

Cumberland Shadow Authority

26 January 2023

Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24

Report from:	Catherine Nicholson Chief Finance Officer S.151
Report Author:	Reg Bascombe Head of Revenues & Benefits Services Carlisle CC
Wards:	All
Key Decision:	Yes

1.0 Purpose/Summary of report

- 1.1. The Council is asked to approve a new single Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24 for Cumberland Council in accordance with Schedule 1A (3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- 1.2. The purpose of this report is to recommend to the Council the adoption of a single unified Council Tax Reduction Scheme with effect from 1st April 2023.
- 1.3. The proposed scheme maintains the existing provisions of the legacy District Councils policies and following a consultation exercise, proposed minor changes to improve administration. An updated Council Tax Reduction Scheme policy will be produced, once the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) regulations applicable for 2023/24 relating to Pensioners, are published in Spring 2023.
- 1.4 Details of the proposed changes and consultation responses were considered by the Shadow Executive on 20th December 2022 and a copy of the report from that meeting is attached.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Shadow Authority:-

- (1) Approve a new single Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24 for Cumberland Council, in accordance with**

Schedule 1A (3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. It is also to be noted that the relevant amendments will be made to the Policy in accordance with the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations.

- (2) Approve that the 100% voluntary disregard is applicable under the scheme of War Disablement Pensions, War Widows Pensions and War Widowers' Pensions, under Section 134 (8) and 139 (6) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992.**

Cumberland Shadow Executive

Date: 20 December 2022

Title: Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Report from: Catherine Nicholson Interim Section. 151 Officer
Report Author: Reg Bascombe Head of Revenues & Benefits Services Carlisle CC
Wards: All
Key Decision: Yes

2.0 Purpose/Summary of report

- 1.4. The Council is asked to approve a new single Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24 for Cumberland Council in accordance with Schedule 1A (3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- 1.5. The purpose of this report is to recommend to Council the adoption of a single, unified Council Tax Reduction with effect from 1st April 2023.
- 1.6. Each year all Councils are required to review their Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme in accordance with the requirements of the schedule 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and to either maintain the scheme or replace it. In the case of Cumberland Council, as it is a new unitary, there is a requirement to agree a scheme which covers the whole of the new Council's area and replaces the schemes previously operated by the former city and boroughs.
- 1.7. Effectively the Council Tax Reduction scheme is in two 'parts', working age and pension age. The new unitary Council does not need to make any decision in relation to pension age applicants as that scheme is prescribed by Government and is operated by all English authorities in a similar way.
- 1.8. As with all of authorities, the Council needs to adopt a CTR scheme for working age applicants. However, unlike most authorities, the formation of the new Council from the existing city and boroughs

means that a single scheme needs to be agreed which will be implemented across the **whole** of the Cumberland area.

- 1.9. Council Tax Reduction was introduced from 1 April 2013 when it replaced the Central Government funded Council Tax Benefit regime. From its inception, the funding available to Councils from Government has reduced year on year.
- 1.10. This report recommends the introduction of a Cumberland wide unitary scheme with effect from 1st April 2023.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Shadow Executive:-

- (1) It is recommended that the Council approve a new single Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24 for Cumberland Council, as outlined in this report, in accordance with Schedule 1A(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- (2) It is recommended that the Council approve the 100% voluntary disregard is applicable under the scheme of War Disablement Pensions, War Widows Pensions and War Widowers' Pensions, under Section 134(8) and 139(6) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992.

3.0 Background and Proposals

- 3.1 Council Tax Reduction (CTR) was introduced by Central Government in April 2013 as a replacement for the Council Tax Benefit scheme administered on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of the introduction, the Government:
- Placed the duty to create a local scheme for **Working Age** applicants with billing authorities;
 - Reduced initial funding by the equivalent of ten per cent from the levels paid through benefit subsidy to authorities under the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme; and
 - Prescribed that persons of **Pension age** would be dealt with under regulations set by Central Government and not the authorities' local scheme.
- 3.2 Since that time, funding for the Council Tax Reduction scheme has been amalgamated into other Central Government grants paid to Local Authorities and into the Business Rates Retention regime. It is

now generally accepted that it is not possible to identify the amount of funding actually provided from Government sources.

- 3.3 Currently Council Tax Reduction schemes administered by all of the existing districts and boroughs are divided into two, with pension age applicants receiving support under the rules prescribed by statute, and the scheme for working age applicants being determined solely by individual district or borough.
- 3.4 Pensioners, subject to their income, can receive up to 100 per cent support towards their council tax. No authority has power to change the level of support provided to pensioners although in all cases the schemes have been enhanced by allowing the full disregard of war pensions and war disablement pensions (the Local Scheme) which fulfils the authorities' agreement to adopt the Armed Forces Covenant.
- 3.5 When Council Tax Reduction was introduced in 2013, for working age applicants, the districts and boroughs broadly adopted the previous means tested Council Tax Benefit scheme as the basis of awarding support. Since that time however, only slight amendments have been made.
- 3.6 In the main, the former city and boroughs operated very similar schemes providing up to 100% support to working age applicants, depending on their level of income and the make-up of their household. There is now a need to align the schemes into a single approach and in the main the recommended scheme will allow the new Council to make awards very much in line with previous schemes with a minimum number of changes.
- 3.7 This approach will largely maintain the status quo which is particularly important during the current cost of living crisis. However, it is recommended that certain changes are made both to fully align the approach and also to ensure that the scheme can deal adequately with both changes to the welfare benefits schemes generally and also with the implementation of Universal Credit within the areas.

3.8 For clarity all of the main aspects of the schemes will carry forward to the new unified approach, however the following the following changes are proposed:

(a) The current schemes apply a temporary absence rule which basically allows applicants to continue to receive Council Tax Reduction provided that they are not absent from the dwelling for a period greater than 13 weeks. Housing Benefit and the Council Tax Reduction for pension age applicants changed in 2016 to reduce this period to 4 weeks when any applicant leaves Great Britain. Any other absence remained at 13 weeks.
It is recommended that the new working age scheme for Cumberland adopt this revised approach.

(b) Changes made to both Housing Benefit and the Council Tax Reduction for pension age applicants in 2017 removed the award of the Family Premium for any new claim received from that date onwards.

It is proposed that the new scheme adopts the approach to align the working scheme with the scheme for pensioners and Housing Benefit.

(c) The introduction of Universal Credit within the Cumbria area has, as experienced in all other areas, brought a number of significant challenges to both the administration of Council Tax Reduction and also the collection of Council Tax generally. All Councils have experienced the following:

- The reluctance of Universal Credit claimants to make a prompt claim for Council Tax Reduction leading to a loss in entitlement; and
- A high number of changes to Universal Credit cases are received from the Department for Work and Pensions requiring a change to Council Tax Reduction entitlement. On average 40% of Universal Credit claimants have between eight and twelve changes in entitlement per annum. These changes result in amendments to Council Tax liability, the re-calculation of instalments, delays, and a demonstrable loss in collection;

In view of the above, it is proposed that the new working age scheme for Cumberland include the provision to allow any claim for Universal Credit to automatically be treated as an application for Council Tax Reduction. This will

protect low-income households and enable maximum support to be given.

In addition, it is recommended that the scheme has flexibilities to allow the authority to determine which changes received from the Department for Work and Pensions should be actioned.

(d) There is a need to ensure that any new scheme is flexible enough to be able to deal with the following:

(a) The introduction of special schemes and initiatives by Government to address crises such as COVID-19 or the cost-of-living crisis; and

(b) The potential increases in welfare benefits in order to assist in the cost-of-living crisis.

In order to ensure that the new scheme has the ability to effectively encompass any new initiative without having a negative effect on the amount of support applicants receive, it is recommended that the scheme gives the new Council the ability to disregard any payments made under these initiative

4.0 Consultation

4.1 The consultation has been undertaken in line with the statutory requirements with:

- Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner; and
- The public together with other stakeholders

4.2 The public consultation exercise ran up to 21st November 2022.

4.3 The full public consultation analysis is attached at Appendix A, which details the questions asked and summarises the responses.

4.4 The appendix also includes the response received from Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

4.5 The consultation exercise was publicised through a wide variety of channels so as to maximise the ability of people to respond. The Council also contacted other organisations including the voluntary

sector such as Citizens Advice. The responses were mainly via the website, but we also offered the ability to complete paper copies and an assisted completion service. Additional demographic data collected with the responses indicates a good spread of responses both geographically and across the different age ranges.

- 4.6 Consultation exercises for Council Tax Reduction schemes are quite complex as we need to consult on the detail of the schemes. Despite this the response rate for this consultation exercise was good and in total we received 148 responses. In addition, the responses we received indicated a high degree of support for the proposed scheme.
- 4.7 The responses were kept under close review throughout the consultation period and additional actions to encourage take-up were undertaken throughout. A final review was completed following the end of the consultation period. No significant changes to the proposed scheme have been made following the consultation, which is supportive of the proposals.

5.0 Outline of the issue that a decision is being sought on and reasons for the recommendations

- 5.1 The Council is asked to approve that the Council introduces a single unified new scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1st April 2023. This will run alongside the pension age scheme which is prescribed by Government.
- 5.2 Council Tax Reduction Schemes are the responsibility of the 'billing authority' under the Council Tax legislation. Currently this responsibility rests with the city and boroughs but from 1st April 2023 will transfer to the new Council.
- 5.3 The new working age scheme will adopt the key principles of the schemes already in operation within the existing city and boroughs plus the recommendations detailed in 3.8 above.
- 5.4 Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme assessments are determined in accordance with the Modified Scheme provisions, under which a 100% voluntary disregard is applicable of War Disablement Pensions, War Widows Pensions and War Widowers' Pensions, under Section 134(8) and 139(6) of the Social Security Administration Act

1992. It is proposed that this principle will be maintained within the Cumberland Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

6.0 Alternative Options

- 6.1 With the creation of the new Council, unlike the previous city and boroughs, there is no alternative other than to implement a single unified scheme. This is required by law and there is no legal mechanism that would allow the existing 'legacy' schemes to continue.
- 6.2 There are a number of schemes designs that could be adopted including more radical approaches which are being implemented by other authorities, however due to the high level of support being provided currently to working age applicant and also that the three legacy authorities operate similar schemes currently, it is recommended that a similar scheme design is recommended and that any further review should be undertaken at some time in the future.
- 6.3 By taking the recommended approach the Council will have a scheme which is both robust, proven and safe. It will also provide applicants with certainty in these difficult times.

7.0 Implications

Financial, Resources and Procurement

- 7.1 The Council Tax Reduction schemes cost approximately £20.8m which is borne by the Collection Fund. Costs are shared using the proportions of the charge attributed to the Council and the Major Precepting Authority
- Cumberland Council;
 - Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
- 7.2 The overall approach for the single unified scheme will be to provide the same high level of support to those households on the very lowest incomes. Based on current modelling, were the new scheme to be in place at the current time, the costs would be the same as identified in 7.1 above. The proposed changes to the scheme detailed in 3.8 will have little impact on the cost.

Human Resources

- 7.3 None

Legal

7.4 Schedule 1A (3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, states:

Before making a scheme, the authority must:

- consult any major precepting authority which has power to issue a precept to it,
- publish a draft scheme in such manner as it thinks fit, and
- consult such other persons as it considers are likely to have an interest in the operation of the scheme.

7.5 In addition, in order to set a new scheme, the Council is obliged to make a resolution by 11th March of the year prior to the scheme coming into place.

Health and Sustainability Impact Assessment

7.6 Have you completed a Health and Sustainability Impact Assessment?
No

7.7 If you have not completed an Impact Assessment, please explain your reasons: Anticipated that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme does not require an assessment

Equality and Diversity

7.8 Have you completed an Equality Impact Analysis? Yes

7.9 If you have not completed an Impact Analysis, please explain your reasons: Not Applicable.

7.10 The move to the new scheme will either have a neutral or positive effect to the majority of working age claimants and all pension age applicants will be unaffected.

7.11 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed and is shown at Appendix B below.

7.12 The effect of the new scheme, if approved will be monitored throughout the 2023/24 financial year.

Risk Management	Consequence	Controls required
None		

Contact Officers

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Appendices Attached to this Report

Appendix A – Consultation Analysis

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment


Background Documents Available

None




APPENDIX A – CONSULTATION ANALYSIS

Cumberland Council - Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24 Consultation

Background to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme consultation

1. I have read the background information about the Council Tax Reduction Scheme: This question must be answered before you can continue.				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		100.00%	102
2	No		0.00%	0
			answered	102
			skipped	46

Part 1 - Continuing with the means tested scheme for all working age applicants which will provide up to 100% support

2. Do you agree with the means-tested scheme as shown above?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		77.22%	61
2	No		15.19%	12
3	Don't Know		7.59%	6
			answered	79
			skipped	69

3. If you disagree please explain why. You can also use this space to let us know if you have any alternative suggestions.




Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	100.00%	13
1	Time consuming and extra staff to process the system. What about people who have saved for the future but are still on low income		
2	Lazy people are being rewarded for not working		
3	Single households on a medium wage, have to pay all utilities on a single persons wage, so 25 percent does not seem enough		
4	The term low Income is thrown around so much these days it's so frustrating. A full time job paying just above the nation minimum wage takes you above the threshold! What incentive is there for anyone to progress when you are penalised financially. The low Income threshold needs raised to reflect the current cost of living to be accurate. Take the average monthly rent plus average monthly food bill, plus average gas & electric, plus water (including the bottled water we have to buy because it's undrinkable) add that to school meal costs, childcare, prescription costs of £10 per item, branded school uniforms, obligatory tv license etc etc you need to be coming home with £1700 a month net to afford all this. Not many jobs in Cumbria will pay that amount of money as a starting salary..... Until that happens we are better off not working..... Not putting into the system hence the continued cycle of generations not working and those that do work scraping by because they over the threshold to qualify for anything. The system is broken, until you change the threshold to reflect reality any change you make is pointless and a waste of officer time and those that actually pay council tax money.		
5	I think the capital limit of £16,000 is far too low in the current climate. Things that have also not been taken into account is for people getting ESA who are in a group and PIP, who work part-time and have a pension from years ago, this should have no bearing on affordability. There should at least be an offer on the table of a percentage/reduction. Council Tax swallows up a large part of anyone's income after Mortgage and fuel consumption, even water rates are getting ridiculous.		
6	<p>I agree that it should be means tested but think that it should be means tested on income rather than on savings or, at the very least the current cap should be raised or, in the case of cohabiting partners, the capital limit should be per person. In my household of two cohabiting adults, we have a joint annual income of £10,000 but we have a council tax burden of £1,600. One adult is not in employment due to autism, ptsd, generalised anxiety disorder and social anxiety. The other adult is self employed as a gardener with an unpredictable income. (If the weather is very bad for example then his income will be massively reduced that week). Our household is not eligible for any council tax reduction (or indeed any other means tested benefit) due to our combined savings of being over £16,000 (due to one adult inheriting £7,000 on the death of his mother). We are thus forced to pay more (over twice as much) on council tax than on heating our home each month - and it is cold and damp as a result. If our council tax burden was not so high we could redirect some of this money to use on other things and be able to live more comfortably. At the same time, because of our location (rural, unadopted road etc) we get very little in return for the money we give as council tax.</p> <p>As an alternative suggestion (and this requires government reform rather than local reform) I believe that the current council tax system should be replaced with a proportional property tax, where tax is paid to central government as a percentage of the value of each property and then this redistributed to local councils. See fairersshare.org.uk for more information. It is completely wrong that we in our tiny one bedroomed terraced bungalow on an unadopted road in a rural area should be paying more council tax each year than Buckingham palace!</p>		
7	16k has been in place for a number of years this should be increased to average wages for the area Local authority Average salary in 2021 Allerdale £29.6k South Lakeland £29.6k Carlisle £30.4k Eden £31.5k United Kingdom £38.1k Barrow-in-Furness £40.4k Copeland £47.8k		

3. If you disagree please explain why. You can also use this space to let us know if you have any alternative suggestions.

	Copeland is only that high due to lala land not every body works their and lots are struggling due to false economy		
8	I am a single salaried household. I earn below the national average. I am a public sector worker. I have a small 2 bed cottage in Burgh by Sands and yet I pay the same council tax as a 2 salaried family who live in a 4 bedroom detached house in Stanwix Carlisle. This system does not work. The scheme of working out the rate of council tax is dickensian and should be modernised. Its not a fair system.		
9	Working people often get paid a similar wage to those claiming benefits yet because they work they are not eligible for any help but if they didn't work and claimed benefits they would - it should be based on a household income rather than if you are on benefits, if you work you can provide evidence of your income by providing a P60		
10	Does this mean a single person living on their own will pay the full council tax if they have saving over 16,000?		
11	Should not allow 100% reduction, but be caped at a maximum of 25%.		
12	Any schemes of this type need to have more flexibility - what support is available for people who are not in receipt of Universal Crddit or Pension Credit because they have worked all their lives and paid taxes, but are just above the thresholds? What support is available for unpaid carers?		
13	No mention of band reduction for homes adapted to meet needs.		
		answered	13
		skipped	135

Part 2 - Reducing the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Reduction to 4 weeks

4. Do you agree with this proposal?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		68.92%	51
2	No		22.97%	17
3	Don't Know		8.11%	6
			answered	74
			skipped	74

5. If you disagree please explain why. You can also use this space to let us know if you have any alternative suggestions.




Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	100.00%	20
1	If away from home 13wks means they can afford to pay. Working person doesnt get that amount of A/L		
2	4 weeks over what period? A year? S month. Some people go on holiday for more than 4 weeks in a year		
3	Armed forces and mariners have been mentioned in this, have other reasons for absence been considered, ie. care for a relative abroad. I agree with the 4 weeks but perhaps other exemptions should be considered to ensure that families are not penalised at a possible time of hardship/extreme pressure. Just a thought.		
4	There should be an option fir extenuating circumstances or a fast track back due to certain circumstances eg illness abroad		
5	People should be able to choose to travel out of the UK for reasons other than those listed as exempt here. The benefit is means-tested - being out of the UK for personal circumstance reasons does not change someone's income & what they can afford to pay for.		
6	There may be situations where it is necessary for a person to leave the country for more than 4 weeks due to family circumstances. It would be unfair to place an added council tax burden on a person in such a situation which may already be difficult and stressful for them. I think that in the case of reducing the limit to 4 weeks, then the list of exceptions should be increased to include family commitments such as caring for someone suffering from ill health.		
7	This should be increased due to not every one working away are in the occupations second homes in the authority should be taxed at the high rete if not on the housing market to renters		
8	May be exceptional circumstances around people visiting family; deaths in families abroad that do need to be consider as examples.		
9	This seems quite a short period; it is possible for example that a person could be justifiably be visiting family members abroad, eg relative living in Australia pays for tickets for person to come & visit. Maybe six weeks would be better?		
10	This will cause undue stress. More paperwork for the individual and council staff to deal with.		
11	What is meant by "temporarily absent"? Would have been beneficial if you had included some examples		
12	My work contracts mean I have to be outside the UK for more than 4 weeks and my contracts TC's change frequently. Since diversity in job applications and at the age of 64,logically many local companies are reluctant to hire me. Losing the current discount of 5% will be a shame and so I would need to fund this from other sources. Hopefully I can do this as paying my Council tax is a priority. Alternative suggestion? Lowering the 5% discount to say 2% seems a nice compromise.		
13	Should be immediate cessation when not present in home.		
14	With the exception of armed forces, why should people who are away for more than 2 weeks e.g. holiday, reap local council benefits? Anyone away for longer can obviously afford to do so? For some benefits e.g.		

5. If you disagree please explain why. You can also use this space to let us know if you have any alternative suggestions.

	Attendance Allowance, Carer's Allowance, the relevant dept. needs to be contacted if the recipient of AA is hospitalised for 1 night. Similar rigour should be applied to means tested benefits.
15	Keep the existing durations. People who need the means tested discount may have relatives overseas who they could stay with for extended durations. Also, they aren't using council services when out of the country, whether it be 1 week or 13 weeks. Having to reapply will be a further burden on council resources. It could lead to fraud, if people disagree with paying.
16	If the time out of the UK is due to either their own or a family members health, i.e. a hospital stay then the reduction should remain in place. Also not sure if there finances are still the same if there is any benefit in reapplying, as applications tend to produce time periods where people suffer financial hardship and longer lasting depts.
17	Under some benefits people are allowed to continue to receive their benefits if they leave the country for reasons such as healthcare that can only be found in other countries. This same ruling should apply to Council Tax. Additionally those who find themselves trapped in other countries due to sickness, pandemics, acts of war and other circumstances beyond their control should have their benefits continued. Whilst people are away from their homes they are not using the services that are being provided, effectively saving costs to the council.
18	Will there be 3xceptions on other grounds e.g. medical treatment, temporary absence fir bereavement etc.? The Council should consider these across the board.
19	Think a compromise of 8 weeks should be reached.
20	Just because they go away? if they have a property they should still pay
	answered 20
	skipped 128

Part 3 - Changing the rules for the family premium to align with the pension age scheme and Housing Benefit

6. Do you agree with this proposal?

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Response Total
1 Yes 	59.72%	43
2 No 	18.06%	13
3 Don't Know 	22.22%	16

6. Do you agree with this proposal?

answered	72
skipped	76

7. If you disagree please explain why. You can also use this space to let us know if you have any alternative suggestions.

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	100.00%	12
1	Working age are struggling more than those on benefits our salaries have not rising with inflation but we don't qualify for any help...hidden poor People on benefits have more disposable income. than those working. It's sad Any they get school.meals free, trips free activities free. The children of working families are those that are missing out the most.		
2	I think if this is to be removed then a transitional period should be built it to relieve any hardship, at a time when cost of living is at an all time high, I think we need to ensure this category of people should be protected from further hardship, at least for a transitional period.		
3	Extend to include dependent adult of family.		
4	Dependent children are relevant to what a person can afford & should be taken into account.		
5	Should be consistent across the board.		
6	Penalising working people yet again. If you are on universal credit you get everything but some people are just over the threshold for benefits and struggle just as much - again should be based on a households total income rather than if you are a benefits claimant. Evidence of income can be provided by working people.		
7	Didn't understand this part		
8	If an elder child/dependant is living with some per day on pension credit they will more than likely be providing care and support and paying additional bills I.e electric, equipment costs and providing support with care needs I.e hospital appointments. A lot of dependants living with say their parents who are pensioners are unpaid carers and by not giving the lesser households without knowing their circumstances this could have a major impact not only on the individual themselves but the people they care for too and the overall household income.		
9	Retain current arrangements.		
10	The system should be fair for all.		
11	It sounds as if those with children who are only just reaching circumstances that mean they need to apply will be worse off. Having children does significantly affect how much it costs to live.		




7. If you disagree please explain why. You can also use this space to let us know if you have any alternative suggestions.

12 Everyone should get same

answered	12
skipped	136

Part 4 - Allowing the scheme to treat a claim for Universal Credit as a claim for Council Tax Reduction and providing the Council with flexibility in dealing with Universal Credit cases.

8. Do you agree with this proposal?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		75.00%	51
2	No		14.71%	10
3	Don't Know		10.29%	7
			answered	68
			skipped	80

9. If you disagree please explain why. You can also use this space to let us know if you have any alternative suggestions.

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	100.00%	14
1	What would happen if the applicant wishes to make a backdated claim to cover existing council tax arrears and we receive the first payment notification from the DWP and only award CTR from the Monday following the start of the assessment period? Work would need to be done so that all of these claims are not automated and backdate requests can be considered accordingly		
2	Again costly to process		
3	Should follow process set down		




9. If you disagree please explain why. You can also use this space to let us know if you have any alternative suggestions.

4	Surely if you are going down to 2 councils the administration etc should be reduced. Why should working people on a medium wage be penalised		
5	Any claim for any benefit should be linked with any and all others. One single source of truth.data sharing agreements should be in place so that fiddling the system cannot happen any longer.		
6	There may be issues when UC is cut temporarily due to low paid claimants behind award cash bonuses, eg long service or Xmas bonuses. In the past the council has not been good at notifying claimants that reductions have been made, albeit temporarily , this could cause clients to unwittingly fall into arrears		
7	People need to retain responsibility over making their own applications.		
8	I agree that allowing a claim for Universal Credit should automatically be counted as a claim for council tax reduction in the case of those who are eligible, but it should also remain possible, based on individual circumstances, for a person to claim for a council tax reduction even if they do not wish to or are not eligible to make a claim for Universal credit.		
9	Not all claimants are on Universal Credit but low wages and don't qualify for benefits due to the 16k threshold		
10	What about benefits other than Universal credit - seems if claim a different type of benefit you are not entitled to the same help as those on universal credit.		
11	Basically if you are UC you get a reduction in Council Tax? There are many people who know how to "work the system". What safeguards are in place to ensure that discount given to those who genuinely need it and the system is not abused?		
12	Retain current arrangements.		
13	The less bureacracy and duplication the better.		
14	Although the costs should be jointly split not Born by the councils alone.		
		answered	14
		skipped	134

Part 5 - To ensure that the new scheme has the ability to deal with any new Government initiative without having a negative effect on the amount of support applicants receive

10. Do you agree with this proposal?

Answer Choices	Response Percent	Response Total
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10. Do you agree with this proposal?				
1	Yes		84.85%	56
2	No		6.06%	4
3	Don't Know		9.09%	6
			answered	66
			skipped	82

11. If you disagree please explain why. You can also use this space to let us know if you have any alternative suggestions.				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question		100.00%	4
1	All monies should be taken into account			
2	Grants should not be given. This facility is abused already and this will only encourage it further.			
3	if households are entitled to Government payments to assist households they should be given the payments			
4	Council should NOT disregard other payments.			
			answered	4
			skipped	144

8. Your comments and suggestions on the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme

12. Please use this space to make any other comments on the proposed scheme or any alternative suggestions you have.				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question		100.00%	20

12. Please use this space to make any other comments on the proposed scheme or any alternative suggestions you have.



- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Previously, council tax reduction could be reconsidered or put back into payment from a universal credit record notification, however now this is not the case and the claimant would need to make a new claim for CTR if they didn't qualify the previous month due to high income. Is this something that will be considered? |
| 2 | As tax payer disgusted with proposals , plenty of jobs out there |
| 3 | Meand tested. Does that mean PIP is counted in thst |
| 4 | No point it been means tested if you don't increase the "threshold of household income" to reflect the reality of the current monthly money needed to just exist at the moment. People are really struggling and your sending out a survey.... |
| 5 | The changes seem fair and reasonable but are dependent upon an effective communication across departments. This may lend itself to being prone to a single point of failure that may have an overarching impact upon claimants. |
| 6 | If 2nd homes were rated at 200% this would fund support for this scheme as well as other benefits to the local residents |
| 7 | I don't believe all the people you aim to protect actually need the support most. I know of people who work part-time and are getting more than £18,000 per year and are still able to claim the full council tax rebate, so either they are not telling the truth or it has been overlooked. It may be that help is given more to single parents, I don't know. |
| 8 | No comments |
| 9 | The council need to make sure people are able to access information on the scheme. |
| 10 | <p>Please see my comments regarding the raising of capital limit and/or allocation of capital limit to each individual in households where adults are cohabiting for means testing purposes. I believe that means testing should be based on income rather than on savings.</p> <p>I hope that that Cumberland Council will advocate for abolishing the current council tax system and replacing it with proportional property tax so that wealth is more fairly distributed around the country. People in tiny houses in Cumbria should not be paying more than large luxury properties in London. Fairershare.org.uk</p> |
| 11 | The claim should not lapse through a temporary increase in income in line with UC as people often do not realise that their entitlement has ended and need to make a new claim. Or to avoid over or under payments for those with variable incomes follow the scheme in Eden where if someone is on UC they receive full CTR to protect those on variable incomes. |
| 12 | Everyone should be able to access discounts if they earn less than a certain amount - everything is always aimed at benefits claimants but workers also have low incomes |
| 13 | Not sure if this is the correct place, but will this impact those who currently get a discount when they are the only adult in a property? |
| 14 | Make sure people genuinely in need get the reduction. Don't make it too easy for the scheme to be abused. |
| 15 | It would be helpful to look at those on low income not just claiming benefits and help them more. |

12. Please use this space to make any other comments on the proposed scheme or any alternative suggestions you have.

16	It would be good if the scheme included a discretionary clause which would enable the council to make one off "ex gratis" type payments to individuals who find that the level of assistance they are entitled to reduces significantly as a result of these changes (I realise that this will be an unlikely outcome and therefore the demand for such payments should be very small but it would allow for any unforeseen consequences)		
17	Do you have robust procedures in place to check and confirm any individuals who are entitled to the 100% award and the conditions they submit are genuine. Any such procedures in use across all 3 councils at the moment should be rolled into 1 stream lined process if indeed such a Fraud detection scheme is already in place.		
18	How, exactly, does it encourage people into work? In my experience of the council and govt. services, being in work and being able to save a little over many years has meant my health has suffered and I have been prohibited from seeking financial support when needed in my later years (when my circumstances changed). Sadly, being in work does not always pay. There are those in society, and I have experienced this first hand in my profession, who have never worked, have no intention of ever working and yet receive every benefit going.		
19	The more aligned that departments are the better for people who require the help. Not everyone is an expert with computers and not everyone is great at reading and writing.		
20	Hopefully the debts that some councils are in on cumbria will not be a reason too put council tax up to much in this climate. This does not mention disability and the band reduction entitlement if rooms etc meet criteria.		
		answered	20
		skipped	128

9. About you

13. Are you completing this form on behalf of an organisation or group?





Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		1.59%	1
2	No		98.41%	62
			answered	63
			skipped	85

If yes, please tell us the name of the organisation/group and add any other comments you wish to make.

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	100.00%	2
1	But I work for Carlisle and Eden Citizens Advice as a Money Adviser.		
2	Roger Marshall on behalf of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Cumbria, The PCC is supportive of the principles of supporting low income households through Council Tax Reduction and of the specific proposals outlined by Cumberland Council in this consultation.		
		answered	2
		skipped	146

10. Questions for Individuals



14. Where do you live?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Allerdale Borough Council area		41.67%	25
2	Carlisle City Council area		35.00%	21
3	Copeland Borough Council area		21.67%	13
4	Outside of the Cumberland Council area		1.67%	1
			answered	60
			skipped	88



15. Do you pay Council Tax?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
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15. Do you pay Council Tax?

1	Yes		95.08%	58
2	No		4.92%	3
			answered	61
			skipped	87

16. Are you currently receiving Council Tax Reduction?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total	
1	Yes		28.33%	17
2	No		71.67%	43
			answered	60
			skipped	88


17. Which of the following best describes your employment status?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total	
1	Employed full time		45.90%	28
2	Employed part time		18.03%	11
3	Retired		16.39%	10
4	Unemployed		3.28%	2
5	In full or part time education		0.00%	0
6	Long term sick or disabled		11.48%	7
7	Providing care for others		4.92%	3





17. Which of the following best describes your employment status?

8	Maternity, paternity, or adoption leave		0.00%	0
			answered	61
			skipped	87

18. Are you currently serving in the Armed Forces?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		0.00%
2	No		100.00%
			answered
			skipped

19. How would you describe your gender?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Male		24.59%
2	Female		59.02%
3	I describe myself in another way		1.64%
4	I prefer not to say		14.75%
			answered
			skipped

20. What is your age?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	18-24	0.00%	0
2	25-34	9.84%	6
3	35-44	19.67%	12
4	45-54	16.39%	10
5	55-64	29.51%	18
6	65-74	11.48%	7
7	75-84	1.64%	1
8	85+	0.00%	0
9	Prefer not to say	11.48%	7
		answered	61
		skipped	87

21. Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person or to have a long term, limiting condition?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	27.87%	17
2	No	55.74%	34
3	Don't know	3.28%	2
4	Prefer not to say	13.11%	8
		answered	61
		skipped	87

22. How would you describe your ethnic background?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	85.25%	52
2	Irish	0.00%	0
3	White Other	0.00%	0
4	Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	1.64%	1
5	Asian / Asian British	0.00%	0
6	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	0.00%	0
7	Other Ethnic Group	0.00%	0
8	Prefer not to say	13.11%	8
		answered	61
		skipped	87

23. Other ethnic group?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	100.00%	1
1	I have council tax reduction due to being a single-adult household. this is not listed as eligible/ relevant in this survey.		
		answered	1
		skipped	147

APPENDIX B – EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Cumberland Council Tax Reduction Equality Impact Assessment

Section 1: About the Decision, Policy, Service or Function

Name of Decision/Policy/Service/Function being assessed	Council Tax Reduction Scheme S.13A 1A Local Government Finance Act 1992
Job Title of Officer completing EIA	Reg Bascombe, Head of Revenues and Benefits Services
Department/service area	Revenues and Benefits
Telephone number and email contact	Reg.Bascombe@carlisle.gov.uk 01228 817102
Date of Assessment	28 th November 2022
Objectives of decision/policy/service/function	<p>To introduce a single unified Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the whole of the new Council area.</p> <p>Essentially there are two elements to the scheme, for Pension Age applicants Government has prescribed scheme by means of regulations. For Working Age applicants, a single scheme needs to be determined by the new Council.</p> <p>The recommended new scheme overwhelmingly replicates the schemes currently in force within the legacy Boroughs and City both in terms of level of support and design. Slight amendments have been proposed as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To align the scheme with Housing Benefit, terminating any reduction is if an applicant in absent from Great Britain for a period of 4 weeks;

Cumberland Council Tax Reduction Equality Impact Assessment

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To align the scheme with the Pension Age Scheme to remove the family premium for any new application. Existing applicants who currently receive the family premium will continue to receive the premium until there is a break in entitlement;• To treat any claim for Universal Credit as an application for Council Tax Reduction and to allow the new Council flexibility in dealing with changes in Universal Credit entitlement; and• To allow the new Council flexibility in dealing with new Government schemes (designed to assist in a crisis) and to prevent any crisis payment affecting entitlement to Council Tax reduction
Key stakeholders and consultees	Council Tax Reduction applicants have been consulted together with the major precepting authorities as required by the legislation.

Cumberland Council Tax Reduction Equality Impact Assessment

Section 2: Information Gathering

Consider the sources of **relevant** information, evidence, data and research that will help you build up a picture of the likely impacts of your decision/policy/service/function on the protected characteristic groups.

Information Source	Location of data/information (give a link here if applicable)	What does the data/information tell us?
Council Tax Reduction data	Held within the existing Boroughs and City Councils	The data provides all information relating to all existing applicants for Council Tax Reduction.
Public	Council Tax Reduction Consultation Analysis	Respondents to the Council's consultation survey provided their opinions on the changes. Details are available as part of the Council's report to full Council. In relation to all proposed recommendations the majority of respondents were in full agreement with the changes.
Major Precepting Authorities	Response received	The major precepting authorities are in full agreement of the proposed scheme

Cumberland Council Tax Reduction Equality Impact Assessment

Section 3: Assessment of Impact

From the information, evidence, data and research you have gathered, use this section to identify the risks and benefits for each of the different protected characteristic groups.

Equality group	Positive (tick)	Adverse (tick)	Neutral (tick)	What is the impact?	Mitigating actions proposed (to address adverse impact)
Age			X	<p>Pension Age applicants will continue to receive Council Tax Reduction in line with Government's Prescribed Requirements Regulations.</p> <p>Existing Working Age applicants will continue to receive support in line with the schemes already in place within the legacy Councils</p> <p>New Working Age applicants with families will be assessed on the basis that family premium will not be granted. This is in line with the Pension Age scheme and Housing Benefit</p>	
Disability			X	The rules for disability remain the same as the existing schemes	
Sex			X	The new scheme makes no reference to the sex of the applicant	
Gender reassignment			X	The new scheme makes no reference to gender reassignment	

Cumberland Council Tax Reduction Equality Impact Assessment

Equality group	Positive (tick)	Adverse (tick)	Neutral (tick)	What is the impact?	Mitigating actions proposed (to address adverse impact)
Marital and civil partnership status			X	Couples / Partners are treated identically in the new scheme as in the existing legacy schemes	
Pregnancy and maternity			X	The new scheme makes no reference to pregnancy or maternity	
Race			X	The new scheme makes no reference to race	
Religion and/or belief			X	The new scheme makes no reference to religion and / or belief	
Sexual orientation			X	The new scheme makes no reference to sexual orientation	
Transgender			X	The new scheme makes no reference to transgender	
People in rural areas			X	The new scheme makes no distinction as to where applicants reside	
Socio-economic status			X	The new scheme continues to support all low-income households and a maximum of 100% support is available to those on the lowest incomes	
Working Age applicants absent outside of GB for a four week period or more		X		The new scheme will end any reduction where the application is absent from GB for a period of four weeks or more.	No mitigating actions are proposed, this brings the schemes into line with other benefits and the Pension Age applicants

Cumberland Council Tax Reduction Equality Impact Assessment

Section 4: Action Planning

What is the negative/ adverse impact or area for further action?	Actions proposed to reduce/ eliminate the negative impact	Who will lead on the action(s)?	Resource implications/ resources required	When? (target completion date)	Monitoring Arrangements
None	None	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Section 5. Outcome of Equality Impact Assessment (tick appropriate box)

No major change needed - the analysis shows the policy is robust and evidence shows no potential for discrimination

Adjust the policy/service/function - alternatives have been considered and steps taken to remove barriers or to better advance equality. Complete the action plan.

Adverse impact(s) identified but continue - this will need a justification or reason. Complete the action plan.

X

Section 6. Review

Date of the next review of the Equality Impact Assessment	Annual Review 2024
Who will carry out this review?	Revenues & Benefits Service

Cumberland Council Tax Reduction Equality Impact Assessment

Glossary: Definitions of Protected Characteristics

Age: This refers to a person having a particular age or being within an age group.

Disability: A person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Includes: Physical/sensory disability; Mental Health; Learning disability.

Sex: This refers to a person being either male or female.

Gender reassignment: This is the process of transitioning from one sex to another, considered a personal process rather than a medical one and it does not require someone to undergo medical treatment in order to be protected.

Marital and civil partnership: Legal recognition of a same-sex couple's relationship. Civil partners must be treated the same as married couples on a range of legal matters.

Maternity: The period after giving birth. It is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, including as a result of breastfeeding.

Race: It refers to a group of people defined by their colour, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins. Includes, Asian, Black and White minority ethnic groups inc. Eastern Europeans, Irish people and Gypsy Travellers.

Religion or belief: "Religion" means any religion, including a reference to a lack of religion. "Belief" includes religious and philosophical beliefs including lack of belief (for example, Atheism). The category includes, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and non-religious beliefs such as Humanism.

Sexual orientation: This is whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.

Transgender: Anyone whose gender identity is neither male nor female as legally defined at birth, and is not undergoing a process of gender resignation.

Rurality: Differential impact on people in rural areas

Socio-economic status: Differential impact on people due to household or personal income.

EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE SHADOW EXECUTIVE HELD ON 20 DECEMBER 2022

70. Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Subject of the Decision

Members considered a report which sought approval of the adoption of a single, unified Council Tax Reduction with effect from 1st April 2023. As a new unitary authority Cumberland Council had a requirement to agree a scheme which covered the whole of the new Councils area and replaced schemes previously operated by the former city and boroughs.

It was requested that Care Leavers be included in Appendix B the Equality Impact Assessment listed Protected Characteristics.

Members thanked the Finance Team for their work on the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Financial Planning and Assets moved the report, which was seconded by the Leader, as a recommendation from the Shadow Executive to be approved by the Shadow Authority.

Alternative Options Considered

With the creation of the new Council, unlike the previous city and boroughs, there was no alternative other than to implement a single unified scheme. This was required by law and there was no legal mechanism that would allow the existing 'legacy' schemes to continue.

There were a number of scheme designs that could be adopted including more radical approaches which were being implemented by other authorities, however due to the high level of support being provided currently to working age applicants and also that the three legacy authorities operate similar schemes currently, it was recommended that a similar scheme design be recommended and that any further review should be undertaken at some time in the future.

The Decision

RESOLVED - That the Shadow Executive:

- 1) Agreed to recommend that Shadow Council approve a new single Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24 for Cumberland Council, as outlined in the report, in accordance with Schedule 1A(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992;
- 2) Agreed to recommend that Shadow Council approve the 100% voluntary disregard as applicable under the scheme of War Disablement Pensions, War Widows Pensions and War Widowers' Pensions, under Section 134(8) and 139(6) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992.

Reason for the Decision

To approve a new single Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24 for Cumberland Council in accordance with Schedule 1A (3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.