

Have Your Say on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Blackpool Council's local Council Tax Reduction Scheme replaced council tax benefit in 2013. Government announced a number of changes to the Housing Benefit Scheme and the Council is proposing a number of changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2018/19 to keep it in line with Housing Benefit, ensuring it does not cost the Council more to run.

The Council would like to hear what you think of the proposals, any suggestions for how the Scheme is changed and any alternative ways for the Council to make savings if the Scheme does not change.

Before completing this survey **it is important that you read the background information sheet provided** to help you understand the detail. The survey will take around 10 minutes to complete.

The consultation closes on the **22nd October 2017**.

Thank you in advance for your feedback.

Q1 I have read the background information (above) about the Council Tax Reduction Scheme:

Yes

No (please read the background information before continuing)

Paying for the scheme

Q2 Should the Council keep the current Council Tax Reduction scheme? (Should it continue to administer the scheme and have the same level of support as it does at the moment?)

Yes

No

Don't know

Q3 Please use the space below to make any comments you have on protecting the Council Tax Reduction Scheme from these changes.

Options to change the current Council Tax Reduction scheme

As explained in the background information, the Council is primarily consulting on the following proposals to change the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 1st April 2018, which would align the scheme with Housing Benefit to assist in its administration and extend the protections provided to certain groups. Your responses are a part of this consultation. Set out below are the proposals being considered.

Proposal 1 – To include additional groups within the ‘protected category’

Within the current scheme, applicants who fall within the protected group can have a reduction up to a maximum of 86.44% rather than a maximum of 72.89% for non-protected working age cases. Currently the following groups are deemed to fall into the protected group:

- Where the applicant or their partner receive, Disability Living Allowance or a Personal Independence Payment; or
- An applicant who is a lone parent and who is responsible and resides with a child under 5 years old; or
- Where the applicant or their partners receives carers allowance; or
- Where the applicant or their partner is in receipt of a war pension, war widows pension, war disablement pension or equivalent

This proposal would extend the protected group to include all of the categories above **plus the following:**

- Where the applicant or their partner receive:
Income Support; or
Income-Based Jobseekers Allowance; or
Income-Related Employment Support Allowance.

The benefits to the Council of this are:

- That more, low income and vulnerable households would receive a higher level of Council Tax Reduction;
- There would be a reduction in administration costs as there would be less time spent trying to recover small amounts of Council Tax from customers whose incomes are low.

The drawbacks of doing this are:

- It would increase the overall costs of the Scheme by approximately £0.4 million based on the additional support outlined above.

Q4 Do you agree with the change to the ‘protected category’?

Yes

No

Don't know

Q5 If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

Proposal 2 – Disregarding the new Bereavement Support Payments

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has introduced a new benefit for working age applicants whose partner dies after April 2017. This is called Bereavement Support Payment and replaces Bereavement Payments, Bereavement Allowance and Widowed Parents Allowance. By making the change, the Council will be able to disregard any amounts paid in the calculation of Council Tax Reduction. The payments are currently disregarded in other benefits such as Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.

The benefit of this is:

- It brings the working age Council Tax Reduction Scheme in line with Housing Benefit changes made by Central Government; and
- The change will be fairer to applicants who have recently lost a partner

The drawbacks of doing this are:

- None

Q6 Do you agree with this change to the scheme?

Yes

No

Don't know

Q7 If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

Proposal 3 – To disregard the We Love Manchester Emergency Fund and The London Emergencies Trust.

Since the tragedies in Manchester and London, emergency funds have been created to assist the victims. The current Council Tax Reduction Scheme takes any payments made to applicants into account as income or capital. Housing Benefit and Universal Credit have been amended to disregard any such payments.

The benefits of the Council doing this are:

- The treatment of the funds will be brought into line with all other welfare benefits;
- Persons receiving these payments will not experience any reduction in Council Tax Reduction.

The drawbacks of doing this are:

- None

Q8 Do you agree with this change to the scheme?

Yes

No

Don't know

Q9 If you disagree what alternative would you propose?

Alternatives to increasing the amount of help provided by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme

If the Council keeps the current scheme, it will be administratively more complex (as it will not align with Housing Benefit which is also administered by the Council) and it will be unfair to certain groups especially those receiving the new payments which are disregarded from Housing Benefit. In the main, the changes will be cost neutral due to the continued reduction in scheme costs. The changes will be met within existing budgets and will not impose any additional costs on taxpayers.

Q10 Do you think we should choose any of the following options rather than the proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme? Please select one answer for each;

Q10a Not make the changes and use any savings for other Council Services;

Yes

No

Don't know

Q10 Not make the changes and use any savings to potentially reduce the Council Tax;

b

Yes

No

Don't know

Q10c Not make the changes and retain any savings for future use;

Yes

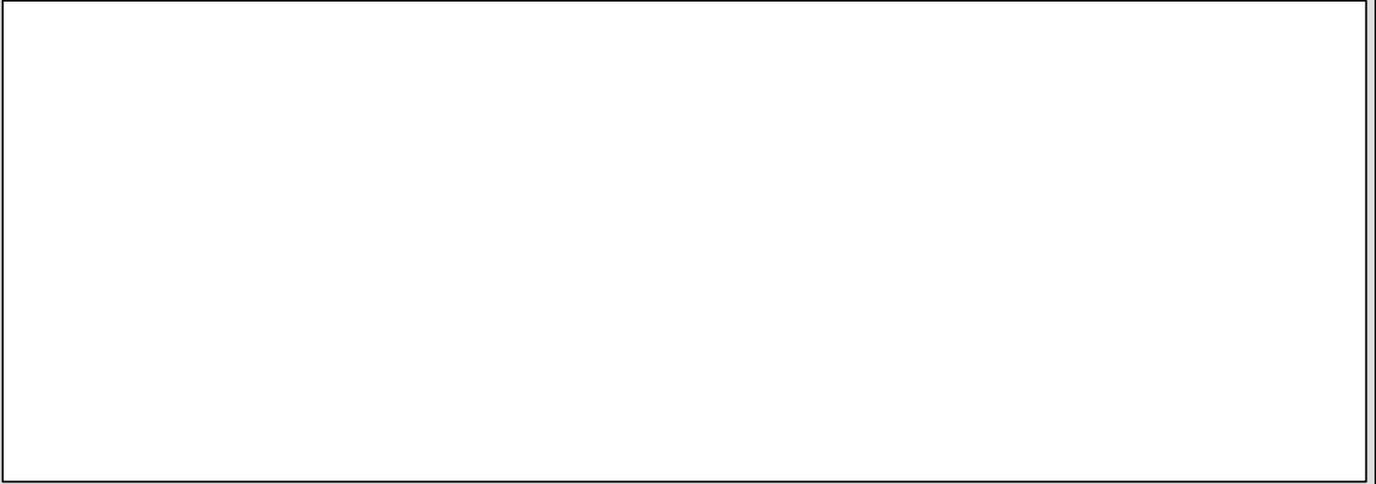
No

Don't know

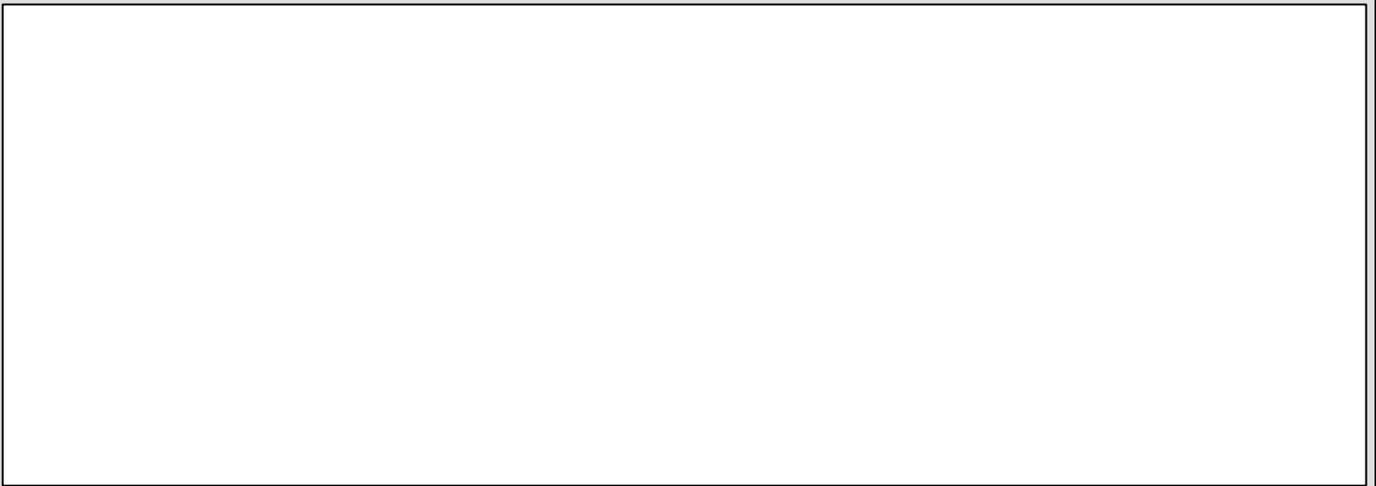
Q11 If the Council were to choose these other options, what would be your order of preference? Please rank in order of preference by selecting a number from 1 – 3 in the boxes below, where 1 is the option that you would most prefer and 3 is the option that you would prefer the least.

	1	2	3
Use savings for other Council services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Potentially reduce Council Tax levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Retain any savings for future use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

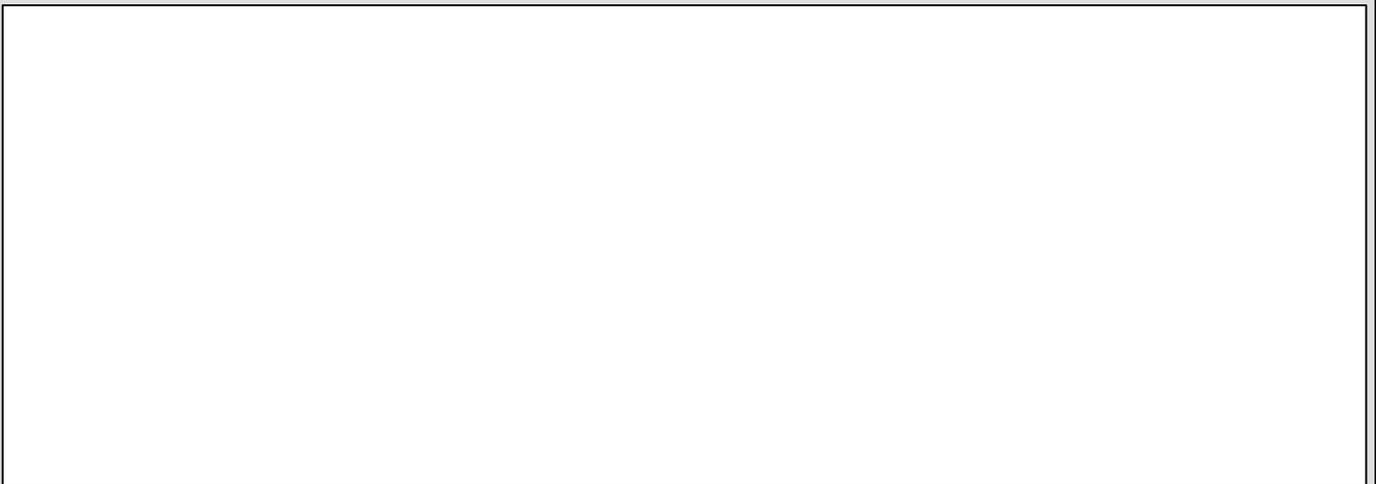
Q12 Please use this space to make any other comments on the scheme.



Q13 Please use the space below if you would like the Council to consider any other options (please state).



Q14 If you have any further comments or questions to make regarding the Council Tax Reduction scheme that you haven't had opportunity to raise elsewhere, please use the space below.



About You

We ask these questions:

1. To find out if different groups of people in the Council's population have been able to take part in the consultation and identify if any groups have been excluded. This means it is not about you as an individual but to find out if people with similar characteristics have had their say.
2. To find out if different groups of people feel differently about the options and proposals in comparison to each other and all respondents. This means it is not about you as an individual but to find out if people with similar characteristics have answered in the same way or not.

This information is completely confidential and anonymous. Your personal information will not be passed on to anyone and your personal details will not be reported alongside your responses.

Q15 Do you have any children in the following age groups? PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 11 to 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't have any children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as: A person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Q16 Are your day to day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

- | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, limited a lot | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, limited a little | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|---|--|-----------------------------|

Q17 What best describes your ethnic background?

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White British | <input type="checkbox"/> Black or Black British | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White - Other | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed Ethnicity | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or Asian British | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Ethnic Group | |

If other, please explain

Q18 Are you, or someone in your household, getting a Council Tax Reduction at this time?

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|

Q19 Are you...?

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Female | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|

Q20 Which age group do you belong to?

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18 to 24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 45 to 54 | <input type="checkbox"/> 75 to 84 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 to 34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 55 to 64 | <input type="checkbox"/> 85 or over |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 35 to 44 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65 to 74 | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

Next steps...

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.

The consultation closes on 22/10/2017.

We will listen carefully to what residents tell us and take the responses into consideration when making a final decision on the 2018/19 scheme.

Following the decision, the full results from the consultation will be available on the Council's website. The new scheme will start on **1 April 2018**. The Council will consider the impact of the scheme annually and consult again if it thinks further changes need to be made.

Please return this survey in the freereply envelope provided