

Appendix A – Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation

A consultation exercise was undertaken from 12 October 2015 to 30 October 2015. The consultation was posted on the authority's website and publicised on Facebook and Twitter. Additionally a random sample of 500 current recipients of Council Tax Reduction and 500 taxpayers who are not in receipt of Council Tax Reduction were written to inviting them to take part in the consultation. Respondents were encouraged to complete the online consultation. However, a paper form was also made available and a few respondents did complete this.

A total of 44 responses were received. Not all respondents answered every question. Respondents answered as follows.

Q1) Are you responding on behalf of yourself or an organisation?

Yourself	40 (95.45%)
An organisation	2 (4.55%)

One of the organisations was a "household of two liable persons". The other was Oxfordshire County Council.

Q2) Do you agree that the Council should continue with the current scheme which provides the same level of financial support as was provided by Council Tax Benefit?

Yes, I agree	29 (69.05%)
No, I don't agree	10 (23.81%)
Don't know	3 (7.14%)

Q3) Do you agree that the Council should change the Council Tax Reduction scheme so that everybody has to pay a percentage of the Council Tax?

Yes, I agree	21 (51.22%)
No, I don't agree	17 (41.46%)
Don't know	3 (7.32%)

Q4) Do you think the Council should choose any of the following options to help pay for the Council Tax Reduction scheme?

a) Increase Council Tax

Yes	13 (30.95%)
No	21 (50.00%)
Don't know	8 (19.05%)

b) Reduce funding for other services`

Yes	13 (34.21%)
No	17 (44.74%)
Don't know	8 (21.05%)

c) Use financial resources

Yes	20 (52.63%)
No	6 (15.79%)
Don't know	12 (31.58%)

Q5) Under its Welfare Reform agenda the Government are proposing a number of changes to Housing Benefit from April 2016. Details are shown in the Consultation Guidance document. Do you agree that our Council Tax Reduction scheme should be amended to reflect the proposed changes?

Yes, I agree	18 (42.86%)
No, I don't agree	7 (16.67%)
Don't know	17 (40.48%)

Respondents also made the following additional comments:

"Council tax banding needs updating, it seems to me that some properties are paying too little."

"When considering any reductions to areas of funding I welcome and strongly suggest that Councillors and Council employees should see a freeze on all allowances. Indeed I served for many years on several committees at Oxford City Council and never once did I see a vote for no increase in councillors allowances. Councillors are privileged to serve their communities and should therefore show good example by a significant reduction in their over-inflated and over-generous allowances before hitting on the poorest families in our community."

"I currently like how the scheme works alongside housing benefit. It allows people on a very low income to feel like they can keep a roof over their families' heads."

"Persons of "working age" have the OPPORTUNITY to increase their income to accommodate the payment of Council Tax or to move location if unwilling to do that. Pensioners usually have ZERO opportunity to do either so it is essential that any changes made by the Council fully protect the Government mandate that "the scheme for pension-age applicants ... will not be directly affected by any changes."

It is our view that all taxing-authority Councils must be REQUIRED to use ALL but the statutory minimum reserves whenever situations of reduced funding occur. Further; It is our view that persons of pensionable age must have ZERO liability for Council Tax due to the fact that they have ZERO opportunity to increase their income which will always be under permanent downward pressure due to inflation.”

“I believe the council should take a hard and serious look at things they currently pay for, which are, "nice to have" but are not essential, one example might be the large number of expensive plants that are planted and have to be maintained at "a cost" around the town. Perhaps Bicester Village could contribute to this as a small recompense for the horrendous traffic congestion they bring to our town each and every weekend and bank holiday through the year - just a thought!”

“All residents, regardless of income, should be expected to pay a contribution to the services they receive & benefit from. Average income households have exactly the same financial challenges & constraints as low income households, and it is unfair to expect 'average' households to continually fund the excesses of low income households - low income households should be expected to make the same saving adjustments as other households to meet they financial responsibilities (such as council tax).”

“Collecting small amounts of council tax from people on benefits is likely to increase their difficulties and is unlikely to raise much income compared to the administrative efforts needed. We think the Council should consider increasing council tax or finding reasonable savings from other services to fund the CT reduction scheme. Use of reserves is not a long term solution. We think you should make the changes to reflect changes in the Welfare Reform agenda. These do not seem to be major changes.”