

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council undertook consultation on its proposals for replacing the existing national Council Tax Benefit scheme with a local Council Tax Support scheme in compliance with draft statutory requirements.
- 1.2 The consultation period of nine weeks commenced 6 August and closed 13 October 2012. Whilst shorter than the twelve weeks recommended in the now superseded Government Code of Practice on Consultation it is in line with National Consultation Principles. Furthermore CLG advised authorities to design consultation periods considering the impact of the proposals and ability to complete the consultation exercise within budgetary timetables.
- 1.3 A range of approaches were used to obtain views and comments for the proposals of the Council's Local Council Tax Support scheme as set out below:
- A press release with information about the scheme was produced in July.
  - All consultation documents were available on the Council's web site – [www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk) which included an online survey.
  - A specific email address was provided to deal with any requests for information and supplementary information.
  - Postal questionnaires, with an accompanying letter from the portfolio holder and Frequently Asked Question sheet, were sent to 5017 working age council tax benefit claimants – see appendix C1.
  - Opinion Research Services conducted 400 telephone surveys with residents- see appendix C2.
  - A focus group discussion with working age claimants, facilitated by Opinion Research Services, was held- see appendix C3.
  - Face to face surveys took place in the town centre through Café Choice- see appendix C4.
  - Local stakeholders groups attended briefing meetings and were sent an online questionnaire.
  - A presentation was made at SoStevenage Board and the SoStevenage Social Inclusion Partnership meeting, where questionnaires were also distributed.
  - Residents were encouraged to contribute using Stevenage Borough Council social media, Facebook and Twitter.
  - Our preceptors were invited to comment about the scheme- see appendix C5.

## 2. CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRES

### 2.1 The questions

- 2.1.1 Respondents were initially asked their views on the proposal to reduce by 10% the council tax support paid to all working age claimants.
- 2.1.2 They were then asked their opinion of reducing by 10% the support given to specific groups: families with children under 5, people with disabilities and in the Choice Café consultation, carers.

2.1.3 The next questions related to proposals to fund the reduction in the money available for council tax support. The proposals are to reduce to 10% the discounts available for homes left empty for six months and for homes requiring major structure repairs left empty for twelve months.

2.1.4 The final question covered the abolition of the discount for second homes. The questions used in the consultation are shown in appendix C1

## 2.2 Response numbers

2.2.1 In total there were 1,169 responses to all methods of consultation. These include:

- 1,100 consultation questionnaire responses were received comprising of 665 paper responses, 400 telephone interviews and 35 online responses.
- Twelve working age council tax benefit claimants attended the focus group.
- A Café Choice consultation session was held in the town centre with residents commenting on the proposal and 57 residents completed the questions about the scheme.

## 3. CONSULTATION - RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRES

**Please note:** Giving the differing methodologies used these results are not statistically comparable, but for the purpose of this exercise the results above have been aggregated.

Due to rounding differences the totals in the tables do not equate to 100% in all cases.

## Question 1

*We are considering funding our council tax support scheme by reducing the support paid to all working age claimants by 10%. Please give us your opinion of this proposal below.*

all working age claimants	postal ( working age ctb claimants ) n= 655	online (general residents ) n= 35	telephone (general residents ) n= 389	total  n= 1,079
strongly agree	30(4.5%)	7(20%)	74(19%)	10.2%
agree	97(14.8%)	7(20%)	128(33%)	21.5%
neither	113(17.2%)	3(9%)	40(10%)	14.5%
disagree	151(23%)	7(20%)	50(13%)	19.2%
strongly disagree	264(40%)	11(31%)	97(25%)	34.5%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Approximately 32% of the total samples either agree or strongly agree and 54% disagree or strongly disagree.

## Question 2a

*Do you think that families with children under 5 should have their council tax support reduced by 10%?*

families with children under 5	postal (working age ctb claimants n=649	online (general residents ) n=34	telephone (general residents ) n=392	total  n =1,075
strongly agree	58(8.9%)	8(23%)	45(12%)	10.3%
agree	68(10.5%)	6(18%)	81(21%)	14.4%
neither	99(15.2%)	4(12%)	43(11%)	13.6%
disagree	148(22.8%)	5(14%)	100(25%)	23.0%
strongly disagree	276(42.5%)	11(32%)	123(32%)	38.0%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Approximately 25% of the total samples either agree or strongly agree and 61% disagree or strongly disagree.

## Question 2b

*Do you think that people with disabilities should have their council tax support reduced by 10%?*

people with disabilities	postal (working age ctb claimants n=659	online (general residents ) n=34	telephone (general residents ) n=393	total  n= 1,086
strongly agree	70(10.6%)	5(14%)	34(9%)	10.0%
agree	40(6.5%)	8(23%)	52(13%)	9.2%
neither	60(9.1%)	2(6%)	32(8%)	8.6%
disagree	123(18.6%)	6(18%)	85(21%)	19.7%
strongly disagree	366(55.5%)	13(38%)	190(49%)	52.3%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Approximately 19% of the total samples either agree or strongly agree and 72% disagree or strongly disagree.

## Question 3

*We are considering reducing to 10% the council tax exemption for homes left empty for up to six months to fund part of our new council tax support scheme. Please give us your opinion of this proposal below.*

reduce to 10% six month exemption	postal (working age ctb claimants n=620	online (general residents ) n=30	telephone (general residents ) n= 395	total  n= 1,045
strongly agree	221(35.6%)	14(47%)	203(51%)	41.7%
agree	187(30.0%)	7(23%)	108(27%)	28.8%
neither	127(20.1%)	5(17%)	19(5%)	14.4%
disagree	44(7.1%)	4(13%)	30(8%)	7.4%
strongly disagree	41(6.6%)	0	35(9%)	7.2%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Approximately 70% of the total samples either agree or strongly agree and 15% disagree or strongly disagree.

#### Question 4

*We are considering reducing to 10% the council tax exemption for homes requiring major structural repairs that are left empty for up to twelve months to fund part of our new council tax support scheme. Please give us your opinion of this proposal below.*

reduce to 10% twelve months exemption	postal (working age ctb claimants n= 631	online (general residents ) n=30	telephone (general residents ) n= 391	total n=1052
strongly agree	198(31.3%)	12(40%)	123(31%)	31.5%
agree	185(29.3%)	9(30%)	127(33%)	30.5%
neither	159(25.1%)	4(13%)	31(8%)	18.4%
disagree	46(7.3%)	5(17%)	61(16%)	10.6%
strongly disagree	43(6.8%)	0	49(12%)	8.7%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Approximately 62% of the total samples either agree or strongly agree and 19% disagree or strongly disagree.

#### Question 5

*We are considering abolishing the council tax exemption for second homes to fund part of our new council tax support scheme. Please give us your opinion of this proposal below.*

abolish second home discount	postal (working age ctb claimants n=622	online (general residents ) n=32	telephone (general residents ) n= 395	total n=1049
strongly agree	298(47.9%)	21(66%)	239(60%)	53.0%
agree	162(26%)	8(25%)	95(24%)	25.2%
neither	103(16.5%)	1(3%)	13(3%)	11.1%
disagree	23(3.7%)	0	25(6%)	4.5%
strongly disagree	36(5.8%)	2(6%)	23(6%)	6.1%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Approximately 78% of the total samples either agree or strongly agree and 11% disagree or strongly disagree.

## **4. FOCUS GROUP**

- 4.1 Twelve participants representing a cross section of working age benefit claimants attended a group facilitated by Opinion Research Services. A presentation of the proposed scheme was delivered and participants were invited to contribute to the discussion themes.
- 4.2 Details on the discussion are listed in appendix C3 and below are a summary of the group's conclusions:
- Two of the attendees were particularly concerned about the cumulative impact of the changes in the benefit system on people with disabilities
  - The consensus was that it is not right to take money from people who claim benefits but given that proviso the proposed scheme was fair
  - The group felt that pensioners should not have been protected and that all claimant groups should be treated in the same way
  - Overall there was little support for protecting families with children under 5
  - The group could not see how the changes incentivised work
  - There was indignation that the money was not being found from increasing the council contributions and fees the Council can charge so that those who are not in receipt of benefits contribute to the shortfall.

## **5. CAFÉ CHOICE CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 Respondents were given the background to the impending council tax benefit changes and the information on the proposals for a Stevenage council tax benefit support scheme. We received valuable verbal feedback and comments from general residents.
- 5.2 The responses to the questions asked follow the general trend of consultation responses. Details of the responses are in appendix C4.

## **6. PRECEPTOR'S CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 Our preceptors were consulted about the proposed scheme in accordance with the Department of Communities and Local Government guidelines. Please see appendix C5

## **7. PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS**

- 7.1 Overall the profile of respondents is in line with the demographic profile of Stevenage. Please see appendix C6 for detail.

**Important changes to council tax benefit – have your say**

1. It is likely that everyone currently receiving council tax benefit, apart from pensioners, will have to pay something towards their future council tax bills.

We are considering funding our council tax support scheme by reducing the support paid to all working age claimants by 10%. Please give us your opinion of this proposal below.

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

2. Do you think that these groups should have their council tax support reduced by 10%?

Families with children under 5

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

People who are disabled

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

3. Are there any particular groups of people who you think will be more affected than others by the proposed changes?

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4. Are there any general comments that you wish to make about the proposed changes?

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Stevenage Borough Council now has powers to review council tax discounts and exemptions, including those that apply to empty properties and second homes. The council is seeking views on these changes as part of this consultation.

5. We are considering reducing to 10% the council tax exemption for homes left empty for up to six months to fund part of our new council tax support scheme. Please give us your opinion of this proposal below.

- strongly agree
  - agree
  - neither agree nor disagree
  - disagree
  - strongly disagree
- 

6. We are considering reducing to 10% the council tax exemption for homes requiring major structural repairs that are left empty for up to twelve months to fund part of our new council tax support scheme. Please give us your opinion of this proposal below.

- strongly agree
  - agree
  - neither agree nor disagree
  - disagree
  - strongly disagree
- 

7. We are considering abolishing the council tax exemption for second homes to fund part of our new council tax support scheme. Please give us your opinion of this proposal below.

- strongly agree
  - agree
  - neither agree nor disagree
  - disagree
  - strongly disagree
- 

8. Do you have any other suggestions about how we can raise funds to cover our local council tax support scheme?

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.....

.....

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.....

**About you**

Your name: .....

Your address or postcode: .....

.....

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Does your name appear on the council tax bill for your household?

yes       no       don't know

---

Does your household receive council tax benefit?

yes       no       don't know       prefer not to say

---

Do you or your household receive any other benefits?

yes       no       don't know       prefer not to say

---

Do you own or rent your current home?

own with a mortgage or a loan       rented from the Council, Housing Association or another Registered Social Landlord  
 own outright  
 shared ownership  
 rented from a private landlord

---

Please tell us your age:

16-24       25-34       35- 44  
 45-54       55-64       65+       prefer not to say

---

Do you consider yourself to have a disability according to the terms of the Equality Act 2010?

Under the Equality Act 2010 a person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial or long term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, which would include things like using a telephone, reading a book or using public transport.

yes       no       prefer not to say

---

Please tell us your sex:

male       female       prefer not to say

---

Your marital status:

single       married       civil partnership       prefer not to say

Please tell us which ethnic group you belong to, choosing one option from groups A to E or write in the appropriate group:

A. Asian or Asian British

- Bangladeshi       Indian       Pakistani  
 other Asian background (please write here):  
.....

B. Black or Black British

- African       Caribbean  
 other Black background (please write here):  
.....

C. Mixed

- White and Black African       White and Black Caribbean  
 White and Asian  
 other mixed background (please write here):  
.....

D. White

- British       Irish       Polish  
 other White background (please write here):  
.....

E. Other ethnic group (please write below):

- .....  
 prefer not to say
- 

Which of the following describes your household?

- a family with dependent children household or a  
 a lone parent household children  
 a carer includes someone  
 other (please write below):  
.....
- a single person  
couple without  
 a household that  
who is disabled
- 

What is your working status?

- working full time       working part time  
 not working       working on a voluntary basis
-

We may ask Opinion Research Services (ORS) to carry out additional research on this topic on our behalf. If you are happy to be contacted by ORS please may we have your telephone number?

I am happy to be contacted by ORS on this telephone number:

.....

**Thank you for taking the time to share your views and information  
with Stevenage Borough Council.**

### **Council tax benefit is changing - Frequently asked questions**

#### **What is changing?**

From April 2013, the Government intends to abolish council tax benefit (CTB). Every council will have to replace it with a new local scheme. We call this new scheme council tax support. The Government is giving councils less money to pay for their new schemes. The cut will be 10% of the current expenditure and will not be increased if the number of people claiming or the council tax charge goes up.

#### **Why does the council have to save £730,000 in 2013/14?**

When the Government hands over the funding for the council tax support scheme, it will be reduced, meaning we will have to save approximately £730,000 to be able to fund the new scheme next year.

To calculate the expected savings above we have looked at the number of people currently claiming council tax benefit and reduced the funding we receive by 10%.

#### **Who will these changes affect?**

All current working age CTB claimants will be affected by these changes and might see their benefit change. Although pensioners will move onto the new scheme, they will be protected and will not have their support reduced under the new scheme.

#### **What is council tax?**

Council tax is a local tax on domestic properties. It is set by the council based on a property's valuation band. Each home is placed in one of eight valuation bands based on its value at 1st April 1991. The council is responsible for collecting council tax and this money funds local public services including refuse collection, planning and environmental health. Some of the money collected is passed to Hertfordshire County Council to fund education, social services, fire services, highways and other services. Money is also handed to the police authority to run the police service.

#### **Who has to pay council tax?**

Council tax is a charge which is usually paid by the occupants of the property. The full tax assumes that there are at least two adults living in the property. If there is only one occupant in the home, they may be eligible for a discount. The tax is also paid by the property owner where the property is unoccupied and no relief is applicable.

#### **What is council tax benefit?**

Council tax benefit is a means tested benefit that helps people on a low or no income to pay their council tax. It is administered by local councils using rules set nationally by the government. No money is paid to the

claimant. Instead, their council tax bill is reduced by the amount of their benefit.

### **Who can get council tax benefit currently?**

Anyone who is liable for council tax may apply. In the case of couples, a joint claim should be made. The amount of benefit they can receive is based on the makeup of their household, the amount of money they have coming in and their council tax charge.

### **Are other discounts and exemptions affected?**

The council now has powers to review council tax discount and exemptions such as those that apply to empty properties and second homes. The council will be seeking views on these changes as part of this consultation.

### **Who will be able to get the new council tax support?**

Anyone who currently receives council tax benefit will be assessed for the new council tax support. It is likely that most people who qualify for CTB will get some council tax support. Anyone liable for council tax may apply for council tax support and will be assessed in the same way as current claimants moving from CTB.

### **How much will I have to pay?**

The outcome of this consultation will help to determine how much more people in different groups will have to pay. Pensioners will not have to pay more than they do now. Depending on how the new scheme is designed, it is likely that most working age people who qualify for council tax support will have to pay more than they do now or they would have done under CTB.

### **Will I have to re-apply?**

If you currently receive CTB you will not have to re-apply under the new scheme. You will automatically be re-assessed using the new rules. Your award may be reviewed once you have moved across to the new scheme.

# Executive Councillor Resources

## Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd

«faaddress1»  
«faaddress2»  
«faaddress3»  
«faaddress4»  
«Fapostcode»

Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd  
:

Tel: 01438 242242  
Date: 5<sup>th</sup> September 2012

### IMPORTANT CHANGES TO COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT FROM APRIL 2013:

#### HAVE YOUR SAY

Dear«title» «initials» «surname»

Our records show that you currently get council tax benefit to help pay your bill. From April 2013, the Government has announced that council tax benefits will no longer exist in their current form, instead councils will operate a local council tax support scheme. However, the amount of financial support the council will receive from the Government will be cut by 10%, this means that Stevenage Borough Council will need to save £730,000 and will have no choice but to consider reducing the amount of help to residents.

The Government has told councils that people of state pension age who are entitled to help with their council tax must be protected from the changes and will see no change to the support they receive.

In operating the new scheme the council has to decide which people of working age should get help to pay their council tax bills and how much this should be.

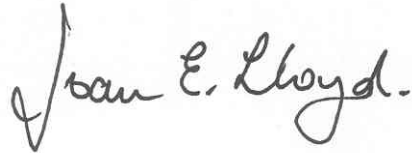
No final decisions have been made about the new scheme and your views about the new scheme will be an important part of any decision we make. This is a real opportunity for you to help influence the decisions made by the council and I would appreciate it if you could take the time to complete the accompanying questionnaire, tell us your views and send it back to us, using the pre-paid envelope enclosed.

Cont/...

If you have any questions or queries please visit:-

[www.stevenage.gov.uk/ctaxbconsultation](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/ctaxbconsultation) or email  
[ctaxbenefitconsultation@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:ctaxbenefitconsultation@stevenage.gov.uk) or call 01438 242242

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan E. Lloyd." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

**Cllr Mrs Joan Lloyd**  
Portfolio Holder Resources

Enc.

## Appendix C2

### Opinion Research Services Results of Telephone Survey

- This report presents residents' attitudes towards the proposed changes to Council Tax Benefit and Council Tax discounts & exemptions.
- The findings are based on a survey of 400 telephone interviews with Stevenage residents.
- The sample was statistically weighted by age, based on comparative data for Household Reference Person (Census 2001) to ensure that the survey results reflect the distribution of households that pay council tax across Stevenage.
- Differences mentioned within the text of this presentation are statistically significant at a 90% and 95% level of confidence.
- Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' categories, or multiple answers.
- In some cases figures of 2% or below are not shown in the graphs.

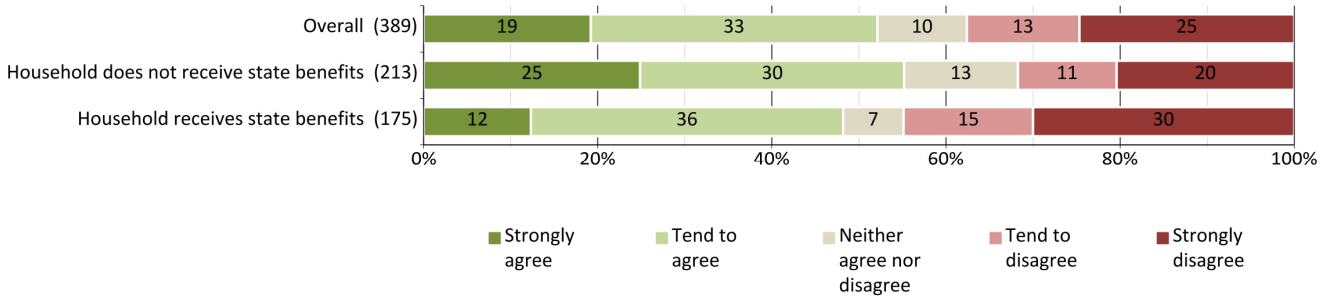
#### Overview of Results – council tax support

- More than half (52%) of residents agreed with the proposal to reduce the council tax support paid to all working age claimants by 10%; although almost two fifths (38%) disagreed
- However the majority state that council tax support should NOT be reduced for:
  1. People who are disabled (70%)
  2. Families with children under 5 (56%)
- 78% agreed that homeowners should have to pay 90% of their council tax on homes left empty for up to 6 months; 17% disagreed
- A lower proportion of residents (64%) agreed that homeowners will have to pay 90% of their council tax on homes requiring major structural repairs that are left empty for up to 12 months; 28% disagreed
- More than four fifths (85%) agreed with the proposal to abolish the Council Tax Exemption for second homes; 12% disagreed



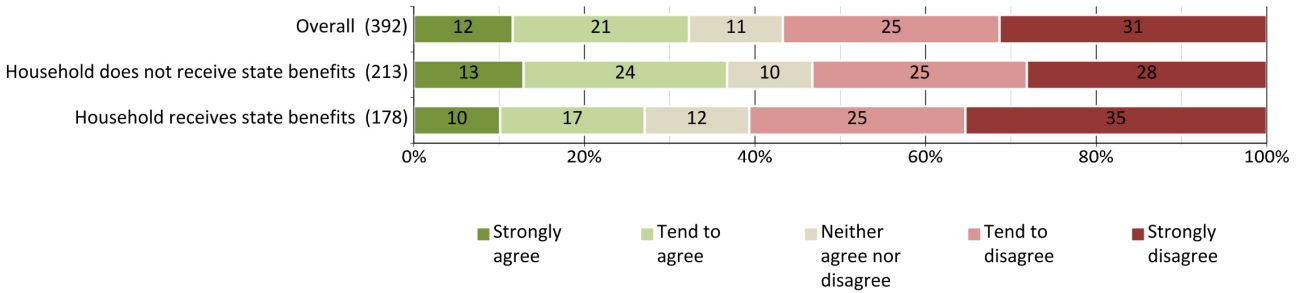
## Detailed results

### Agreement with reducing support to all working age claimants by 10%



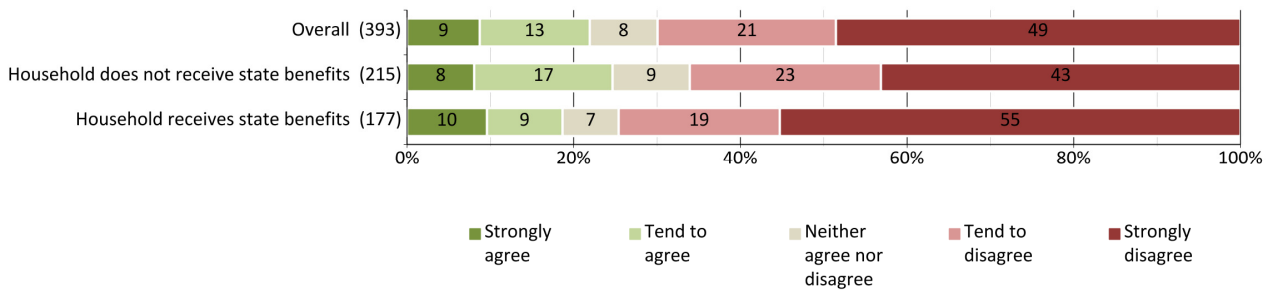
Base: All respondents (389)

### Agreement with reducing support to claimants with children under 5 by 10%



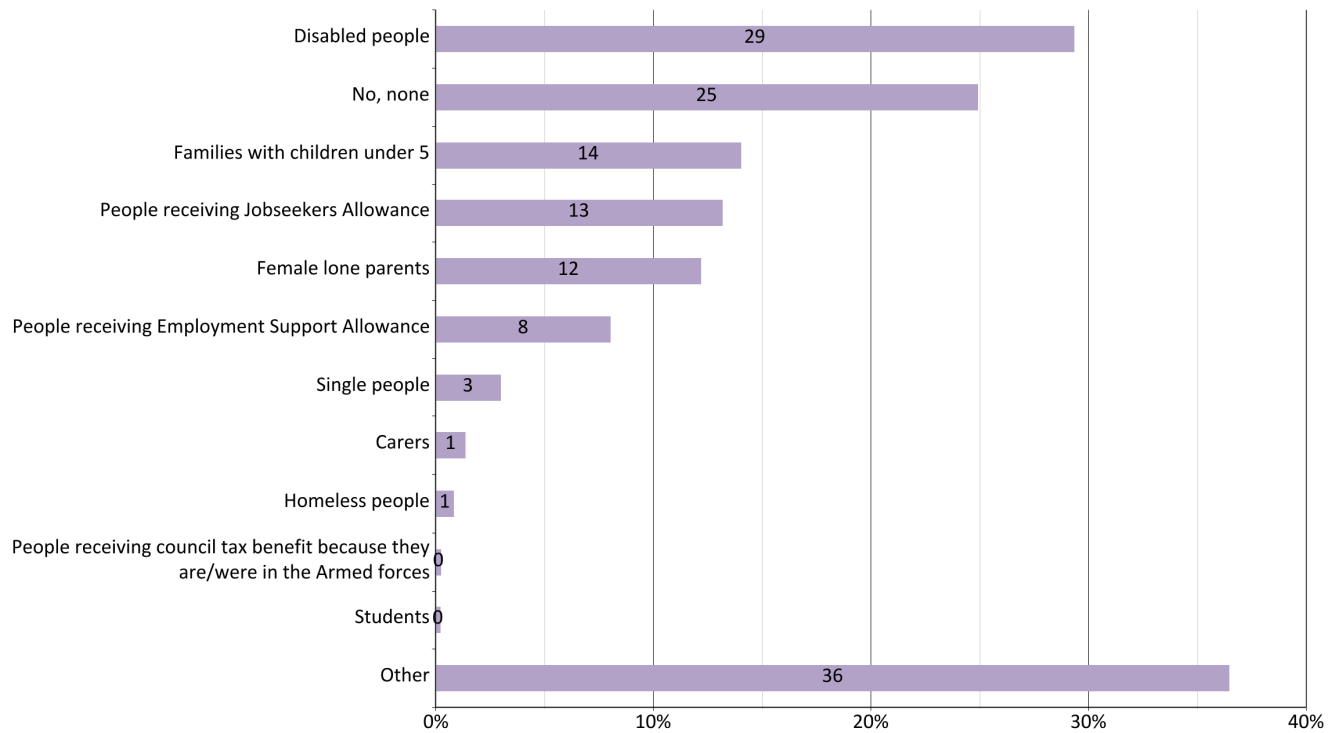
Base: All respondents(392)

### Agreement with reducing support to disabled claimants by 10%



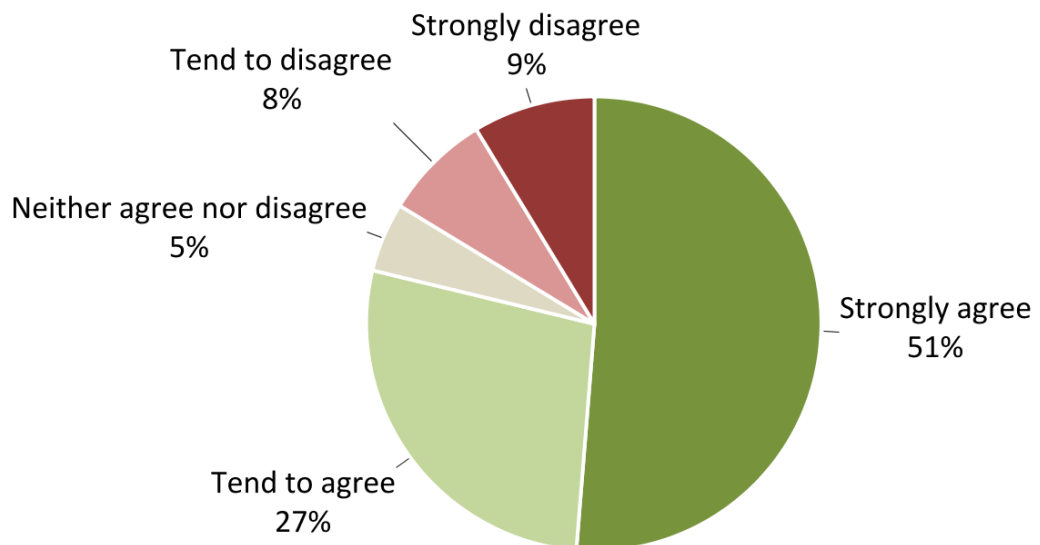
Base: All respondents ( 393)

## Groups of people who may be affected more than others



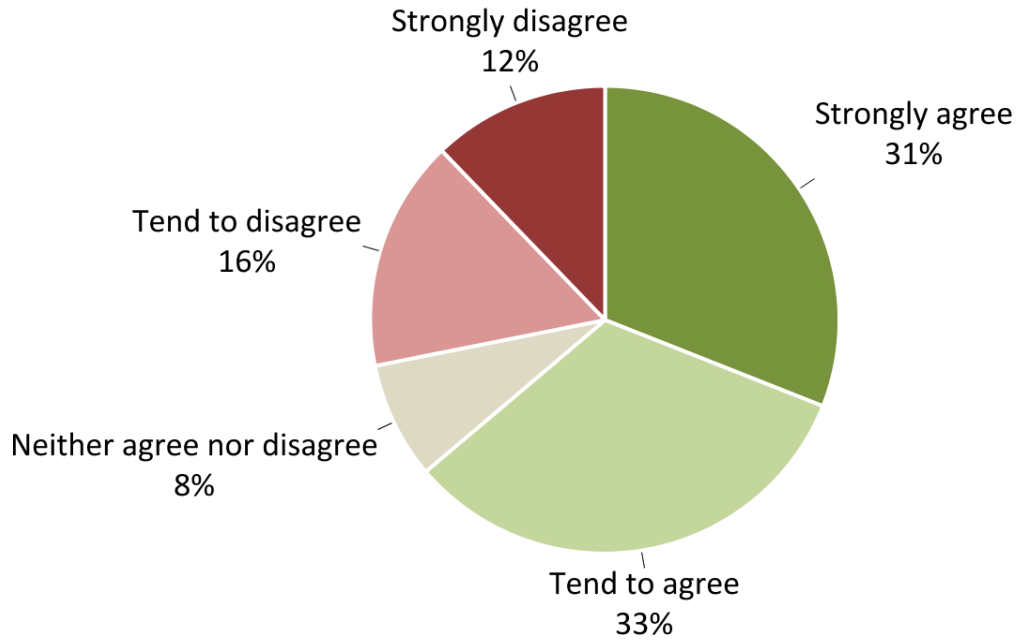
Base: All respondents (365)

## Agreement with reducing the council tax exemption for homes left empty for up to six months



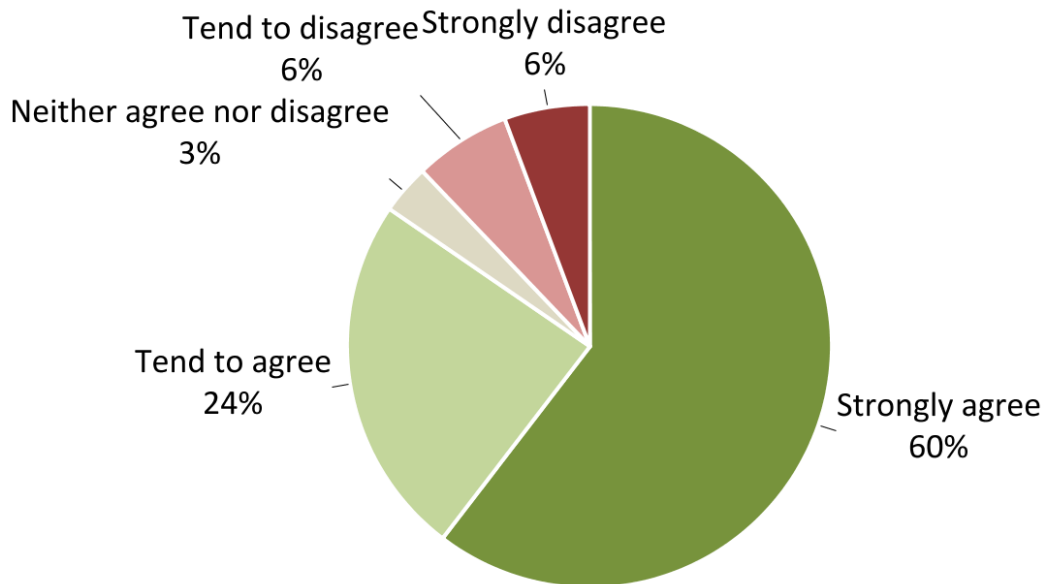
Base: All respondents (395)

**Agreement with reducing the council tax exemption for homes requiring major structural repairs and left empty for up to twelve months**



Base: All respondents (391)

**Agreement with abolishing the council tax exemption for second homes**



Base: All respondents (395)

## **Examples of other suggestions made about how to raise the funds**

- People with larger properties should pay more
- People on benefits should pay £5-£10 a week towards their council tax
- If there are still a lot of people with empty and second homes they should be charged more to raise funds
- They should try and target people who can actually afford it
- Stop Chronicle
- Cut Councillors allowances
- Make Council services more efficient
- Don't leave properties empty between rentals
- Put people on benefits in council jobs

### **General comments:**

- 90% is too high for the empty properties; if it was a lower figure it would be more agreeable because there are legitimate reasons why a house may be left empty. Maybe they could introduce a sliding scale based on how many months it's been empty, increasing to 100% after one year.
- Their consideration needs to ebb on people on low incomes so they don't become more financially at risk looking after their family.
- No, I'm not keen on the change because there are so many people with such a range of circumstances, I'd be hard to generalise. For example, if someone gets a divorce and the man leaves the woman then she's eligible to pay council tax through no fault of her own, that's unfair.
- It's unfortunate that this has to be done but there is an option, something has to be done.
- I don't know about it, it should have been more widely publicised.
- I feel that the changes are too drastic and too soon, if people are really needing benefits I feel that their support shouldn't be cut. The Council should also look at perks paid to Councillors
- You will find it difficult to get the money when low income people will have to pay more

## Appendix C3

### Focus group 10 October 2012

Twelve respondents participants representing a cross section of working age benefit claimants attended a group facilitated by Opinion Research Services.

A presentation of the proposed scheme was delivered by Scott Crudginton and participants were invited to contribute to the discussion themes. Theresa Mortimer, Benefits Manager, was in attendance to answer queries about technical aspects. Below is a summary of the discussion:

#### Initial comments:

- There was little awareness of the changes which come into effect on April 2013, nor of other major welfare reform benefit changes
- Initial views of the Council's scheme were that benefits are assessed at the minimum amount and if monies are taken away claimants are left with less than a minimum amount to live on
- Views that it is the people who have the least that are hit the hardest were expressed
- Very difficult to incentivise work in Stevenage as the jobs are not there, especially for the self employed
- SBC, HCC and the Police all need to make savings and to look at ways of working smarter

#### • **Comments about the proposed scheme:**

- It may be fairer for everyone across the board to pay 10% rather than pitting different claimants groups against each other
- Pensioners are protected because they are the group that is most likely to vote
- Although it may sound a small amount to pay if you don't have enough to live on how can you find it?
- Disabled people have already had to cope with extra charges including home care costs which have doubled recently without allowances increasing
- Could people lose their homes if they don't pay?
- How will arrears in general be handled?
- What are the associated costs of retrieving the 10% contribution from people on benefits?
- People on benefits will have problems understanding the changes and SBC need to get through to everyone who will be affected
- The Government has been clever in making it look like this is all to do with Councils and not them but they should publicise this more

#### **Comments about families with children under five**

- It's not fair but again it's not fair across the board
- No point in separating out particular groups to set them against each other

- People can choose to have children and children grow up- the disabled do not choose to be disabled and their conditions usually deteriorate
- Many over 50s have given up careers to be carers – they are also affected

### **Comments about people with disabilities**

- Maybe people with disabilities get more than people on Job Seekers Allowance –but we are all in the same boat
- It may increase prejudice against people with disabilities from those who do not get extra protection
- People with disabilities are being hit from all directions
- Disabled people will cut their homecare to pay and this could put them in danger

### **Alternative suggestions to raise monies:**

- More efficiency savings at SBC including using voluntary workers to support council services so they get a cv to help with employment and the Council doesn't have to pay as much wages
- People who are working should pay more Council Tax
- Couldn't you revalue property Council Tax bands so people in more valuable homes pay more?

### **Incentivising work**

- How can this incentivise work when there are no jobs out there
- Many of those with disabilities are unlikely to be offered employment
- It often feels like we are no better off if we work or don't work
- My husband works and we have children under 5 and we get housing benefit/ council tax benefit -the more we earn the more we lose in benefits and we never feel any better off

### **Exemptions – 6 months**

- It should be 100% paid and no discount
- Could the Council Tax on private rented sector homes be increased?

### **Exemptions – 12 months**

- Sounds fair
- If people are doing a property up they will get a financial benefit from the asset
- There is a possible advantage in that it will incentivise the speed at which repairs are done
- If it is your home and you cannot live there you will be paying twice, once for the property you are in and the for the empty property

### **Second homes**

- A second home is usually an investment and there should be no Council Tax benefit

### **Miscellaneous comments and suggestions**

- Councillors should give up some of their expenses allowances, between a half and a quarter
- Use volunteers to replace temps in Council services
- Sell SBC expertise to the private sector
- Increase charges for car parks and garage rentals and planning application costs
- SBC should be more efficient

### **Summary**

- Two of the attendees were wheelchair users and were concerned about the cumulative impact of the changes in the benefit system on people with disabilities
- The consensus was that it is not right to take money from people who claim benefits but given that proviso the scheme was fair
- The group felt that pensioners should not have been protected and that all claimant groups should be treated in the same way
- Overall there was little support for protecting families with children under 5
- The group could not see how the changes in CTB incentivised work
- There was indignation that the money was not being found from increasing the council tax contributions and fees the Council can charge so that those who are not in receipt of benefits can contribute to the shortfall

## Appendix C4

### Café Choice Consultation 13 October 2012

Respondents were given the background to the impending council tax benefit changes and the information on the proposals for a Stevenage council tax benefit support scheme. We received valuable verbal feedback and comments from general residents. Many of those approached were not in receipt of benefits and declined to comment further.

Respondents who wished to give their opinion were asked whether they agreed or disagreed to a series of questions and their responses are below.

The numbers of responses vary as not every respondent gave an opinion to every question.

#### Question one

*It is likely that everyone receiving council tax benefit, apart for pensioners, will have to pay something towards their future council tax bills. We are considering funding our council tax support scheme by reducing the support paid to all working age claimants by 10%.*

Agree	Disagree
35(61%)	22(39%)

#### Question two

*Do you think that families with children under 5 should have their council tax support reduced by 10%?*

Agree	Disagree
26(47%)	29(53%)

#### Question three

*Do you think that people who are disabled should have their council tax support reduced by 10%?*

Agree	Disagree
21(37%)	36(63%)

#### Question four

*Do you think that carers should have their council tax support reduced by 10%?*

Agree	Disagree
24(43%)	32(57%)



### Question five

*We are considering reducing to 10% the council tax exemption for homes left empty for up to six months to fund part of our new council tax support scheme.*

Agree	Disagree
54(96%)	2(4%)

### Question six

*We are considering reducing to 10% the council tax exemption for homes requiring major structural repairs that are left empty for up to twelve left empty months to fund part of our new council tax support scheme.*

Agree	Disagree
54(100%)	0

### Question seven

*We are considering abolishing the council tax exemption to fund part of our new council tax support scheme.*

Agree	Disagree
53(93%)	4(7%)

### Summary

- Although not directly comparable these results confirm the general trend shown in our other forms of consultation.
- The level of agreement expressed in Question one is higher than in all of the forms of consultation but the same pattern of responses when specific working age claimant groups are introduced may be observed.
- The levels of agreement for the proposals to reduce the empty homes discount and to abolish the discount on second homes are similar to those expressed in our other forms of consultation.

## Appendix C5

### Stevenage Borough Council Local Council Tax Scheme Consultation with Preceptors

Our Executive on agreed the following recommendations regarding the new Local Council Tax Scheme:

- 1. That it be noted that the Executive of this Council deplores the actions of the Tory led Government in reducing council tax support to the most vulnerable members of our community including the disabled, carers of disabled children and those on low wages. The Executive encourages everyone to get involved in the consultation exercise that commences in August.*
- 2. That the timetable for implementing a Council Tax Support scheme be noted.*
- 3. That given the implications set out in paragraph 4.2.5, the savings for the pensioner group are not transferred over to the remaining claimant population.*
- 4. That the Executive approve that Option 1 be the preferred proposal for consultation with residents and stakeholders, and that Options 2, 3 & 4 also be included.*
- 5. That the Executive approve that the options regarding money raised from locally determined exemptions and discounts, as set out in paragraph 4.4.5 also be included in the consultation.*
- 6. That Officers explore the option of establishing a hardship fund to address any unintended consequences of implementing this proposal and that Officers liaise with other precepting bodies to make a fair contribution to the fund.*

I have attached our Executive report for your information.

As you will see Stevenage has a preferred approach that will utilise Council Tax exemptions for Second Homes and Empty Properties to part fund the 10% savings required. The remaining shortfall is to then be addressed with a 10% reduction to all council tax support for all **Working Age** Claimants (although this may go down to 8% following consultation, caseload forecasts and no additional protections agreed following consultation). As a result based on our modelling and forecasts we **don't anticipate** any shortfall to fall on the Borough Council, County Council or Police Authority.

The Council will be launching a consultation webpage in the next week, and will be undertaking a range of stakeholder consultations through ORS.

The Executive have also requested that a hardship fund be established that will be used to address any unintended consequences of these changes. Consequently, our Executive has requested that this fund is also supported by the preceptors based on contributions of their current council tax shares.

As a preceptor, I would welcome any comments you have on our proposals and specific view on the establishment of the hardship fund. In addition I am happy to meet with you or your representative to discuss our proposals further.

Regards

**Scott Crudgington**

Corporate Services  
Director of Resources and Performance

STEVENAGE B.C.  
28 SEP 2012



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Strategic Director  
Stevenage Borough Council  
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*MARK  
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My ref: MP/CC/mgb  
Your ref:  
Date: 26 September 2012

Dear Scott

**Consultation on Proposals for Localised Council Tax Benefit Scheme**

The authority welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on a localised council tax benefit scheme for Stevenage Borough Council.

The design of a local scheme which embraces the principles agreed by the Hertfordshire Leaders at their meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2012 is welcomed, in particular the objective of not passing on any increase to Council Tax payers. As you are aware, any shortfall in the implementation of the discount scheme is likely to result in either further service savings or an increase in council tax levels for this authority.

This authority's preference would be for your preferred scheme, given that any alternatives that you propose would not necessarily deliver against the principles agreed by the Hertfordshire Leaders.

I note the proposal for the introduction of a hardship fund. It is difficult to understand how the criteria for such a fund would be set and how it would interact with the proposed discount scheme – particularly in terms of fairness and transparency. In addition, given the existing arrangements in place for write off of uncollectable debt, the requirement for a hardship fund is questioned.

There will be a requirement for all authorities to work closely together to understand and recognise the risks of managing the potential impact of reduced collection rates and further demographic growth. I welcome the opportunity to continue to work with you on these areas.

Yours sincerely

**Mike Parsons**  
**Director of Resources & Performance**

## Appendix C6

### Profile of respondents to consultation questionnaires

#### Responses – age

age	postal ( working age ctb claimants) n=651	on- line (general residents ) n=31	telephone (general residents ) n=400	total n=1082
16-34	139(21.3%)	10(34.4%)	80(20%)	21.1%
35-44	129(19.8%)	4(13.8%)	69(17.2%)	18.6%
45-54	200(30.7%)	8(27.6%)	103(25.7%)	28.7%
55 and over	172(26.4%)	7(24.1%)	147(36.7%)	30.1%
prefer not to say	11(1.6%)	0	1(0.25)	1.1%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

#### Responses – gender

gender	postal ( working age ctb claimants) n=656	on-line (general residents) n=29	telephone (general residents ) n=400	total n=1085
male	258(39.3%)	15(51.7%)	191(48%)	42.7%
female	390(59.4%)	13(44.8%)	209(52%)	56.4%
prefer not to say	8(1.2%)	1(3.4%)	0	0.8%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

#### Responses- disability

disability	postal ( working age ctb claimants) n= 644	on-line (general residents) n= 29	Telephone (general residents) n= 399	total n= 1072
no	357(55.4%)	18(62.1%)	79(19.7%)	42.3%
yes	243(37.7%)	10(34.5%)	320(80.3%)	53.4%
prefer not to say	44(6.8%)	1 (3.4%)	0	4.2%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Responses –ethnic group

ethnic group	postal ( working age ctb claimants) n=665	on-line (general residents) n=29	telephone (general residents) n=399	total n=1093
White British	538(81%)	21(72%)	359(89%)	84%
Irish	3(0.4%)	1(3.4%)	3(0.7%)	0.6%
Other White	43(6.4%)	3(10%)	13(3%)	5.4%
Asian/ Asian British- Indian	2(0.3%)	0	6(1.5%)	0.7%
Asian/ Asian British-Bangladeshi	5(0.7%)	0	2(0.5%)	0.6%
Any other Asian background	12(1.8%)	0	1(0.25%)	1.2%
Black / Black British –African	21(3.1%)	0	4(1%)	2.3%
Black / Black British – Caribbean	2(0.3%)	0	3(0.7%)	0.4%
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	4(0.6%)	2(7%)	1(0.25%)	0.6%
Mixed- White and Black African	4(0.6%)	0	19(4.7%)	2.1%
Mixed- any other mixed background	12(1.8%)	0	2(0.5%)	1.2%
Chinese	0	0	4(1%)	0.3%
Polish	11(1.7%)	0	0	1%
Middle Eastern	3(0.4%)	0	0	0.3%
Prefer not to say	1(0.1%)	2(7%)	0	0.3%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Responses – name on council tax bill

name on bill	postal ( working age ctb claimants) n=651	on-line (general residents) n=31	telephone (general residents) n=400	total n=1082
yes	613(94%)	26(84%)	346(87%)	91%
no	7(1%)	4(13%)	41(10%)	5%
don't know	31(5%)	1(3%)	13(3%)	4%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Responses- in receipt of council tax benefit

Council tax benefit	postal ( working age ctb claimants) n=655	on-line (general residents) n=30	telephone (general residents) n=400	Total n=1085
yes	621(95%)	13(43%)	39(10%)	63%
no	12(2%)	15(50%)	358(89%)	36%
don't know	10(2%)	2(7%)	3(1%)	1%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Responses – in receipt of other benefits

other benefits	postal ( working age ctb claimants) n=652	on-line (general residents) n=31	telephone (general residents) n=400	Total n= 1083
yes	577(88%)	15(48%)	176(44%)	71%
no	45(7%)	12(39%)	220(55%)	25%
don't know	6(1%)	2(6.5%)	3(1%)	1%
prefer not to say	24(4%)	2(6.5%)	1	3%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Responses- rent or own current home

tenure	postal ( working age ctb claimants) n=652	on-line (general residents) n=29	telephone (general residents) n=398	total n=1079
own with mortgage or a loan	50(8%)	8(28%)	145(36%)	19%
owned outright	25(4%)	3(10%)	112(27%)	13%
shared ownership	0	1(3%)	0	0%
rented from council , housing association or other registered social landlord	480(73%)	10(35%)	108(28%)	55%
rented from private landlord	88(14%)	7(24%)	17(4%)	10%
other	9(1%)	0	16(4%)	2%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

### Responses- household type

household	postal ( working age ctb claimants) n=630	on-line (general residents) n=30	telephone (general residents) n=454 *respondents gave multiple answers	total n=1114
family with dependent children	85(13.5%)	9(30%)	131(29%)	21%
lone parent household	181(28.7%)	3(10%)	21(5%)	18%
carer	12(2%)	0	9(2%)	1%
household that includes someone who is disabled	142(22.5%)	6(20%)	23(5%)	15%
single person household or a couple without children	178(28.2%)	8(27%)	268(60%)	41%
other	32(5.1%)	4(13%)	2	3%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%

### Responses- working status

working status	postal ( working age ctb claimants) n=635	on-line (general residents) n=28	telephone (general residents) n=400	total n=1063
not working	435(69%)	12(43%)	167(42%)	58%
part time	135(21%)	3(11%)	48(12%)	18%
voluntary	29(4%)	0	0	2%
full time	36(6%)	13(46%)	148(37%)	19%
Self- employed	0	0	37(9%)	3%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%



### Council Tax Benefit Consultation - Café Choice 15 December 2012

#### 1 .Script for interviews

Council Tax Benefit is given to people on low incomes to help them pay their Council Tax Bills. The total cost of this is met by the Government.

From April 2013, the Government is abolishing Council Tax Benefit. It will be replaced with a new benefit called Council Tax Support. The rules about who is entitled to this and how much they will be paid must be written by the Council. Pensioners are not affected.

The challenge in writing the new rules is that the Government is reducing the amount of money available to pay Council Tax Support in Stevenage by £750,000.

We have consulted on our original proposal which considered funding our Council Tax Support scheme by reducing the support paid to all working age claimants by 10%. We were told that people had concerns about the impact on working age claimants

In view of this, the Council is now proposing rules which say that Council Tax Support will be based on 91.5% of peoples Council Tax bills, rather than 100%% of their bills. This means that everyone on low income (who isn't a pensioner) will have to pay the first 8.5% of their Council Tax, before they get any of the new benefit.

Do you think that this will lessen the impact for working age claimants?

- 1) agree strongly
- 2) agree
- 3) neither agree nor disagree
- 4) disagree
- 5) disagree strongly

#### 2. Responses

In total 43 responses were recorded and the following information recorded:

Responses to the amended proposal

agree strongly	5 (11.5%)
agree	29(67.5%)
neither agree nor disagree	2(4.5%)
disagree	5(11.5%)
disagree strongly	2(4.5%)

total	43(100)
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#### Gender

female	25(58%)
male	18(42%)
total	43(100)

#### Age

18-24	1(2%)
25-34	2(4%)
35-44	6(14.5%)
45-54	14(32%)
55-64	5(11.5%)
65+	15(35.5%)
total	43(100%)

#### Ethnicity

White British	40(93%)
Middle East	1(2.3%)
Mixed race – white British and African	1(2.3%)
British Asian	1(2.3%)
total	43(100%)

#### Disability

no disabilities	41(95.5%)
disabilities	2(4%)
total	43(100%)

#### Benefits

council tax *	5(11.5%)
other benefits *	5(11.5%)
no benefits	38(87.5%)
total	43(100%)

\* 5 respondents in total who claimed council tax benefit plus additional benefits

#### Children under 5

children under 5	2(4%)
no children under 5	41(96%)
total	43(100%)

### **3. Summary**

In total 79% of the respondents either agreed or agreed strongly that the new proposal lessened the impact for working age claimants.

Respondents were given the opportunity to comment and any remarks made were recorded. The comments were similar to those made in the main consultation and included an overall concern that those least able to are being asked to contribute.