rises.*
- *If we have to pay more were going to have to get in touch with a food bank as money is already tight*

- *Reliance on food banks will be required*
- *Will have less money to feed and clothe my children*
- *Can't afford it ...as also other things eg food price has also going up...important to feed the kids first*

3: Mentioned disability / illness

- *We pay 12.5% at moment so we will have to pay more and we are both disabled*
- *Any increase will affect my health and wellbeing*
- *Any more than option 1 will add financial difficulty and impact our mental health.*
- *I know people who will be affected especially ...those with severe disabilities*

4: Mentioned employment status

- *I served 17 years on submarines in the royal navy. Our conservative Government made a lot and only those on the good pension redundant ... now unemployed and financially ruined*
- *It's already a struggle to manage financially on PIP because I am no longer able to work.*
- *Am back in a job but taken a drop in wages, rather than be unemployed.*
- *I am a low paid single mother*

5: Not sure if will be affected

Respondents did not understand how they would be affected or said this was dependant on which option was approved or if their circumstances changed.

- *In mixed household of working age and pension age so unsure if effected*
- *Don't know if I will be made redundant*
- *Will have to wait for the outcome to see how much I will be affected*

6: Worries for others

Respondents were concerned that others would struggle.

- *It will not only affect me but also affect thousands of people in our town. Fundamentally, people will be worse off.*
- *I want people who need help they will get it.*
- *Don't agree with cutting support for people.*
- *Get asked a lot to help people near me who run out of money*

7: – Struggle to pay utilities

Respondents would struggle to pay utility bills and might need to cut down on heating to save money.

- *Probably sacrifice something like electric to pay the extra. In the winter months this would be difficult as I am in an all-electric property that uses approx. £6 a day which i struggle to afford at the best of times.*

- *It's quite simple, to pay this tax from benefits will mean using money from ... heating budget.*
- *At the movement our income is low and we still have to pay all the bills, such as electricity, gas, water etc.*

7. Support

Respondents were asked to comment on what support they may need during the transition period of any proposal being implemented. 125 individuals chose to comment.

Rank	Categorised comment	No. of respondents
1	Don't implement / raise other revenue / make savings	61
2	Increase benefits / reduce other costs	22
3	Utilise discretionary fund	17
4	Unsure if will need support	12
5=	Protect more categories of people	11
5=	Payment arrangements	11
7	Phase in	10

Key issues / concerns

1: Don't implement / raise other revenue / make savings

Respondents felt that the options should not be implanted. Instead, savings could be made, or money obtained from other sources such as central Government.

- *Don't increase it!!!! I am struggling to pay what I am being asked to as it is!!!*
- *Reverse the decision.*
- *Don't increase the council tax*
- *Leave things as they are or reduce the contribution to zero.*
- *Tax the rich!*
- *Relentlessly hound the government to properly fund local government.*
- *Create a cross party coalition within Bolton alongside other councils to demand that central government stops giving unnecessary benefit to Supermarket Chains, who have seen their sales rocket and instead funnels that money towards local authorities*
- *Don't cut their support in the first place. It's a disgrace making people beg for scraps*

- *Just don't reduce the discounts to those who have it. Many are already having to decide between food or bills; where are they going to get the money from. Reducing discounts would be cruel and would show how out of touch you are with the population of Bolton.*
- *It is crucial that this proposal is not carried out, it is just the beginning of the end for claimants who need help otherwise they would not claim. The question asked is very nicely worded, but no support through the change will make things better in the future it will make this more difficult. This I'm sure the council has every knowledge of.*

2: Increase benefits / reduce other costs

Respondents suggested that benefits be increased, so that people could afford to pay the Council Tax increase, or that their other costs could be reduced in some way.

- *Increase universal credit or keep the £20 a week extra given to us due to Covid a permanent feature.*
- *Increase another benefit so I can afford to pay the increase*
- *I would you to help me to get school close to house, then I can pay that money to council tax instead of paying for taxi.*
- *Remove bedroom tax*
- *Support would be needed in forms of food and heating grants to bring the income back up to what the government say a family is legally required to live on*
- *Give me my benefits back*

3: Utilise discretionary fund

Greater access to the discretionary fund may be required.

- *Please help me pay it*
- *Have a separate fund to help those most in need*
- *Support with paying towards the change*
- *Offer support that is proportionate to need.*
- *Receiving the council tax hardship fund was a huge help*
- *It'd help to know that there was a fund available to cover any potential shortfalls. I think I'll cope with Option 1, but I'm looking further into the future too.*

4: Unsure if will need support

This largely depended on people's circumstances at the time any increase was actioned.

- *Have to see at the time.*
- *We are currently suffering financial difficulties due to coronavirus lockdowns during which our business has been severely impacted and we have been unable to take a wage. Hopefully the situation will have improved by the time these changes are*

implemented but if not, we will need to look at whatever help is available.

- If the increase is small then no help would be required, however if it is a substantial increase, I wouldn't be able to afford it so not sure what support would be needed.*
- depending on government ability to increase prosperity for the country.*

5=: Protect more categories of people

Respondents felt that more groups should receive the discount or discretionary funding, and that it should be easier to claim

- More support for JSA and UC people.*
- Make it easy to request additional support - e.g., through a simple tick box, and not through a further application process.*
- Apply other discretionary discounts but must be long term or permanent*
- Tried to get support was told no chance due to small savings*

5=: Payment arrangements

Respondents would find it easier to budget if they could pay more frequently or had more time to pay.

- Set up better payment plans/options*
- Offer a way for payments to be made weekly or send out more information on money management/courses.*
- 12 months instead of 10 months*
- Direct debit, every 2 weeks*

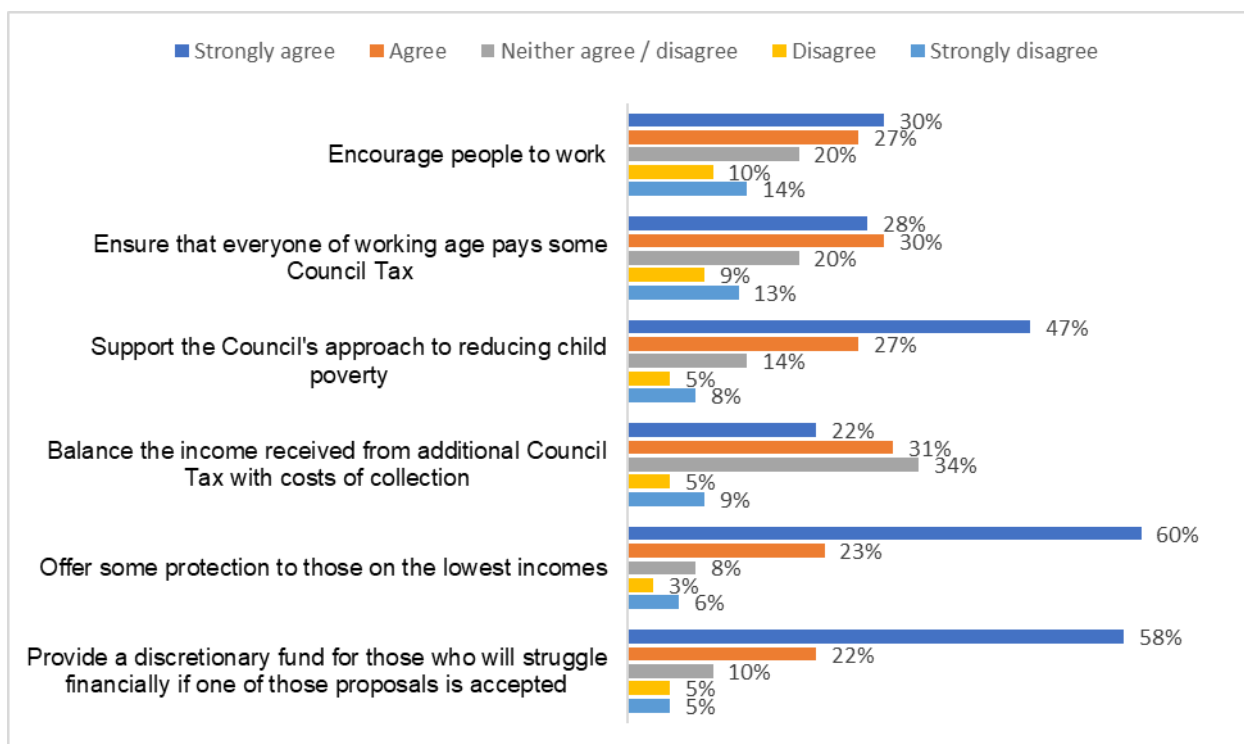
7: Phase in

Some respondents would be helped if the increase were brought in gradually, rather than all at once.

- Stagger the change*
- Plenty of notice beforehand*
- Introducing it gradually, a small amount over say, 12 months. This way there is no sudden change to tight household budgets, allowing for budgets to be gradually adapted over the time period.*
- Be given time to adjust my tight finances to fit in with the increase*

8. The principles

When designing the local scheme, a number of principles have been developed, aimed at minimising the impact, but set against the context of reduced funding. Residents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the principles. The table below shows the breakdown for each principle.



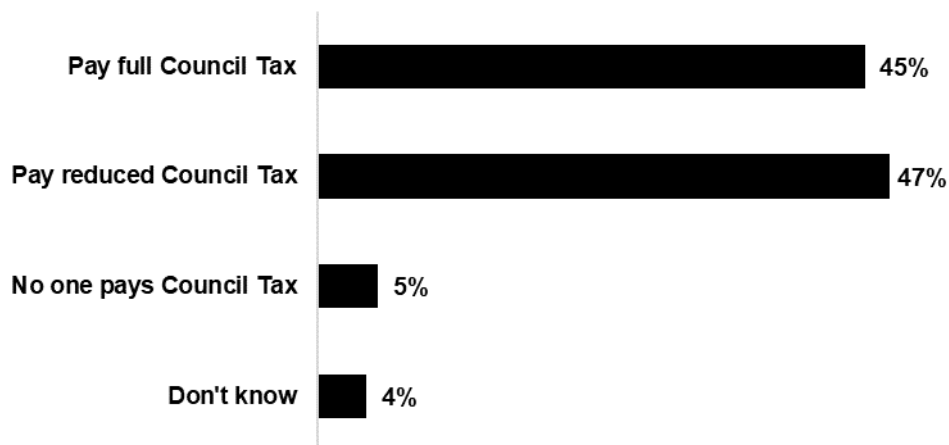
Strongest support amongst respondents was for the principle that offer some protection to those on the lowest incomes and to provide a discretionary fund for those who will struggle financially. Least support was for the principle to balance the income received from additional Council Tax with costs of collection.

9. Respondent profile

So that we can understand how the proposals impact on different people, residents were asked to answer a number of questions about their personal circumstances. Of the 342 responses, 3 were completed by an organisation and 3 by a Councillor or Elected Member.

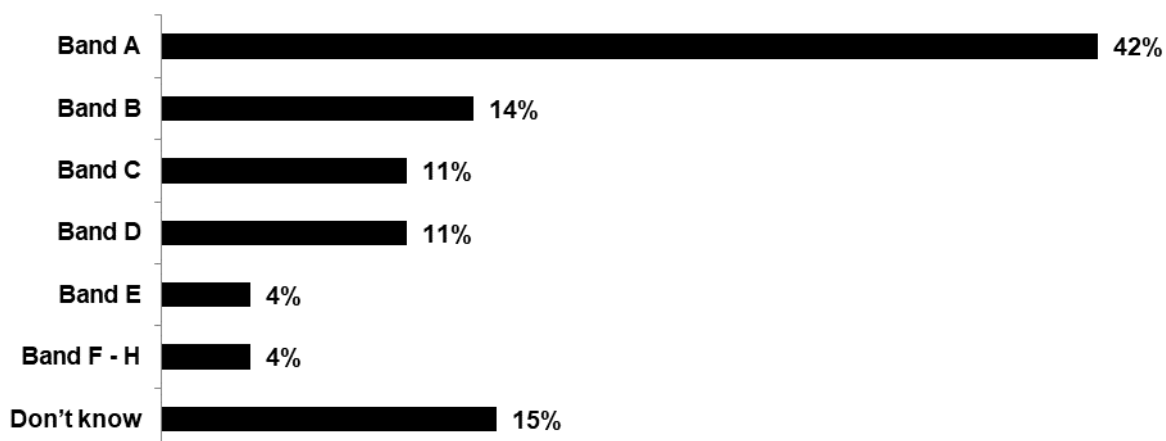
In receipt of Council Tax support from Bolton Council

Residents were asked whether they currently receive Council Tax support. The majority of respondents, 154, said they currently receive reduced Council Tax support and 15 of the respondents received full Council Tax support. 45% (147) said they paid full Council Tax and 12 individuals were unsure.



Council Tax band

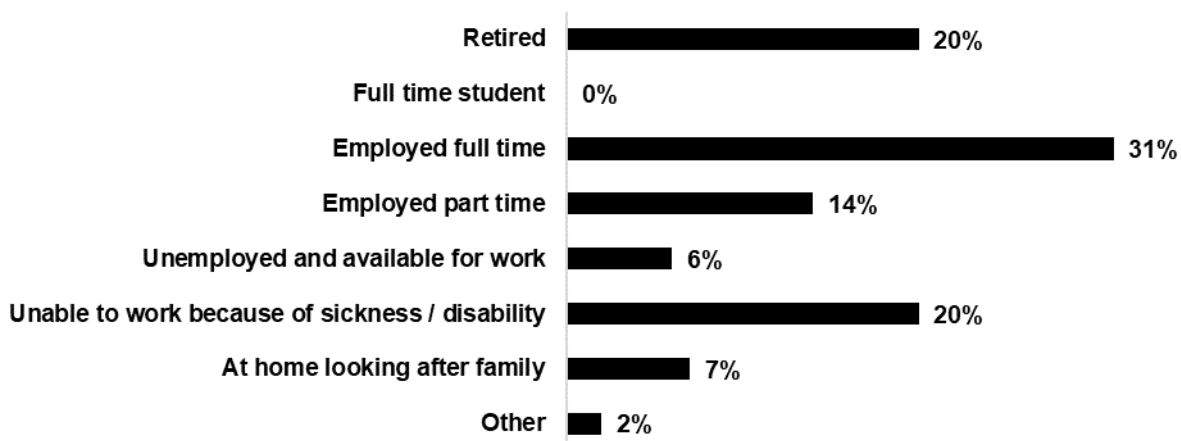
Residents were asked which Council Tax band their homes fall into:



42% of the respondents said they live in a Band A house, 15% said they did not know what band their house was in.

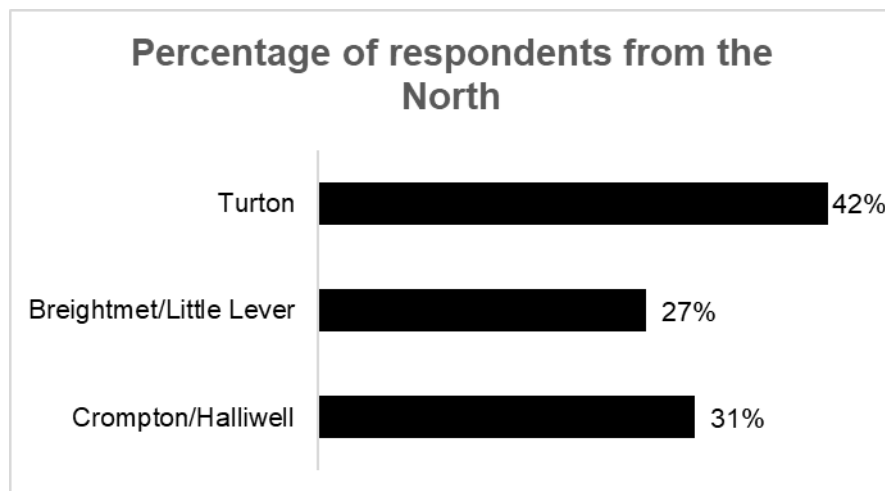
Employment status

45% of respondents were in some form of employment. One-fifth of respondents state they are unable to work because of sickness or disability. 'Other' responses include those who are self-employed or have stopped work due to Covid-19.



Location

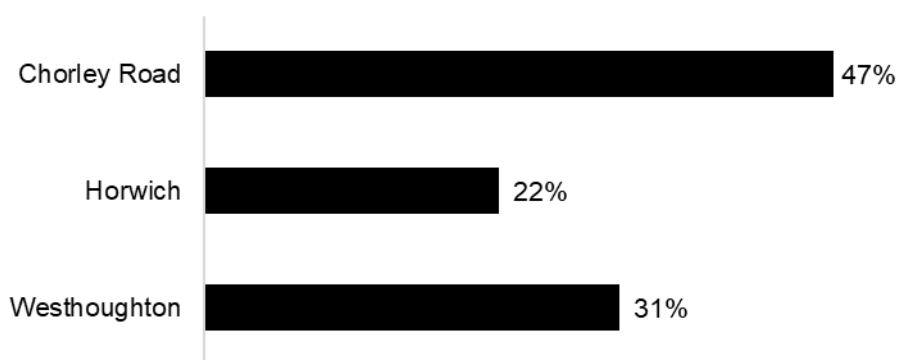
The tables below show the demographics of respondents by geographical neighbourhoods, broken down into districts. A total of 191 respondents provided their full postcode; 34% of respondents were from the North, 23% were from the South and 43% were from the West.



Percentage of respondents from the South

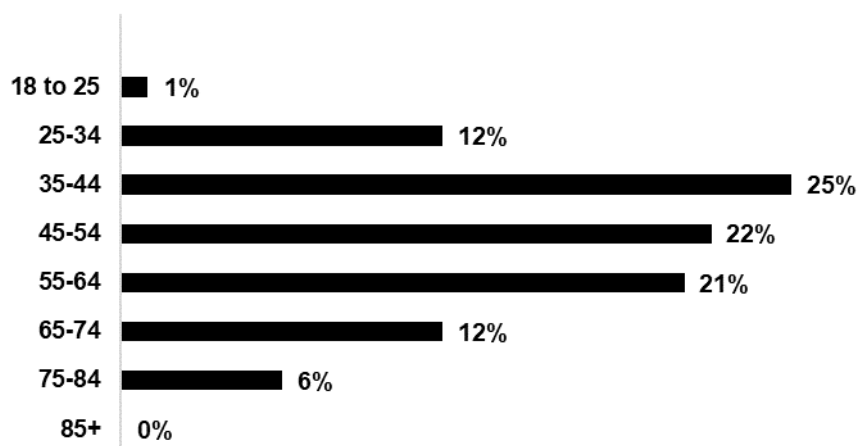


Percentage of respondents from the West



Age

263 (81%) of respondents to the survey were between the age of 25 and 64.

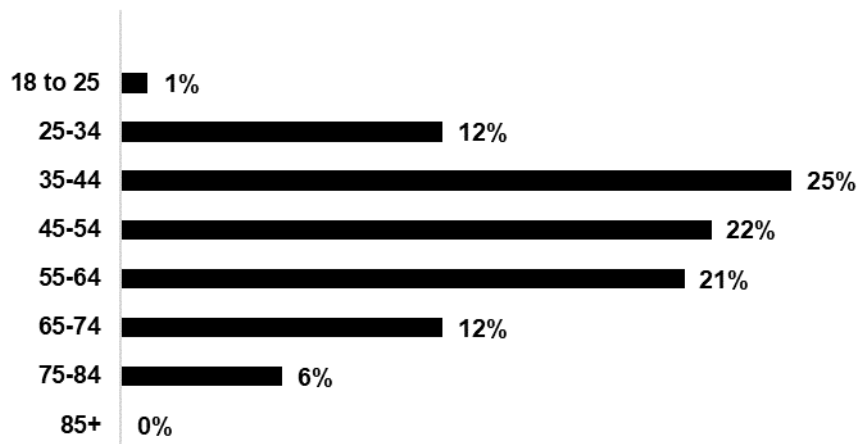
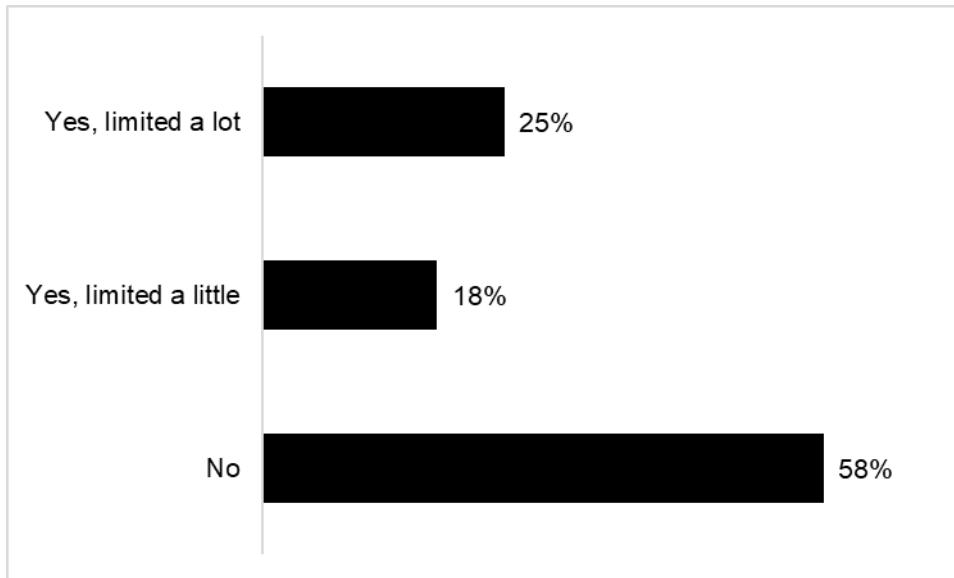


Gender

53% of respondents are female, 44% are male 2% reported as 'other'.

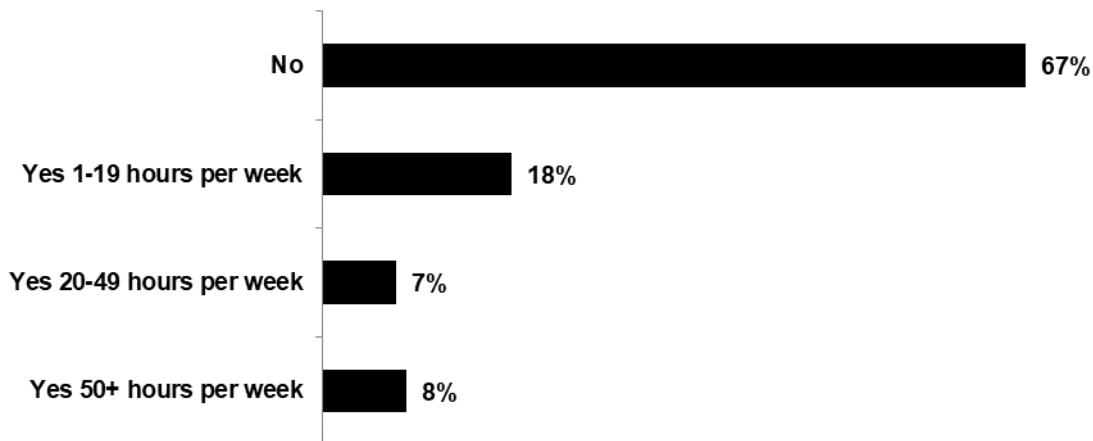
Health problem / disability

Residents were asked if their day-to-day activities were limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted or expected to last, at least 12 months. Over two-fifths of the respondents said their day-to-day activities were limited due to a health or disability problem. 25% of respondents said that they were limited a lot.



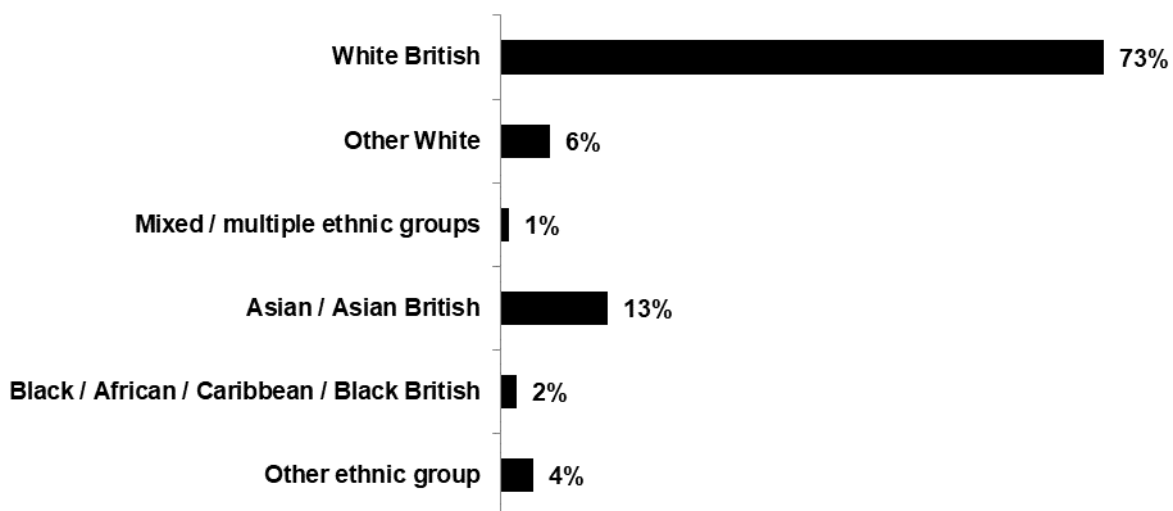
Caring Status

Residents were asked if they looked after, or gave help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of a long-term physical or mental health / disability or problems due to old age. One-third of respondents had caring responsibilities.



Ethnic origin

Residents were asked to state their ethnic origin. Over one-quarter of all respondents stated their ethnicity as other than White British.



10 Conclusions

Questionnaires were sent to a sample of 6,000 residents in receipt of Council Tax Support, to ask their opinion on the proposals put forward to change the Council Tax Support Scheme. In addition, a further communication plan was implemented to seek the views of residents across the borough. A total of 355 completed survey forms were received, with over one-quarter of respondents being from black and minority ethnic communities.

Of the surveys completed, just under half were of respondents were in either full or part-time employment, with a further 20% being unable to work due to sickness or disability. From the

Option 1

Would increase the household bill from 12.5% to 17.5% of total Council Tax rating for the property. On a Band A home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£4.06** a week, an increase of **£1.16** a week. On a Band H home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£12.19** a week, an increase of **£3.48** a week.

Option 2

Would increase the household bill from 12.5% to 20% of total Council Tax rating for the property. On a Band A home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£4.64** a week, an increase of **£1.74** a week. On a Band H home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£13.93** a week, an increase of **£5.22** a week.

Option 3

Would increase the household bill from 12.5% to 22.5% of total Council Tax rating for the property. On a Band A home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£5.22** a week, an increase of **£2.32** a week. On a Band H home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£15.67** a week, an increase of **£6.96** a week.

Option 4

Would increase the household bill from 12.5% to 25% of total Council Tax rating for the property. On a Band A home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£5.80** a week, an increase of **£2.90** a week. On a Band H home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£17.41** a week, an increase of **£8.70** a week.

Your preferred option

Q1 Which of the four options should the Council adopt?

- ☐ Option one - increase Council Tax contribution to 17.5%
- ☐ Option two - increase Council Tax contribution to 20%
- ☐ Option three - increase Council Tax contribution to 22.5%
- ☐ Option four - increase Council Tax contribution to 25%
- ☐ None of these options - please give an alternative below
- ☐ Don't know

If 'None of these options' what alternative do you propose?

Q2 Why have you chosen this option?

42% stated that the implementation of any of the proposals would have implications for their households, with one-fifth being unsure what impact the proposals would have. The most common impact was naturally a financial one, with some predicting hardship, struggles to buy food and pay utilities.

Of those who commented on the support that they would need, most felt that the best support would be not to implement any of the options, raising money from other sources or by savings.

60% went to agree with the principle that there should be protection for those on the lowest incomes, with the least popular principle being to balance the income received from additional Council Tax with costs of collection.

Council tax support review 2020

Local Council Tax Support is currently given to around 30,000 individuals and families in the borough, whose personal circumstances mean that they are eligible for financial help to pay their council tax.

In response to reductions in Local Government funding and the council's need to find further savings it is proposed that the Local Council Tax Support Scheme is amended from 1st April 2021.

This questionnaire sets out the proposals and asks for your views, which will be considered by the Council's Cabinet who will make the final decision on which option, if any, should be adopted.

Your responses

Your responses will be anonymised, and no individual will be identified in any report.

Any personal data you provide will be held securely in line with our retention schedule and privacy policy, which can be found here:

www.bolton.gov.uk/data-protection-freedom-information/privacy-notice

What will not change

In order to protect the most vulnerable the following will not change:

- In line with national requirements, pension age households will not be affected by these changes
- If a claimant gets paid work, they will continue to get support for four weeks
- We will continue to ignore a proportion of people's earnings when calculating income
- Child Benefit will not be regarded as income when calculating entitlement
- War pensions / war-widows pension will not be included as income when calculating entitlement
- Certain disability benefits such as Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payments will not be included as income in the calculations.

It is proposed to maintain a discretionary fund to support anybody that finds themselves in severe financial difficulties as a result of changes to the local council tax support scheme.

The proposals

Please read the proposals carefully before giving your views.

Every working age household currently pays at least 12.5% of the Council Tax due for their home.

The four options all increase the amount that a household currently receiving a 87.5% discount would have to pay in Council Tax.

Those who currently pay full Council Tax would not be affected by these proposals.

Single person households would continue to receive a 25% discount in the amount they are liable to pay.

Examples given are for a property in Bolton, other areas in the borough may pay slightly more in Council Tax due to Parish precepts etc.

Option 1

Would increase the household bill from 12.5% to 17.5% of total Council Tax rating for the property. On a Band A home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£4.06** a week, an increase of **£1.16** a week. On a Band H home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£12.19** a week, an increase of **£3.48** a week.

Option 2

Would increase the household bill from 12.5% to 20% of total Council Tax rating for the property. On a Band A home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£4.64** a week, an increase of **£1.74** a week. On a Band H home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£13.93** a week, an increase of **£5.22** a week.

Option 3

Would increase the household bill from 12.5% to 22.5% of total Council Tax rating for the property. On a Band A home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£5.22** a week, an increase of **£2.32** a week. On a Band H home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£15.67** a week, an increase of **£6.96** a week.

Option 4

Would increase the household bill from 12.5% to 25% of total Council Tax rating for the property. On a Band A home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£5.80** a week, an increase of **£2.90** a week. On a Band H home, that would increase the amount of Council Tax paid to **£17.41** a week, an increase of **£8.70** a week.

Your preferred option

Q1 Which of the four options should the Council adopt?

- ☐ Option one - increase Council Tax contribution to 17.5%
- ☐ Option two - increase Council Tax contribution to 20%
- ☐ Option three - increase Council Tax contribution to 22.5%
- ☐ Option four - increase Council Tax contribution to 25%
- ☐ None of these options - please give an alternative below
- ☐ Don't know

If 'None of these options' what alternative do you propose?

Q2 Why have you chosen this option?

The impact

Q3 Will you or your household be affected if one of the proposals is approved?

- ☐ Yes, will have to pay more Council Tax
 ☐ No
 ☐ Not sure

Q4 Please explain how you or your household will be affected if one of the proposals is approved. If no impact, please leave blank

Support

Q5 If the discount you receive is reduced and you are asked to pay more towards Council Tax, what can we do to support you through the change? If no support is required, please leave blank.

The general principles

When developing the four options, a number of principles were considered. These aim to minimise the impact to the most vulnerable whilst raising the necessary funding for council services.

Q6 How strongly do you agree or disagree that the scheme adopted should ...?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Encourage people to work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensure that everyone of working age pays some Council Tax	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support the Council's approach to reducing child poverty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Balance the income received from additional Council Tax with costs of collection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offer some protection to those on the lowest incomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide a discretionary fund for those who will struggle financially if one of the proposals is accepted	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

About you

These questions are entirely optional. Please skip any questions you don't want to answer. They will only be used to help us to check that we are getting responses from different types of people and to group answers together. They will not be used to contact you.

Q7 Which Council Tax band does your home fall into?

- ☐ A ☐ C ☐ E ☐ G ☐ Don't know
☐ B ☐ D ☐ F ☐ H

Q8 Do you [or someone in your household] currently pay Council Tax?

- ☐ Pay full Council Tax ☐ No-one in household pays any Council Tax
☐ Pay reduced Council Tax ☐ Don't know

Q9 Which most closely describes you?

- ☐ Retired ☐ Unemployed, available for work
☐ Full time student ☐ Unable to work because of sickness / disability
☐ Employed full time [30+hours a week] ☐ At home / looking after family
☐ Employed part time [up to 30 hours a week] ☐ Other [please state below]

Other

Q10 What is your postcode ?

Q11 Which age group do you fall into?

- ☐ 24 or under ☐ 35-44 ☐ 55-64 ☐ 75-84
☐ 25-34 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 65-74 ☐ 85 or older

Q12 Are you ...?

- ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Other

Q13 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, limited a lot ☐ Yes, limited a little ☐ No

Q14 Do you look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of either long-term physical or mental ill-health / disability, or problems relating to old age? Please don't count anything you do as part of your paid employment.

- ☐ No ☐ Yes, 20 - 49 hours a week
☐ Yes, 1-19 hours a week ☐ Yes, 50 or more hours a week

Q15 What is your ethnic group?

- ☐ White British ☐ Mixed or Multiple ethnic group ☐ Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
☐ White other ☐ Asian or Asian British ☐ Other ethnic group

Thanks for your views. Please post your questionnaire back to us in the envelope provided.

