

Report to: Cabinet Meeting - 31 October 2023

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Paul Peacock, Strategy, Performance & Finance

Director Lead: Sanjiv Kohli, Deputy Chief Executive & Director - Resources

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Report Summary	
Type of Report	Open Report, Non-Key Decision
Report Title	Localised Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25
Purpose of Report	To confirm the continuation of the Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 with minor changes in accordance with the annual uprating amounts applied by the Department for Works and Pensions.
Recommendations	That Cabinet recommends to Full Council the uprating of the applicable amounts, premiums, state benefits and disregard criteria in accordance with the annual uprating amounts applied by the Department for Works & Pensions (DWP); whilst continuing the current Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 financial year.
Alternative Options Considered	An alternative option would be to increase the maximum award of 80% - the cost of doing this has been considered within the financial implications section in the report.
Reason for Recommendations	To ensure the Council discharges its responsibilities to agree its Council Tax Support scheme by 31 January 2024.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 As part of the 2012 Welfare Reform Act the national Council Tax Benefit scheme was abolished and in accordance with the Local Government Act 2013 local authorities were required to introduce Localised Council Tax Support schemes from 1 April 2013.
- 1.2 Government funding for the new schemes was reduced by approximately 10%, for Newark & Sherwood claimants and this amounted to around £1m.
- 1.3 Support for Council Tax is now offered as reductions within the council tax system with claimants of state pension age receiving a discount of up to 100% thereby ensuring that they receive no reduction in support as a direct result of the reform.

- 1.4 Localisation provided local authorities with the flexibility to design Council Tax Support schemes for working age claimants taking into account the needs of vulnerable groups and the importance of supporting work incentives. Our current scheme provides the following:
- a) A maximum award of 80% of the liability that Council Tax Support would cover for properties in Bands A and B.
 - b) A maximum award of the liability that Council Tax Support would cover equivalent to a council tax band A charge for properties in Bands C to H.
 - c) No entitlement to Council Tax Support where claimants have in excess of £16,000 in capital.
 - d) A work incentive entitlement that maintains the current rate of council tax support for six weeks when moving into employment.
 - e) Providing additional support to vulnerable groups by applying the annual uprating of income and disregard criteria in accordance with the annual uprating amounts applied by the Department for Works and Pensions.

2.0 Proposal

- 2.1 Council Tax Support is calculated by comparing the claimant's income and capital to the applicable amount. The applicable amount is a notional figure made up of amounts set by the DWP each year and is a measure of someone's basic living requirements.
- 2.2 The applicable amount is made up of one or more of the following; dependent upon the makeup of the household:
- A personal allowance for the claimant/partner and children.
 - Any qualifying premiums such as the disability living premium.
- 2.3 By comparing the claimant(s) income and capital to the applicable amount a decision can then be made on the amount of any Council Tax Support entitlement.
- 2.4 This report asks Cabinet to recommend to Full Council uprating the applicable amounts, premiums, state benefits and disregard criteria in accordance with the annual uprating amounts applied by the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP); whilst continuing the current Localised Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 financial year.
- 2.5 In consideration of the obligation to consider vulnerable groups within the design of our local scheme Child Benefit, War Pensions, Personal Independence Payments, Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance continue to be disregarded as income and the disability premiums are retained to protect families with children and people with disabilities.
- 2.6 By applying the annual uprating of income and disregards to the 2024/25 scheme the Council will continue to maintain the current level of support to all Council Tax Support claimants and ensure that the scheme continues to benefit the most vulnerable and low -income households using nationally recognised rates of DWP income rather than continuing with the 2023 rates that are being used in the current scheme.

- 2.7 Should the Council decide not to uprate the income and disregards in line with the annual uprating amounts applied by the DWP, this would then penalise claimants as where their income increases their applicable amount would remain the same as the current year. This would then potentially lead to a reduction in Council Tax support awarded.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding, Sustainability, and Crime and Disorder and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

Financial Implications (FIN23-24 4567)

- 3.1 As at the end of August 2023, the number of working age claimants eligible for Council Tax Support was 3,789 and the number of pensioners eligible for Council Tax Support was 2,917.
- 3.2 The value of support awarded to date for the 2023/24 year is £7,290,000, in line with the forecast expenditure for the scheme. This would be forecast to increase for 2024/25 but will be dependent on the total Council Tax bill including preceptors, which at the time of writing this report are not available. The implications of an 80% award will be built into the Council Tax base in order to prepare the budget for 2024/25.
- 3.3 The additional estimated cost of moving to a maximum (working age) award of up to 90% would be approximately £911,000 of which the cost to Newark and Sherwood District Council would be £78,000.
- 3.4 The additional estimated cost of moving to a maximum (working age) award of 100% would be £1,822,000 of which the cost to Newark and Sherwood District Council would be an additional £156,000.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None