

Consultation Summary

Background

Public consultation on the proposed Draft Scheme of Council Tax Support commenced on Monday 10th September and ended on Sunday 2nd December 2012. This summary provides the key points from the results of the consultation.

Consultation Publicity

A variety of methods were used to publicise the consultation, the most successful being a mailshot sent directly to every claimant – this provoked a large response. The homepage of www.birmingham.gov.uk featured a link to our dedicated webpage. This had over 7300 views during the period of the consultation. There have also been posters and leaflets distributed around the city.

The three main local papers each featured a 4-page supplement on our proposals and the autumn edition of 'Forward' magazine included article on the Council Tax Support scheme proposal. Local charity, welfare and equalities organisations were contacted directly by email and notified of the consultation.

Public Participation

Telephone contact

We received a large number of calls in the days immediate to the issue of the consultation mailshot. The total number of calls during the consultation period was in the region of 2769.

On line survey

Up to the end of the consultation on 2nd December 2012, 1399 people started the online consultation questionnaire with 72% (1011) completing the process.

Public meetings

Five public meetings were held during late September/early October. Attendance at the public meetings was reasonably mixed and a total of 200 people attended. Separate meetings were held with the Birmingham Voluntary Services Council with representation from eight local charity and welfare organisations. Briefings on our proposal were also given to the Private Rented Sector Landlord Forum and Birmingham Social Housing Partnership.

Paper consultation returns

Although there have been many requests for consultation packs to be sent out in the post, less than 20 have been returned.

Consultation Results

CSK Strategies Consultants produced a final report on the consultation results. This was based on responses from the public meetings, online questionnaire, by phone and email. In summary, the consultation results are:

- Nearly half of online respondents (45%) say that Birmingham City Council is adopting the right approach, 20% do not know and 34% say it is not. 70% of the respondents are current Council Tax Benefit recipients.
- Of the 15% of Asian origin that completed the survey 49% disagreed with the approach with 32% agreeing. A much stronger rate of agreement of 68% came from amongst the over 60's
- 34% of respondents who did not agree that Birmingham City Council is adopting the right approach, 60% (180) said the Council Tax Support scheme should be paid for by cutting services and 48% (144) said that council tax should increase.

- 38% thought the scheme was based on the right principles, 18% did not know with 44% saying no. Majority of those who answered no were:

Asians	56% no v 25% yes
White	40% no v 45% yes
Black/Afro	39% no v 46% yes
Under 30s	48% no v 33% yes
30 to 59	47% no v 37% yes
CTB recipients	44% no v 38% yes
Over 60s	29% no v 55% yes

- Over half (52%) said that most people of working age should be expected to pay something towards their Council Tax. 7% did not know and 41% saying no.
- Opposition to the principle of working age paying something was stronger at public meetings, the view was that those in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance and Employment Seekers Allowance would not be able to pay and go into financial difficulties as a result.
- There is strong support (86%) for protecting some groups. Greater detail of 86% that said yes;

Those who have a disability	87%
Those who have a disable child	78%
Those in receipt of ward pension	73%
Those with dependent children under 6	58%
- There was concern at all public meetings regarding the negative impact on those least able to pay and who could not find adequately paid work. Groups mentioned:
 - Young people who would be receiving lower benefits in general
 - Those only receiving Jobseekers Allowance or Income Support
 - Those in low paid or part time work
 - Those with poor social skills and low level of mental health issues
- This issue of carers came up at a number of the public meetings and that parent carers in the main should also be protected.
- There was much disquiet at public meetings on who would qualify for disability premium in particular those who may be excluded from protection by moving from Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance.
- Of the respondents to the online survey, 41% (434) agreed that backdating of claims should be limited to one month and 48% (512) being opposed to the idea.
- Opposition were strongest amongst the under 30s (57% said no) and amongst BME groups (57% of Asian and 55% of Black/Afro Caribbean's said no)
- Out of 48% that were opposed to limiting backdating, 47% thought that the correct length of time for backdating was over 3 months with 45% thinking it should be limited to 3 months.
- Voluntary sector organisations suggested that many of the people they deal with tend to lead the sort of lives that leads to a late recognition that they can claim benefits.
- Two thirds of on line respondents (67%) agreed that empty property and second home discount should be set to zero with 24% against.
- A high proportion (68%) also agreed with charging up to 150% for properties that have been empty for more than 2 years with 23% against.
- The picture was different from Housing Association and Landlords.
 - 9 of 18 Housing Association disagreed with zero discount/exemption with 6 in favour
 - 10 Housing Association were in favour of 150% charge with 4 against
 - 40 of 52 Landlord who responded were against zero discount with 6 in favour
 - 29 Landlords were in favour of 150% charge with 21 against.

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- There were concerns that this might discourage landlords in general from repairing their properties and that a 2 month grace should be given. Also concerns were raised from people inheriting an empty property in need of repairs will also be hit.
 - Many consultees suggested that more savings could be made through reducing wastage, fraud, increasing council tax and cutting unnecessary low priority spending.
 - Strong support for a Hardship fund (76% in favour with only 13% against). Feeling at the public meetings that it would run out very quickly though. Also requests for clarity and transparency on criteria for applying.
 - A high proportion of online survey respondents (88%) are in favour of Birmingham City Council simplifying the administration of its scheme.

Monitoring Data

Of the respondents who have completed the online survey:

- 50% were male, 44% female (the rest did not say);
- 72% were White British/Irish
- 7% were British Black African/African-Caribbean
- 15% were British Asian (of which more than half Pakistani)
- 20% were in receipt of disability premium
- 6% were aged less than 30 years and 23% were aged 60 or over. (18% were pensioners)
- All wards in the city were represented ranging from 17 people from Sutton New Hall, 18 from each of Stechford and Yardley North and Sutton New Hill to 46 from Mosley and Kings Heath.
- A high percentage of respondents (70.0%) are existing Council Tax Benefit Claimants with 84% being of working age (defined as up to 64 years)
- The data shows a broad section of Birmingham's population accessed consultation process although there has been some under representation of:
 - Women
 - Young people
 - Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Communities
 - People not receiving CTB
 - Some wards although there is no clear pattern
- The consultation provides more detail regarding information on the likely impact of the proposed CTS on certain groups. One example is the consideration being given to young people in developing guidance for the proposed Hardship Fund. Another is around limiting backdating on some people with disabilities