

Council Tax Support to replace Council Tax Benefit

Have your say

What is Council Tax Benefit?

Council Tax Benefit helps those people on low or no income to pay their council tax. The Government currently sets the rules about who can claim council tax benefit. If you meet the criteria, you receive a contribution towards your council tax which is paid directly into your council tax account reducing your bill.

The council receives grant from the Government that generally covers the cost of council tax benefit awards made.

What are the changes to council tax benefit?

In April 2013 council tax benefit will be replaced with a new local council tax support scheme designed by your local council.

The new local scheme will no longer be funded 100% by the Government. In future councils will receive a maximum of 90% of the cost of the benefits paid. This reduction in funding is estimated to be approximately £3.8m across Gloucestershire.

Each local council is required to publish a draft scheme and consult with interested parties on the proposal. The local scheme must be agreed by 31st January 2013 or the Government will impose a default scheme, which is similar to the national scheme, but leaving the local council's to find the 10% reduction in funding.

The Government has said that people who have reached state pension age will not be affected by this change as they will be assessed under a national scheme which is likely to be very similar to the current council tax benefit scheme.

Our Proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2013/14

In Gloucestershire, the six District Councils, the County Council and the Police Authority have been working together to find a way of managing these changes without affecting the level of support we give to local residents towards their council tax.

Approximately 50% of the people in Gloucestershire currently receiving council tax benefit are of pension age and, as such, are

protected from these changes. However, this means that working age people on low incomes could face a reduction of more than 20% in the help they currently get so that benefits for people of pension age can be maintained.

With this in mind and the very short time we have to make difficult decisions and bring in the changes, we are proposing that at least for the first year, 2013/14, we do not change the existing arrangements.

This means those people in receipt of council tax benefit will continue to receive the same level of help as they currently do for next year.

To do this, we will have to find ways to meet the reduction in Government funding for the local scheme. Cheltenham's share of the funding shortfall is £710,000 of which about £90,000 directly affects the district council share of your council tax bill. The rest affects the Gloucestershire County Council and Police Authority share of your council tax bill.

We will need to review this proposal during 2013/14 in light of other changes being made to benefits during the year and any savings that have been found. It is likely that we will then have to revise our local scheme for 2014/15 – we are trying to plan for this now and need your input to help with this.

Have your say

We would really welcome your views on our proposals for a Local Council Tax Support Scheme as outlined in this document. You can tell us your views by completing our online survey at www.cheltenham.gov.uk/counciltaxconsultation completing the paper survey attached or sending your comments to:

Email: ctax.consultation@cheltenham.gov.uk

Write to: Paul Aldridge, Benefit Manager
Municipal offices,
Promenade
Cheltenham
Glos, GL50 1PN

Phone: 01242 264196

We want to ensure that your needs are met. If you would like this information in any other format, please contact us.

Consultation on Draft Gloucestershire Local Council Tax Support Scheme

The consultation will run from 10th August to 5th October 2012

Council Tax Benefit helps those people on low income to pay their council tax and is currently fully funded by the Government. From 1st April 2013 each authority must have a local scheme in place, but with 10% less funding from the Government and protection for pensioners at the same level as this year.

Given the impact on many vulnerable people and the time we have to implement this scheme, we are proposing to maintain the same level of support in 2013/14 as is currently in place and fully review the scheme the following year.

- 1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that council tax support for 2013/14 should be broadly the same as the current council tax benefit scheme?**

Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

It is likely that we will need to make further changes to the local scheme in future years. We are not permitted to change the current level of council tax support for low income pensioners, but we can make savings to the scheme for working age customers and would like your opinion on some of the current rules to see if they should be changed in the future.

- 2. If we make changes to the local scheme in the future, to what extent do you agree or disagree that we should aim to keep the benefit reductions as low as possible to protect vulnerable and working age people on the lowest income?**

Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

- 3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that people of pension age should be protected from any of the proposed changes?**

Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

- 4. A single person living in a property is currently entitled to receive a 25% discount regardless of their income. The Council is not currently able to vary this discount under a local scheme but to what extent do you agree that we should be able to reduce this discount in the future if we could?**

Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐

- 5. At the moment a person can get their council tax benefit backdated for up to six months, if they had a valid reason for not claiming on time. Do you think this should be the same in our local scheme or should it be shorter?**

Stay at 6 months ☐ 3 months ☐ 1 month ☐

- 6. At the moment a person can get four weeks council tax benefit after they start work. Do you think this should be the same in our local scheme or should it end?**

Still give 4 weeks discount ☐ Amend the discount as soon as they start work ☐

7. At the moment a person can still get council tax benefit (subject to any other income) if they have savings of up to £16,000. Do you think this should be the same in our local scheme?

Stay at £16,000 ☐

Have a lower savings limit ☐

8. At the moment we give council tax benefit to people on low income in all council tax bands from A to H (these bands reflect the value of the property). In future, we could restrict the support we give to people living in the higher banded properties. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this?

Strongly agree ☐

Agree ☐

Neither ☐

Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐

9. If any adult, other than a partner, lives with someone on benefit, we expect them to make a contribution towards the council tax bill. Do you think this should continue in the local scheme?

Yes ☐

No ☐

10. We are planning to introduce more visits and spot checks to make sure people are paying the right amount of council tax. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this?

Strongly agree ☐

Agree ☐

Neither ☐

Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐

11. Is there anything else you think we should consider when designing a local council tax support scheme?

12. Which district do you live in?

Gloucester ☐
Cotswold ☐

Cheltenham ☐
Tewkesbury ☐

Forest of Dean ☐
Stroud ☐

13. Are you responding as:

A council tax payer

Yes

☐

No

☐

Someone in receipt of council tax benefit

Yes

☐

No

☐

A local business

Yes

☐

No

☐

A local voluntary or community sector organisation

Yes

☐

No

☐

A parish or town council

Yes

☐

No

☐

Other, please specify:

About you

Please answer the following **optional questions** about yourself. The information you supply will help us analyse the results of this consultation and ensure that we understand the views of different people. Responses to these questions will remain confidential. Individuals will not be identified and personal details will not be published.

14. Please tell us your full postcode:

15. Are you Male ☐ Female ☐

16. How old are you?

☐ Under 18 ☐ 18 - 24 ☐ 25 - 44 ☐ 45 - 64 ☐ 65 - 74 ☐ 75 or over

17. Please tell us your ethnic origin

White

- ☐ English, British
- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ☐ Any other white background (please write in) _____

Black or Black British

- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ African
- ☐ Any other Black background (please write in) _____

Mixed or multiple ethnic groups

- ☐ White & Black Caribbean
- ☐ White & Black African
- ☐ White & Asian
- ☐ Any other mixed background (please write in) _____

Asian or Asian British

- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Any other Asian background (please write in) _____

Other ethnic group

- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Other ethnic group (please write in) _____

18. Please tell us your religion or belief

None	<input type="checkbox"/>	Buddhist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Christian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hindu	<input type="checkbox"/>
Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sikh	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jewish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>						

19. Do you identify yourself as:

Gay woman/lesbian	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gay man	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heterosexual/Straight	<input type="checkbox"/>	Transgender	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. Do you have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term impact on your ability to carry out normal day to day activities?

i.e. poor hearing, poor sight, significant mobility impairment, mental health condition, learning disabilities, dyslexia, heart condition, multiple sclerosis, HIV, diabetes, epilepsy

Yes ☐ No ☐

Thank you for taking the time to complete the consultation questionnaire.

The information on this consultation will be used by each council to assist in making a decision on the new local scheme for 2013/14 and help to inform the future design of the scheme.

The results from the consultation will be published on each local authority's website and the final decision on the scheme will be made by full council in each authority no later than December 2012.