

Sefton Council

Annex A Consultation Report Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2015-16

Background

As required by law, the Council reviewed the 2014/15 Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which supports residents with low incomes in paying their Council Tax.

The Scheme has been running since April 2013 and has successfully supported pensioner and non pensioner households.

For 2015/16, the Council proposed to continue with the 2014/15 Council Tax Reduction Scheme subject to some minor changes, as outlined below:

Pensioners

Pensioners remain fully protected from any changes to the scheme for non-pensioners. This is because the national prescribed scheme for pensioners, which the local authority administer, will continue to support claimants of pension age at the same level as 2014/15, except where their circumstances change or there are changes in Government legislation.

Non Pensioners –Annual Upating

Each year state benefits for working age people are increased by the Government. These increases, because they would result in a higher income for anyone receiving benefits, would subsequently result in less Council Tax Reduction unless the applicable amounts and personal allowances for working age claimants are also increased.

It is the Council's intention to annually uprate the Applicable Amounts and Personal Allowances for working age claimants in line with those for Housing Benefit without the need for further consultation.

Non- Pensioners – Non- Dependant Charges:

It is proposed that non-dependant income levels are kept in line with the Government annual uprating of weekly gross earned income levels. This will allow for small increases in earned income not to affect the charges made for a non-dependant.

The proposal for non-dependants in receipt of Universal Credit to be brought more in line with Housing Benefit legislation when calculating Council Tax Reduction charges. This will ensure that Council Tax Reduction claimants are not disadvantaged by the award of Universal Credit for non-dependants. In calculating the earnings in respect of non-dependants the Council propose that the level will be increased in line with the Government scheme for pension age claimants

For clarity, any non-dependant who receives an award of Universal Credit:-

- Where their award of Universal credit includes earned income then a deduction of either £2.00 or £5.00 will be made as appropriate.
- Where the award of Universal Credit is calculated on the basis that the non-dependant does not have any earned income no deduction will be made.

This information was included in a Supporting Document that accompanied the consultation (Annex 1).

The Consultation

At the moment there are more than 15,600 working age residents in the borough who are affected by the scheme and the Council welcomes any views on the proposals.

The Council has been consulting with the public on the proposed Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2015-16 and the minor changes within.

The consultation commenced on 10th October 2014 and ended on 14th November 2014, 12.00 noon.

Methodology

The Consultation for the general public took the form of an on-line questionnaire which was accessed via the Council's website. Members of the public were able to view a copy of the proposed amendment to the scheme on the Council's website and then complete the questionnaire giving their views. A link to the questionnaire was also included on the intranet.

A press release (Annex 2) was issued giving details of the proposed amendments to the scheme and how members of the public could have their say.

A letter (Annex 3) was sent to stakeholders inviting them to comment (over 55 stakeholders, including RSL's housing associations, voluntary & community organisation, local MP's, Parish Councillors). Details of the number of responses received are included in the results section of this report.

Contact (Annex 4) was also made with Council Tax Preceptors to ascertain their views and details are also included in the results section.

Information about how to take part in the consultation was also presented at landlord events and via the Council's website, intranet and Social Media (Twitter)

The Results

2 responses were received by letter/email (Annex 5)

39 responses were received to the **online questionnaire** by the closing date on 14th November 2014.

The following paragraphs give details of the questions asked and responses.

Question 1

Annual Uprating (Non Pensioners)

Do you agree that the Council should increase (up rate) the Personal Allowances and Applicable Amounts in accordance with the Department for Work & Pensions rates for non-pensioners? (This will ensure the Scheme is kept up to date and not disadvantage applicants whose other benefits increase annually)

Response	No of responses	%
Yes	31	79
No	8	21
Total	39	100

Question 2

Non-Dependant charges (Non Pensioners)

Do you agree non-dependant earned income levels are kept in line with the pensioner scheme set by Central Government? (This will allow for small increases in income not to affect the deductions made)

Response	No of responses	%
Yes	32	82
No	7	18
Total	39	100

Question 3

Non- Dependant charges -Treatment of Universal Credit (Non Pensioners)

Do you agree that no charge should be made for a non-dependant whose award of Universal Credit is calculated on the basis that he or she does not have any earned income? (This will ensure that Council Tax Reduction Scheme claimants

are not disadvantaged by the award of Universal Credit for non-dependants in their households).

Response	No of responses	%
Yes	30	77
No	9	23
Total	39	100

Question 4

Do you agree that the Council should look to automatically up rate each year without the need for further consultation (unless there are other changes to be made to the 2015/16 Scheme?)

Response	No of responses	%
Yes	23	59
No	16	41
Total	39	100

Do you have any further comments?

The following comments were received from those who **agreed** with the proposals:

- Some one who is in receipt of income based JSA or pre assessment rate ESA of £72.40 per week, should not be expected to pay anything towards their council tax ,as they simply do not have enough money coming in
- I work full time my self my partner cant work because we have small children at home one is 3 one is 1 and my daughter is 8 I can't afford rent the council tax because you help is not enough and I don't know how to resolve this ?
- These questions are not as simple as they could be and no real explanations next to them could mean people inadvertently vote incorrectly.
- It is unjust to charge full council tax to people who do not live in the borough and use none of its services. I am thinking of landlords.

The following comments were received from those who **did not agree** with the proposals:

- I think it is very poor that these choices default to yes and that the questions are deliberately ambiguous / difficult to understand.
- Everyone should contribute something even those claiming benefits then my £142 pm may be reduced helping out the working poor!!

About yourself – gender

Response	No of responses	% of responses
Male	17	44
Female	15	38
Prefer Not to Say	7	18
Total	39	100%

About yourself – age

Response	No of responses	%
18-24	1	3
25-39	8	21
40-59	20	51
60-74	3	8
Prefer not to say	7	17
Total	39	100

About yourself – Do you have a long term illness, health problem or disability which limits your daily activities?

Response	No of responses	%
Yes	9	23
No	21	54

Prefer not to say	9	23
Total	39	100

About yourself – Which of these describes your ethnic group?

Response	No of responses	%
White	29	74
Black	0	0
Asian	1	3
Mixed		0
Other	1	3
Prefer not to say	8	21
Total	39	100

Of those who said that they ***didn't agree*** with the proposal (X) the following statistics have been obtained:-

Gender

Response	No of responses	%
Female	2	25
Male	5	63
Prefer not to say	1	23
Total	8	100

Age

Response	No of responses	%
18-24	0	
25-39	4	50
40-59	3	38

60-74	0	
Prefer not to say	1	13
Total	8	100

Long Term Illness/Health Problem/Disability

Response	No of responses	%
Yes	0	0
No	6	75
Prefer not to say	2	25
Total	8	100

Ethnicity

Response	No of responses	%
White	6	75
Black	0	0
Asian	0	0
Mixed	0	0
Other	1	13
Prefer not to say	1	13
Total	8	100

Of those who said that they **did agree** with the proposal (X) the following statistics have been obtained:-

Gender

Response	No of responses	%
Female	13	42
Male	12	39

Prefer not to say	6	19
Total	31	100

Age

Response	No of responses	%
18-24	1	3
25-39	4	13
40-59	17	55
60-74	3	10
Prefer not to say	6	19
Total	31	100

Long Term Illness/Health Problem/Disability

Response	No of responses	%
Yes	9	29
No	15	48
Prefer not to say	7	23
Total	31	100

Ethnicity

Response	No of responses	%
White	23	74
Black	0	0
Asian	1	3
Mixed	0	0
Other	0	0

Prefer not to say	7	23
Total	31	100

- Annex 1 Consultation leaflet
- Annex 2 Press Release
- Annex 3 Stakeholder Letter
- Annex 4 Local Authorities Preceptors
- Annex 5 Consultation responses received by letter