

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL – 22 JANUARY 2013

Title of report	LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT
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Purpose of report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Local Government Finance Act 2012 sets out measures that will require all Council Tax billing authorities to devise and implement a local Council Tax Support Scheme to replace the current nationally determined Council Tax Benefit Scheme. • This report sets out the Council's proposed responses to the measures set out in the Local Government Finance Act 2012 and asks the Council to agree the scheme and provide appropriate delegations that will allow implementation of the proposals in accordance with the required timescale as recommended by the Cabinet at its meeting on 21 November 2012.
Council Priorities	Business and Jobs Value for Money
Implications: Financial/Staff Link to relevant CAT Risk Management	<p>Financial implications are contained within the report. Additional Staffing Resource implications are contained within Appendix D.</p> <p>Welfare Reforms CAT</p> <p>There are significant risks associated with systems implementation, annual billing, non-collection of Council Tax and the implications for other services of customers receiving less support towards their Council Tax. These risks are being managed through sound project management, public consultation/communications and the establishment of a Council Tax hardship fund paid for by the Council, County, Police and Fire & Rescue service.</p>

Equalities Impact Assessment	Detailed in Appendix E.
Human Rights	None identified.
Transformational Government	None identified
Comments of Head of Paid Service	The report is satisfactory.
Comments of Section 151 Officer	As report author the report is satisfactory.
Comments of Monitoring Officer	The report is satisfactory.
Consultees	Existing Council Tax Benefit claimants, public through the Council's website, Leicestershire County Council, Leicestershire Police Authority, Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Authority, other Leicestershire District Councils, Policy Development Group.
Background papers	<p>Analysis of Consultation Responses: https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/files/documents/consultation_analysis_nwl_171012_2/Consultation%20analysis%20NWL%20171012%20%282%29.pdf</p> <p>Report to Cabinet 21 November 2012 http://minutes.nwleics.gov.uk:81/aksnwleicester/images/att5521.pdf</p> <p>Report to Cabinet 21 August 2012 http://minutes.nwleics.gov.uk:81/aksnwleicester/images/att5450.pdf</p> <p>Minutes of Policy Development Group 3 October 2012: http://minutes.nwleics.gov.uk:81/aksnwleicester/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmt=PDG&meet=5&arc=71</p> <p>Local Government Finance Act 2012: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/17/enacted</p>
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. THE PROPOSED LOCAL SCHEME OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT, AS SET OUT AT APPENDIX A, IS APPROVED INCLUDING ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S TRANSITIONAL GRANT. 2. THE PROPOSED DISCRETIONARY DISCOUNT FUND, AS SET OUT AT APPENDIX B, IS APPROVED. 3. THE PROPOSALS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NEW POWERS SET OUT IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT TO VARY

	<p>STATUTORY EXEMPTIONS FROM COUNCIL TAX IN RESPECT OF VACANT AND UNOCCUPIED DWELLINGS, AS SET OUT IN APPENDIX C, ARE APPROVED.</p> <p>4. THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OFFERED BY MAJOR PRECEPTORS IN RESPECT OF THE PROPOSED DISCRETIONARY COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNT FUND AND THE ADDITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS THAT WOULD BE INCURRED BY THE COUNCIL UNDER THE PROPOSED NEW ARRANGEMENTS, AS SET OUT AT APPENDIX D ARE NOTED; AND</p> <p>5. DELEGATED AUTHORITY IS GIVEN TO THE HEAD OF FINANCE, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE CORPORATE PORTFOLIO HOLDER, TO MAKE ALL DETAILED ARRANGEMENTS REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT THE PROPOSED LOCAL SCHEME OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT, THE PROPOSED DISCRETIONARY COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNT FUND AND THE VARIATIONS TO STATUTORY EXEMPTIONS FROM COUNCIL TAX.</p>
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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting on 21 August 2012 Cabinet received an update on the publication of a draft scheme for the localisation of council tax support and the public consultation which commenced on 2 August 2012. The public consultation ended on 12 October 2012 allowing responses to be considered and proposals to be developed for further consideration by Cabinet.
- 1.2 On 18 October 2012 the Government provided new information including the provision of a one-off transitional grant to assist Councils which implemented schemes which limited contributions to Council Tax charges to 8.5%. This announcement influenced the Cabinet's decision on recommending a Local Council Tax Support Scheme to Council, as recommending a higher contribution would mean the Council would not receive this grant.
- 1.3 On 21 November 2012, Cabinet agreed to the recommendations outlined in this report, enabling the proposed Scheme to be put to Council for final approval.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 As part of the Government's Welfare Reform programme, from April 2013 Council Tax Benefit, the current means of helping people on low incomes meet their Council Tax obligations, will be replaced by a new localised support scheme defined by each Council. At the same time the Government is reducing funding for Council Tax Support by 10%. This will save £470m nationally and the North West Leicestershire share of this is £586,000. This Council would need to save £84,000 in 2013/14 with the remainder to be saved by the County Council, Police and Fire and Rescue Service. The Government's funding would at best be fixed but from 2014/15 it becomes part of mainstream funding and will be liable to further reductions, however the authority has the ability to review its scheme year on year to take into account any reductions if appropriate.

- 2.2 The Government has stated that pensioners will be protected from the effects of the local schemes by a national framework of rules and eligibility. As the current level of funding is being reduced nationally by an average of 10% and taking into account the protection for pensioners the average reduction for working age claimants in North West Leicestershire has been estimated to be 21% if all of the shortfall in funding was to be recovered.
- 2.3 At a local level the Council will be maintaining the two disregards which apply to War Widows Pensions/Armed Forces Compensation Scheme as part of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme. This means that people receiving income from military compensation schemes will not lose support towards their Council Tax because of this.
- 2.4 The Local Government Finance Act contains provisions for the localisation of council tax support in England by imposing a duty on billing authorities to approve a localised council tax reduction scheme by 31 January 2013 and to consult with major precepting authorities and such other persons as it considers likely to have an interest in the scheme.

Summary of Consultations

The Council consulted as part of a county-wide arrangement on a capped eligibility scheme of between 75% and 90% from 2 August to 12 October 2012. The consultation was extended by two weeks, when initial analysis highlighted a lower than anticipated response. The consultation was promoted heavily by customer services staff, through social media and leaflets distributed within district and county facilities. As part of the county wide consultation, road shows were run jointly with Citizens Advice Bureau to provide awareness of welfare reforms took place in September. Additional events were organised at leisure centres where staff were available to discuss the proposed schemes with members of the public.

Proportionally more adults of working age responded to the consultation and this was the target group highlighted in equality impact assessments to be most affected by proposed changes.

The Council wrote out to all existing Council Tax benefit claimants and to the major preceptors – County Council, Police and Fire & Rescue as well as Parish Councils.

The draft scheme was also scrutinised by the Council's Policy Development Group on 3 October 2012. Concerns were raised that although people were not responding to the consultation they would be likely to react once the scheme was in place and this could have an impact on the Council. At least one member felt that restricting support to the lower Council Tax bands was unfair.

Following the Government's announcement on transitional grant the Council has taken the view that whilst it could implement a compliant scheme without necessarily undertaking further consultation, it would be helpful to consult further and the opportunity to comment was provided at an event held on 8 November 2012.

- 2.5 A total of 145 responses were received which represents 2.1% of the current number of Council Tax Benefit claimants (6,950). Questions were asked to guide the Council in determining its local scheme. The responses can be summarised as follows:

- 42% (61) agreed that everyone apart from pensioners should pay something towards their Council Tax. As opposed to 51% (74) who disagreed. In the other parts of the County a small majority of respondents answered yes to this question.
- Just over half agreed that people living in more expensive properties should get less Council Tax support. If the Council did implement this it would not qualify for the Transitional Grant.
- 41% agreed that there should be an increased withdrawal of support when a claimant's income increases than there is currently.
- 57% agreed with the withdrawal of the "Second Adult Rebate". At present if someone can afford to pay Council tax but lives with another person on a low income they can claim help with their Council Tax because they cannot claim the Single Person Discount.

Key comments from major preceptors (County Council, Police Authority and Fire and Rescue Authority):

- The principle of partnership working adopted by Leicestershire Districts is strongly supported
- The development of new local schemes that are designed to be financially sustainable is strongly supported
- The preceptors are fully behind the proposal that councils across Leicestershire should use some of the new flexibilities around removal of discounts for empty and second properties to make up the shortfall and reduce the impact on current recipients of council tax benefit
- A 'hardship fund', to mitigate the impact of the new local schemes on council tax benefit recipients should be introduced

2.6 Based on the consultation responses the following proposals are being put forward which take into account the offer of a Transitional Grant together with the assessment of the potential schemes being rolled out across the County Authorities.

2.7 The Government's offer of a grant for one year would require implementing a scheme which limits contributions to Council Tax to 8.5% but obviously saves a lower proportion of the shortfall than less generous schemes would. The transitional grants offered are as follows:

North West Leicestershire	£ 20,428
Leicestershire County Council	£ 98,662
Leicestershire Police	£ 16,138
Leicestershire Fire & Rescue	£ 4,954
Total	£140,182

2.8 In order to receive the transitional grants above, our scheme would have to ensure that no-one suffered a reduction of more than 8.5%. This means that the scheme proposed will only save £258,000 (detailed in the table below) of the estimated shortfall in funding of £586,000. In addition, the £140,182 grant monies will need to be found by the District Council, County

Council, Police Authority and Fire & Rescue Service from 2014/15. The proposed scheme makes the following savings:

Change	Estimated Saving	People Affected (based on existing workloads)
Cap eligibility at 91.5% so everyone pays at least 8.5% Council Tax.	£251,000	Up to 2,500 working age people
Remove the "Second Adult Rebate" so that if the second person in the household isn't earning there would be no 25% discount.	£7,000	Around 30 people
Total	258,000	

2.9 The proposed scheme would result in a Council Tax Bill of around £128 based on the current Band D charge. As the 8.5% minimum is applied after all other discounts have been applied, in practice many people's bills would be significantly lower than this.

2.10 The Council's proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme is attached at **Appendix A**. A "default scheme" published by the Government takes the existing national Council Tax Benefit scheme and converts it into a system of Council Tax Discounts. At a local level authorities have then decided whether to make changes to generate the savings needed because of the reduced grant funding. The amendments to the default scheme shown in **Appendix A** (via track changes) facilitate the reduction in eligibility to 91.5% and the removal of the "Second Adult Rebate". There are also changes to maintain the local discretions regarding the War Widows Pensions/Armed Forces Compensation Scheme mentioned in paragraph 2.3.

2.11 Costs of the Hardship Fund and Administrative Costs (see **Appendix D**)

Discretionary Council Tax Hardship Funds administered by district councils are being set up throughout the County as detailed in **Appendix B**. The costs will be shared by the district councils and the major preceptors pro-rata to the share of the Council Tax bill. (shown in **Appendix D**) For 2013/14 an amount of £58,943 representing 1% of current expenditure on Council Tax Benefit payments is being set aside. North West Leicestershire District Council's share will be £8,589.

In addition it has been estimated that the Council will incur an additional £33,600 in administrative costs when the Local Council Tax Support Scheme is introduced. Again, the costs, also shown in **Appendix D**, will be shared by the district council and the major preceptors pro-rata to the share of the Council Tax bill.

2.12 Changes to Council Tax Discounts

From 1 April 2013 the Government is giving local authorities powers to replace a number of Council Tax exemptions with discounts of between 0% and 100%. The following proposals would generate additional income.

Class A

Vacant dwellings requiring or undergoing major structural alteration or repair currently attract a 100% exemption for up to 12 months. It is proposed this is reduced to a 50% discount for up

to 12 months. It is estimated this could generate over £77,000 a year (NWLDC share = £11,000.)

Class C

Short term, empty and substantially unfurnished properties, currently attract a 100% exemption for up to six months. It is proposed that this is reduced to 100% for one month only. It is estimated this could generate an additional £260,000 a year (NWLDC share = £38,000).

These savings will also help bridge the shortfall in Council Tax Support funding.

3. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Technical

IT systems are being modified but as we are using our existing provider which has a national profile we are confident that they will deliver the modifications required. It is essential that a new scheme is adopted at an early stage and that there is a robust implementation plan. The system is being adapted and this will be completed once the scheme has been approved by Council.

3.2 Collection Rates

For this council roughly half of benefit claimants (non-pensioners) will have to absorb all of the Government's reduction in support. Simply put, the average reduction could be nearer to 21% than 10%. For some people Council Tax bills will increase considerably which will adversely affect their ability to pay and could impact on collection rates, arrears and bad debts. As detailed above, the Council has agreed a financial contribution from the major precepting authorities towards additional costs of collection and the establishment of a hardship fund.

3.3 Future Government Funding

The transitional grant, by definition, will not be available again in 2014/15 unless there is a further Government announcement. The main LCTSS funding will be fixed but demand is not. Changing demographics or unexpected consequences of the scheme design could mean that the amount of Council Tax Support awarded is more than anticipated and hence Council Tax collected and distributed will not equate to that budgeted for. The ongoing Council Tax Support grant funding is not expected to increase to reflect any future Council Tax increases.

3.4 Customer Services

An assessment of the impact on Customer Services has been undertaken and plans put in place to ensure that the increased needs of customers for advice can be met.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The overall of financial implications for the County, Police, Fire and Rescue Service and the District Council are set out below. The District Council's share of the costs and savings is 14.5%.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
	£000	£000	£000
Savings required	586	586	586
Hardship Fund	59	59	59
Administrative Costs	34	34	34
Provision for non-collection	40	40	40
Amount to recover	719	719	719
Savings from LCTSS	258	258	258
Government Grant	140	0	0
Total Savings	398	258	258
Shortfall	321	461	461
Council Tax Discount Savings	414	414	414
Net Saving/(Shortfall)	93	(47)	(47)
Impact on NWLDC	13	(7)	(7)

The remaining District Council costs and savings above will be taken into account when the financial plans are finalised as part of the 2013/14 budget process.

5. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

<u>2012</u>		
21 November	Cabinet	Recommends new LCTSS to Council and agrees changes to Council Tax discounts
<u>2013</u>		
22 January	Council	Approves LCTSS.
26 February	Council	Approves Council Tax 2013/14

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT/OUTCOMES

- 6.1 The implementation of the proposed new scheme of Local Council Tax Support, based on reduced levels of funding will affect all working age claimants. In designing the scheme the Council has performed an Equalities Impact Assessment and has had regard to:
- Detailed analysis of the Council's caseload data
 - Extensive consultation exercises performed with the public and other stakeholders, including housing associations and the voluntary sector
 - Consultation with major preceptor partners
- 6.2 The mix of council tax benefit claimants is such that it is generally difficult to protect specific vulnerable groups, such as families with young children, or the disabled, as protecting these would result in a highly adverse impact on non-protected claimants. Recognising this

Council's desire to support our Armed Forces however, it is proposed that the small number of war widows and widowers living in the District will be protected in line with current arrangements and the disregard up to the full amount of any War Pension in payment would continue under the new Council Tax Local Scheme effective from 1 April 2013.

- 6.3 In order to mitigate the impact of the scheme on other vulnerable groups a Discretionary Discount Fund has been created that will allow the Council to support the most vulnerable residents on a case by case basis. Details of this fund are set out at **Appendix B**.
- 6.4 The Equality Impact Assessment is attached in **Appendix E**.

APPENDIX A

Localisation of Council Tax Support Scheme

https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/files/documents/localisation_of_council_tax_support_scheme/Blank%20Page.pdf

APPENDIX B

Proposal for Discretionary Discount Scheme Funding

This document sets out proposals for the Leicestershire and Rutland scheme together with specific funding detail for each local authority.

Name:	The Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Scheme - Discretionary Discount Scheme Proposal
Date:	6th September 2012
Author:	Localisation of Council Tax Programme
Release/Version:	Draft V2.0

This document forms part of the Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Scheme.

This document has been distributed to:

Name	Title	Date	Version
Leicestershire County Council	Chris Tambini, Jason Firth and James Rossell	05.09.12	V2.0
Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service	Trevor Peel	05.09.12	V2.0
Police Authority	Paul Dawkins	05.09.12	V2.0
DCEX	District Chief Executives	06.09.12	V2.0
RCC	Rutland County Council Senior Management Team	06.09.12	V2.0
LCC	Leicester City Council Senior Management Team	06.09.12	V2.0
Preceptors	Leicestershire County Council, Leicestershire Police Authority, Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service	11.09.12	V2.0

Background

Under existing arrangements, residents can be eligible for help with their housing costs from three principal areas:

- Crisis Loans
- Social Fund Loans
- Discretionary Housing Payments

Crisis Loans can help families or individuals cover immediate short term needs (such as residential charges for a hostel), while Social Fund loans tend to be targeted towards ongoing living assistance (such as household equipment). Discretionary Housing Payments are very much focussed on supporting the payment of rent.

Both Crisis Loans and Social Fund Loans are administered by Jobcentre Plus at present but administration is due to pass to local authorities from 1 April 2013. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are currently administered by local authorities, an arrangement which will continue.

Appendix A describes individual assistance measures available to residents in more detail.

Fundamentally, while the detail of future national funding to assist vulnerable residents with their housing costs is not yet available, at best it is likely to be restricted to existing levels. However, the impact on vulnerable residents will be increased significantly due to the impact of the new Local Council Tax Schemes.

Overall, it is likely that demand for financial support for residents will continue in 2013, and there is an expectation that this demand will increase as a series of changes to Welfare and Benefits rolls out.

In response to the above, Leicestershire and Rutland authorities are therefore proposing that a new Discretionary Discount is created to support hardship related to the new Local Council Tax Schemes.

Duration

It is proposed that a Discretionary Discount, operating in accordance with the principles set out below, is agreed amongst billing authorities and major preceptors for the financial years 2013/14 to 2015/16 inclusive,

Eligibility

The Discretionary Discount will be administered through the use of 'eligibility' criteria, in similar manner to the existing DHPs. A detailed policy setting out the proposed eligibility criteria for the new fund is set out at Appendix B.

Administration

Administration of the new fund will be undertaken by Unitary and District Council staffs who currently administer the existing DHPs. This will be undertaken alongside the administration of the new council tax arrangements. Appropriate functionality to record Discretionary Discounts is being developed by council tax system software providers.

Funding

Funding for the new Discretionary Discount will be shared amongst billing authorities and major preceptors, in proportion to individual precept amounts. The initial proposal is that the total Discretionary fund will be 1% of the total council tax benefit paid during 2011/12 by each billing authority. The proposed contributions are tabulated below for each billing authority and preceptor.

Justification of proposal:

The nearest equivalent fund existing at present is that for Discretionary Housing Payments. DWP provide 0.5% subsidy to each local authority based on the total benefit paid out in the preceding year. Local authorities are expected to spend the whole of this amount; further, authorities also have the ability to make additional payments and may make payments totalling up to a maximum of 2.5 times the subsidy awarded (i.e. equivalent to 1.25% of the benefit paid out). On this basis a total contribution of 1% of the council tax benefit paid appears reasonable

Review and monitoring of payments

At the time of drafting this proposal it is not clear which resident groups are likely to seek assistance in respect of council tax payments. The funding proposals should therefore be considered alongside the proposed arrangements for the ongoing review and monitoring processes that will be put in place with the Fund.

In general, payments will be monitored monthly in the first year of the Local Council Tax Scheme. More detailed monitoring arrangements will be proposed when council tax system software to manage payments is available.

Funding allocations

Total council tax benefits payments 2011/12			
Total council tax benefit paid out in 2011/12		1% of the total council tax benefit paid out = PROPOSED DISCRETIONARY FUND	
Rutland	£1,871,717	Rutland	£18,720
Blaby	£4,630,678	Blaby	£46,310
Charnwood	£9,297,088	Charnwood	£92,970
Harborough	£3,519,268	Harborough	£35,190
Hinckley and Bosworth	£5,831,863	Hinckley and Bosworth	£58,320
Melton	£2,544,301	Melton	£25,440
NW Leicestershire	£5,895,084	NW Leicestershire	£58,950
Oadby and Wigston	£3,095,715	Oadby and Wigston	£30,960

Source: Cell 144 of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit subsidy 2011/12 as completed by each Billing Authority

Contributions to the fund will be shared between local authorities and preceptors in shares proportional to their precept, as set out below:

Rutland	
1% of 2011/2012 Council Tax Benefit payable	£18,720
RCC share of precept 86.60%	£16,211
LCC Share of precept	Not applicable
LPA Share of precept 10.25%	£1,918
CFA Share of precept 3.15%	£589

Blaby	
1% of 2011/2012 Council Tax Benefit payable	£46,310
Blaby share of precept 14.13%	£6,543
LCC Share of precept 70.74%	£32,759
LPA Share of precept 11.57%	£5,358
CFA Share of precept 3.55%	£1,644

Charnwood	
1% of 2011/2012 Council Tax Benefit payable	£92,970
Charnwood share of precept 11.92%	£11,085
LCC Share of precept 72.56%	£67,463
LPA Share of precept 11.87%	£11,035
CFA Share of precept 3.64%	£3,384

Harborough	
1% of 2011/2012 Council Tax Benefit payable	£35,190
Harborough share of precept 13.62%	£4,792
LCC Share of precept 71.17%	£25,044
LPA Share of precept 11.64%	£4,096
CFA Share of precept 3.57%	£1,256

Hinckley & Bosworth	
1% of 2011/2012 Council Tax Benefit payable	£58,320
H & Bosworth share of precept 10.55%	£6,151
LCC Share of precept 73.70%	£42,981
LPA Share of precept 12.05%	£7,027
CFA Share of precept 3.70%	£2,157

Melton	
1% of 2011/2012 Council Tax Benefit payable	£25,440
Melton share of precept 13.55%	£3,447
LCC Share of precept 71.22%	£18,118
LPA Share of precept 11.65%	£2,963
CFA Share of precept 3.58%	£910

North West Leicestershire	
1% of 2011/2012 Council Tax Benefit payable	£58,950
NWL share of precept 14.57%	£8,589
LCC Share of precept 70.38%	£41,489
LPA Share of precept 11.51%	£6,785
CFA Share of precept 3.53%	£2,080

Oadby and Wigston	
1% of 2011/2012 Council Tax Benefit payable	£30,960
OWBC share of precept 13.57%	£4,201
LCC Share of precept 71.21%	£22,046
LPA Share of precept 11.65%	£3,606
CFA Share of precept 3.57%	£1,105

Discretionary Discount Scheme – proposed eligibility criteria

Name:	The Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Scheme - Discretionary Discount Scheme Proposal and Policy
Date:	3rd September 2012
Author:	Leicestershire and Rutland Welfare Practitioners Group
Release/Version:	Draft V4.0

Approvals

This document forms part of the Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Scheme. The following people are points of contact for the scheme and are the point of contact for the approval of the scheme within each authority

Name	Authority	Date
Martyn Bowen	Melton BC	3.9.2012
Leigh Butler	Hinckley & Bosworth BC Harborough DC North West Leicester DC	3.9.2012
Jason Firth	Leicestershire County Council	3.9.2012
Andrea Grinney	Rutland County Council	3.9.2012
Caroline Jackson	Leicester City Council	3.9.2012
Daren Nolan	Oadby & Wigston BC	3.9.2012
Graham Perkins	Blaby DC	3.9.2012
David Platts	Charnwood BC	3.9.2012
James Rossell	Leicestershire County Council	3.9.2012
Leila-Jane Wilson	Programme Manager Localisation of Council Tax Programme	6.9.2012

This document has been distributed to:

Name	Title	Date	Version
LALAT	Chief Accountants group	08-08-12	V2.0
WRPG	Welfare Reform Practitioners Group	15-08-12	V3.0
DCEX	District Chief Executives	06-09-12	V4.0
RCC	Rutland County Council Senior Management Team	06-09-12	V4.0
LCC	Leicester City Council Senior Management Team	06-09-12	V4.0
Preceptors	Leicestershire County Council, Leicestershire Police Authority, Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service	11-09-12	V4.0

Revision History

Version	Date	Summary of Changes
1.0	30.5.2012	First issue.
2.0	28.6.2012	Revised following comments from WPG
3.0	15.8.2012	Revised following comments from LALAT
4.0	3.09.2012	Revised following inclusion of S13A matters

1. Background

- 1.1 The Leicestershire, Leicester City, Fire, Police & Rutland authorities have co-operated and shared best practice to develop a shared Council Tax Support Scheme. The group has devised a shared Discretionary Discount Policy/Guide to ensure that the most vulnerable members of the community are protected in line with the requirements of the government's localisation of Benefits, under which from April 2013, Councils must have in place local schemes for the administration of the scheme which will replace the existing Council Tax Benefits Scheme.
- 1.2 This change to local taxation benefits systems is amongst the first of a very wide range of changes to the national welfare benefits framework which begins in earnest from next year.
- 1.3 The government is making a number of changes from April 2013 in relation to Council Tax exemption classes A and C and also ending the current scheme for council tax benefit in favour of a Local Council Tax Discount. The Council therefore intends to set up a discretionary Local Council Tax Discount Scheme to offset the most severe impacts of these reforms on vulnerable persons
- 1.4 The Discretionary Council Tax Support Scheme will operate along the lines of the existing Discretionary Housing Payments policy and will permit officers the discretion to provide reductions in Council Tax under the policy from 0% to 100% of the remaining Council Tax liable amount.
- 1.5 The scheme will be locally funded but will seek a contribution from precepting authorities to offset the full cost of the schemes operation. The scheme will be subject to a budget cap each year set by the Council.

2. Legislative Framework

- 2.1 The following legislation and regulations are relevant to this document:
 - i. The Local Government Finance Act 2012
 - ii. The Local Government Act 1992 Section 13A(2)
 - iii. The Leicestershire & Rutland Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2012
 - iv. Child Poverty Act 2010
 - v. Equality Act 2010 (incorporating the Disabled Persons Act 1986)
 - vi. Housing Act 1996
 - vii. Armed Forces Covenant
 - viii. The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012
 - ix. The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012 Default Scheme
 - x. Social Security Act 1992

3. Objectives

- 3.1 This policy aims to set up a local Council Tax discount scheme to support local persons experiencing hardship and who are unable to pay their Council Tax. The discount will be known as the Discretionary Council Tax Support Scheme but will operate under the legal framework outlined in Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

- 3.2 The government have prescribed a national pension age scheme that will ensure that pensioners are not worse off under the local council tax support scheme.
- 3.3 The government have not prescribed any vulnerable groups, having regard to local authorities' defined responsibilities, in relation to, and awareness of the most vulnerable groups and individuals in their areas through an Equality Impact Assessment.
- 3.4 The Discretionary Discount Policy will specify those individuals and groups who are eligible to access the fund and explain the claim process.
- 3.5 The Discretionary Discount Policy will be mindful of the directive to incentivise work. In doing so reduce worklessness and dependency on benefits in line with the government's expectation.
- 3.6 It should be noted that where the Council has a discretionary power, it must not fetter its discretion by having a set of rules that are inflexible. Each case must be considered on its own merits, determined within the budget provided and administered under the framework set out in this policy.

4. Criteria

- 4.1 Fundamental to The Discretionary Discount Policy is a clear indication of the groups or individuals that can be considered eligible to claim additional council tax support from the Discretionary Discount Scheme.
- 4.2 The fund has financial limitations and as such awards can only be made based on eligibility and having regard to the level of funding available or remaining within the Discretionary Discount Scheme each financial year.
- 4.3 Before any award will be considered, the taxpayer must require further financial assistance with Council Tax due to the conditions detailed in section 5, Eligibility.
- 4.4 Unless specified, all criteria and conditions that apply to The Leicestershire & Rutland Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2012, will also apply to The Discretionary Discount Policy.

5. Equalities

- 5.1 The Council is committed to equality and fairness. Equality is about ensuring people are treated fairly and given fair chances. It is also about ensuring that people receive fair outcomes in the standard of service they receive from the Council and equality of access to Council Services. This incorporates everyone, regardless of their race, gender, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status and/or disability in line with the principles set out in the Equalities Act 2010.
- 5.2 A number of groups have been defined as being eligible to submit a claim for Discretionary Discount. The groups are listed in the table below:

Types of vulnerable people
The applicant or household or a dependent child in receipt of the middle or higher rate of Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
The applicant or household is a disabled adult living in supported living accommodation who have carers and are unable to work due to their health
The applicant or household is in receipt of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) with support component
The applicant or household is a care leaver up to the age of 22 years
The applicant or household is deemed vulnerable through drug or alcohol dependency who are attending a rehabilitation programme
The applicant or household has suffered domestic violence and is being supported by accredited local schemes to move into permanent accommodation, inclusive of forced marriages
The applicant or household is a foster carer and has current foster child placements
The applicant or household has dependent children under the age of 5 and is living on income support
Applicant or households who provide care who are single or a couple, and have no other income (other than income support) where they are in receipt of carers allowance
The applicant or household is a foster carer (child or adult) and is in between foster care placements
The applicant or household has parental care responsibility for non-resident children
The applicant or household is a hostel leaver where they were resident in a hostel engaging with support while resident. Minimum period of hostel residency is 3 months

- 5.3 There may be a number of vulnerable individuals who do not fall into any of the above categories. In this event awards may be considered due to severe financial hardship, please refer to section 6 below.

6. Severe Financial Hardship

- 6.1 Applications will be accepted on the basis that the applicant or household would suffer severe financial hardship if financial assistance were not given.
- 6.2 Individuals in this group will not be defined but need to be able to demonstrate their circumstances and have exhausted other sources of income that are available to them.
- 6.3 Each case will be considered on its own merits.
- 6.4 Care will be taken to ensure the applicant or household has access to independent financial advice and support.
- 6.5 Examples of applicant or households who may potentially be awarded Discretionary Discount support are:
- i. Recently bereaved and suspension of other benefits have caused a disruption to income
 - ii. Terminally ill and unable to contribute to the household income

- iii. Recovering from a serious illness and unable to contribute to the household income
- iv. Recently released from prison and under probation

6.6 Applications for Discretionary Council Tax Support (DCTS) should be one of last resort. Applicants will be expected to have explored and secured any lawful entitlement to other benefits, incomes and reductions in preference to claiming DCTS. Applicants will need to ensure they are able to satisfy the Council that they have taken all reasonable steps to resolve their own situation prior to application.

6.7 Applications will be considered if the above apply and:

- i. There is evidence of financial hardship or personal circumstances that justify an award
- ii. The applicant or household has supplied all evidence requested by the Local Authority in respect of their claim for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme
- iii. The applicant or household must have applied for any appropriate discount or exemption and supplied any evidence requested by the Local Authority in respect of that application
- iv. The applicant or household does not have access to any other financial assets that could be realised to pay the council tax
- v. The applicant or household must not be avoiding outstanding council tax due to wilful refusal or culpable neglect
- vi. The Council's finances must allow for an award to be made

7. How to claim

7.1 A claim should be made in writing or on line using the approved claim form together with supporting evidence as required.

7.2 Claims can also be made by a referral process. Please see Section 10, Referrals from other sectors.

7.3 The applicant must be the person liable to pay the council tax, or be their representative with authority to act on their behalf i.e. Power of Attorney

7.4 Claims can only be made to and accepted by the billing authority who issues the taxpayer their Council Tax Demand Notice.

7.5 If an applicant or household needs advice and support to complete a claim form, the applicant or household will be signposted to an appropriate service that offers support relevant to the needs of the applicant or household.

7.6 The applicant must set out the reasons for applying including explaining any special circumstances or hardship being experienced.

8. Information required to support a claim

8.1 Evidence will be required to substantiate a claim from the Discretionary Discount.

Evidence can include, but is not limited to:

- A household income statement; using a prescribed form
- A household expenditure statement; using a prescribed form
- Supporting evidence may be requested such as utility bills
- Evidence of seeking debt advice, if appropriate

- 8.2 Evidence may be requested that is relevant to the nature of the Claim i.e. evidence of illness. It should be noted that no costs will be borne by the Authority in circumstances of this nature.
- 8.3 Failure to provide supporting information and evidence that is requested may lead to a refusal.
- 8.4 Care will be taken by staff to ensure that the applicant or household is treated fairly and respectfully and that only relevant information and evidence is requested.
- 8.5 All information and evidence provided will be treated in confidence and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- 8.6 Where the Council requires additional information or evidence it will write to the applicant requesting the information is supplied within one calendar month.
- 8.7 The applicant is required to report any changes in their circumstances or of the circumstances of household members immediately in writing to the Council. A failure to report changes may lead to a loss of DCTS, result in an overpayment which will be recoverable from the Council Tax account and lead to prosecution where appropriate.

9. Notice of decision

- 9.1 The Council will provide a written notice of its decision to the applicant or their representative. The decision notice will set out:
- i) The amount of the award (if any)
 - ii) The period of the award (if any)
 - iii) Provide details of how to appeal or obtain more information about the decision
 - iv) Provide details of how the award (if any) will be made

Provide a summary of the factors considered in reaching the decision.

- 9.2 On the provision of all satisfactory requested information, a decision will be made where practicable within 14 working days.

10. Referrals from other sectors

- 10.1 The billing authority will accept referrals from:

- Leicester City, Leicestershire County Council, Social Services Team
- Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Combined Fire Authority
- Leicestershire Policy Authority
- Third sector organisations i.e. Citizens Advice Bureau, welfare rights

- 10.2 The approved referral form should be completed and returned to the relevant billing authority.

10.3 The Leicestershire and Rutland billing authorities and the organisations above have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place to ensure the agreed process is adhered to.

10.4 Referrals will be monitored and reviewed in accordance with the SLA.

11. Alternative sources of financial assistance

11.1 Various alternative sources of financial assistance exist with the public, private and voluntary sectors, if support from The Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Discretionary Discount is not awarded, applicant or households will be signposted to alternative sources of financial assistance.

12. Debt Advice

12.1 It is recognised that debt and poverty are linked. In most cases the billing authority will expect the applicant or household to seek debt/money management advice as a long term solution to financial problems.

12.2 Working age applicant or households are also expected to move into work if they are able to reduce their dependency on support. With this in mind applicant or households should receive more income from work than out of work. Work incentives will be a factor when determining awards from The Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Discretionary Discount Scheme.

12.3 Billing Authorities will signpost applicant or households to debt advice service in their area, evidence of taking and adhering to advice may be requested from the applicant or household when making an application for Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Discretionary Discount Scheme.

13. Backdating

13.1 Applications for Discretionary Discount may be backdated up to 1 calendar month from the date the written application is received where continuous good cause exists throughout the period for the delay in making the application

14. Determining awards

14.1 The Council will consider each application on its own merits. This will ensure that each application is treated in an open and consistent manner, whilst considering individual circumstances.

14.2 The Council will be under no duty to assess applications not made in the approved manner.

14.3 Where information or evidence requested has not been received within one calendar month, the Council will determine the application on the basis of the evidence and information in its possession. The Council will make an adverse inference in respect of any information or evidence not supplied by the applicant within the one calendar month time limit.

14.4 Nothing in this policy shall permit the Council to reduce the Council Tax charge for any day to less than NIL.

DCTS may only be awarded in respect of Council Tax liability.

14.6 The order of discounts will be maintained in line with the Local Government Finance Act; therefore the maximum amount of DCTS that can be claimed for any day will be net of other discounts and reductions already awarded.

14.7 Awards will have a defined start and end date. This information will be provided to the applicant or household when the decision is made.

14.8 Awards may be a one off payment, an award for a short period of time or until the applicant or households circumstances change or for a full financial year. This will be detailed when a decision is made.

14.9 Awards will stop immediately if the applicant or household or their representative has misrepresented or failed to disclose a material fact, fraudulent or otherwise. The authority may look to recover any overpayment of award but instances of proven fraudulent activity will seek to recover in all cases.

15. Method of Payment

15.1 Awards will be credited directly to the applicant or households/liable persons' council tax account. This will have the effect of reducing the council tax liability.

15.2 Taxpayers may find that the award does not reduce their council tax to zero. If taxpayers have council tax to pay, they should contact the recovery section as early as possible and make arrangements to pay the sum due.

16. Appeals

16.1 Applicants may appeal against a decision within one calendar month of the decision notice where:

- i They have not been awarded DCTS for a day; or
- ii Where they feel the award should be increased.

16.2 Appeals must be:

- i Be submitted in writing;
- ii Received at the Council offices within one calendar month of the date of the decision notice;
- iii Signed by the applicant;
- iv Outline the grounds for appeal;

16.3 Applicants will not have the right of appeal:

- i. Where their appeal is received by the Council more than one calendar month after the date of the decision notice;

- ii. Where the Council has already made a determination of appeal in respect of the matter;
- iii. For any day on which they have received 100% discount or exemption;
- iv. For any request to backdate the award for more than one calendar month from the date of application;
- v. Where the Council has no remaining budget provision;
- vi. Where the Council has made an adverse inference decision;
- vii. In any case where the Council was under no duty to make a decision.
- viii. Local Council Tax Support scheme suspensions where there is doubt about entitlement
- ix. Shortfalls caused by the recovery of overpaid Local Council Tax Support

16.4 Any appeal under this scheme will be determined within one calendar month of receipt of the appeal or as soon as reasonably practicable.

16.5 Appeal decisions are final and may not be further challenged except where legislation permits. The Council will write to the applicant once their appeal has been considered and will explain:

- i The amount of the award (if any);
- ii The period of the award (if any);
- iii Provide details of how the award (if any) will be made;
- iv Provide a summary of the factors considered in reaching the decision.

17. Recovery of an overpaid discretionary discount award

17.1 The Council may recover any overpayment of Discretionary Discount that has been paid by removing the discount from the account.

18. Fraud

18.1 The Council may always correct any award made under this scheme where fraud or error has occurred.

18.2 Where a customer has failed to provide information or has knowingly supplied false or misleading information the Council reserves the right to withdraw any award made under this scheme.

18.3 Furthermore, the Council reserves the right to investigate any the alleged offences, to levy penalties in accordance with the law and to prosecute anyone who has committed a criminal offence.

19. Data Sharing and Fair processing

19.1 The Council may use any evidence and information supplied to it in respect of DCTS to check the eligibility of the applicant in respect of this scheme or any other welfare benefit, discounts or exemptions.

19.2 The Council take parts in data matching exercises as part work to assist in the prevention and detection of fraud. Data matching involves comparing sets of our data, such as council tax or benefit records against other records held by the Council or other bodies to see how far they

match. Data matching allows potentially fraudulent claims, reductions and payments to be identified. Where a match is found it indicates that there is an inconsistency that requires further investigation. No assumption can be made as to whether there is fraud, error or other explanation until an investigation is carried out. The processing of personal information by the Council for data matching exercises is carried out in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988; specifically under section 29 of that act. This means the Council does not require the consent of the individuals concerned

20. Publicity

20.1 The Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Discretionary Discount will be publicised across the region.

20.2 The following methods of communication may be used:

- Leaflets and posters
- Information with decision notices for the Local Council Tax Support Scheme where there is a shortfall
- Face to face and verbal when visiting or telephoning the council offices
- Information on billing authority websites
- Information for 3rd sector organizations and referrers
- Claim forms available to download or complete online
- Information with council tax reminders notices where the taxpayer is in receipt of Local Council Tax Support

21. Administration

21.1 Applications will be subject to the billing authority's usual quality control procedures and audit.

21.2 Home visits will be made available to applicant or households who are unable to attend the council offices and have no-one else to assist them.

21.3 Awards will be recorded and reported on monthly basis to Senior Management and to precepting authorities. Statistical information will be made available on the billing authorities website, personal data i.e. individuals names and addresses will be withheld and not published in accordance with The Freedom of Information Act 2000.

21.4 Reports will record the following: for both successful and unsuccessful claims per financial year:

- Name of applicant or household
- Address of applicant or household
- Ward of applicant or household (if relevant)
- The start/end date of the award
- The amount of the award
- The reason for the award/refusal/eligibility criteria
- Equality data to monitor the effectiveness of the EIA

21.5 Billing authorities may from time to time conduct a survey of all applicants to seek opinions, satisfaction levels and to shape the scheme for future years.

22. Policy Review

- 22.1 The Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Discretionary Discount Policy/Guidance will be reviewed annually by 31st January each year.
- 22.2 Any major changes will be subject to consultation in accordance with best practice.
- 22.3 Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Discretionary Discount Policy will be published and available to view on billing authorities' websites.

23. Budget considerations

- 23.1 *The Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Discretionary Discount Scheme will have a budget set each financial year for each local authority. This will be set in agreement with and with a contribution from major precepting authorities*
- 23.2 Once available funds have been exhausted from the Discretionary Discount budget, no further awards will be made until a new financial year.

24. Legislation

- 24.1 Awards under this scheme are made in line with the Local Government Finance Act as outlined below:
- i) Section 13A and 76 Local Government Finance Act 1992 – The award of discretionary discounts.
 - ii) Section 4 Local Government Finance Act 1992 - Dwellings may be exempt from Council Tax if they fall within one of the specified classes.
 - iii) Section 11 Local Government Finance Act 1992 - The amount of Council Tax payable may be subject to a discount under where there is no resident, or all but one of them fall to be disregarded.
 - iv) Section 13 Local Government Finance Act 1992 - The amount may be reduced where it is occupied by disabled person(s).

APPENDIX C

The Council will take advantage of proposed technical changes in council tax and set discounts and exemptions on empty properties as follows:

- Class A - Vacant dwellings where major repair works or structural alterations are required, under way or recently completed (up to 12 months)
 - DISCOUNT 50%
- Class C - A vacant dwelling, i.e. empty and substantially unfurnished (up to 6 months)
 - DISCOUNT 100% for the first month
 - DISCOUNT 0% for subsequent months

APPENDIX D

Hardship Fund and Administrative Costs

Hardship Fund

1% of 2011/2012 Council Tax Benefit payable	£58,943
<i>North West Leicestershire District</i>	<i>£8,589</i>
Leicestershire C. C.	£41,489
Leicestershire Police Authority	£6,785
Fire & Rescue Authority	£2,080

Administration Costs

As previously identified the introduction of the local scheme is likely to create additional demands on the Council's operations particularly around dealing with customer queries, and debt collection and recovery. Much of the additional activity can be attributed to the features of the local scheme and technical changes to council tax designed to deliver a financially sustainable arrangement. In recognition of the benefit they receive from this approach the major preceptors, Leicestershire County Council, and the Police and Fire Authorities, have agreed to contribute towards the Council's additional administration costs which for North West Leicestershire equates to approximately 1.5fte or £33,600 per annum.

North West Leicestershire District Council – Equality Impact Assessment

Title of the policy	Localisation of Council Tax Support
Date	21-08-12
Lead Officer	Ray Bowmer
Who else is involved in undertaking this assessment?	Leila-Jane Wilson- Programme Manager Localisation of Council Tax Scheme Leigh Butler, Senior Partnership Manager, The Leicestershire Partnership - Revenues and Benefits. Sue Williams-Lee, Partnership Manager, The Leicestershire Partnership - Revenues and Benefits.

Step 1 – Overview of policy/function being assessed

<p>A. Outline: What is the purpose of this policy? (specify aims and objectives)</p> <p>Localisation of Council Tax Benefit is part of a programme of national policy change to the welfare system aimed at addressing the rising cost of welfare.</p> <p>From 1st April 2013, all Councils will be required to establish a local scheme for Council Tax Support (CTLS) to replace the nationally designed Council Tax Benefit Scheme. These changes will reduce the level of funding received by Councils to deliver the scheme (by approximately 10%) and allow the Council to decide who to financially support, outside prescribed elements which includes protecting support received by pensioners. The scheme itself must be approved and in place by 31st January 2013. The Local Government Finance Bill imposes a duty on billing authorities (North West Leicestershire DC) to consult with major precepting authorities and such other persons as it considers having an interest in the scheme. Major precepting authorities in Leicestershire are Leicestershire County Council, Leicestershire Police Authority and Leicestershire Fire Authority.</p> <p>This policy is intended to replace the current Council Tax Benefit Scheme. This must be in place by 1st April 2013 as Council Tax Benefit will be abolished from this date. It must be stressed that the Government is attempting the most significant changes to welfare that have been seen for at least 30 years.</p> <p>The current system 'Council Tax Benefit' is a national means tested scheme. Claimants may get Council Tax Benefit if they are liable for council tax and their income and capital (savings and investments) are below a certain level. The benefit is income-related (means tested) and anyone who is liable for council tax can apply, irrespective of whether they are working, unemployed, living in rented accommodation or own their own home. Decision making is devolved to Billing Authorities with funding paid by the Department for Works and Pensions from their annually managed expenditure. In essence this means that the Council is re-imbursed for 100% of its spend.</p> <p>In future funding for a localised scheme will be paid by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) from the Department Expenditure Limit budget. This means each Council will receive a fixed grant regardless of it's spend.</p> <p>Whilst the Government expect to reduce their expenditure by 10% (estimated £585,000 for North West Leicestershire), they also require that Councils do not pass any of such savings required to those of Pension Age. That decision means that the burden falls disproportionately upon those of Working Age,.</p> <p>In accordance with DCLG proposals, a replacement scheme must be adopted by 31st January 2013 to commence from 1st April 2013. Council's who are not able to comply will be obliged to adopt the default scheme. In practice, the default scheme mirrors the existing Council Tax Benefit but with a 10% cut in funding</p>
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to be met from other sources.

The Government has stated that it will protect low income pensioners as they have a fixed income and can't be expected to work to increase their income in the same way that a working age person can. Of the caseload for North West Leicestershire; approximately 52 % are pensioners and 48 % are working age; therefore the impact on working age claimants will be disproportionate. They will bear the burden of the savings applied to the scheme.

The Government has also instructed that vulnerable groups should be protected in the same way as pensioners. The Government has not defined, and does not intend to define, any particular groups. It is therefore up to each local authority, having regard to local needs and knowledge of their population, to identify the most vulnerable in their communities.

The Local Council Tax Support Scheme will deliver the replacement for Council Tax Benefit.

The Leicestershire and Rutland Council Tax Support Scheme - Discretionary Discount Scheme will provide additional support for vulnerable groups.

As part of the Council Tax Local Scheme Council Tax empty property exemptions will be reviewed as these will be deemed as discounts from 1st April 2013.

Class A (property requiring structural repairs) discount will be awarded for up to 12 months at a discount of 50% for the period granted.

Class C (empty and unfurnished properties) discount period will be one month only with the discount set at 100% will be granted. Properties empty for more than one month 'Full' Council Tax will be payable.

B. What specific groups is the policy designed to affect/impact?

The main activity is to provide council tax support via a discount to those of working age on a low income. The discount will automatically be applied to the council tax demand notice and will reduce the amount to be paid. The support will be means tested in the same way as the present 'Council Tax Benefit' scheme.

Those on low incomes will benefit from the scheme in a similar way to the existing Council Tax Benefit, however it is likely that the majority of working age claimants will have to pay some council tax, or more than they do now.

This is because working age claimants will have to pay the funding shortfall of 10%, which in real terms equates to nearer 20%-25% due to the protection of pensioners and vulnerable groups

Working age claimants will be able to claim CTLS however it is possible they will receive less help towards their council tax than if they claimed council tax benefit.

C. Which groups have been consulted as part of the creation or review of the policy?

A full public consultation will take place for a period of eight weeks, responses will shape the scheme. Equality questions will form part of the questionnaire to enable analysis to take place.

Formal consultation will also be undertaken with precepting authorities, parish preceptors and various 3rd sector agencies that work closely with the Council. E.g. Citizen's Advice Bureau, Voluntary and Advocacy groups and community forums in North West Leicestershire.

The consultation will be jointly run with other Leicestershire authorities, this will enable us to identify any midland wide, broader issues and also report on local North West Leicestershire considerations.

The consultation will be open for a period of 8 weeks and be available to view; www.nwleics.gov.uk. The letters will be sent to both working age and pensioner council tax benefit claimants to raise awareness of the

consultation.

Paper copies will be distributed at road show events being held during the period.

Customer Services staff at North West Leicestershire will also encourage customers to complete the consultation, and be available to guide those who require assistance through the online questionnaire form.

Copies of the consultation will also be made available upon request in alternative formats.

The consultation documentation incorporates Plain English standards, although, we are legally obliged to provide some technical information that is not easily adapted to Plain English standards.

Meetings are being held with 3rd sector organisations to discuss the options of the scheme and enable them to voice an opinion.

Step 2 – What we already know and where there are gaps

A. List any existing information/data do you have/monitor about different diverse groups in relation to this policy? Such as in relation to ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, gender, transgender etc.

Data/information such as:

- **Consultation**
- **Previous Equality Impact Assessments**
- **Demographic information**
- **Anecdotal and other evidence**

This is a completely new area of work, and new responsibility. Billing Authorities have always delivered Council Tax support through the national Council Tax Benefit Scheme.

A third party provider has been engaged and is currently undertaking an exercise to forecast various options for the policy. The impact upon various groups will be considered when the data is available.

The results of the forecast will be used to create the new scheme and to model various scenarios for a particular set of circumstances. Scenarios will be presented as supplementary material as part of the online consultation package.

The current council tax benefit data is available to us for modelling and forecasting purposes. Equality and Diversity data is collated and will be used for comparison purposes.

Examples have been provided to the Senior Management Team and Members. This will continue as the scheme is developed.

The current data held in the council tax benefit data base is comprehensive and will help to shape the scheme via modelling, along with the additional data provided by the third party provider engaged.

It is likely that we will need to work closely with council departments to understand how many people we have in the various identified vulnerable groups, as the Discretionary Fund must be affordable. For example; the number of potential claimants who are care leavers up to the age of 22 per year; the number of foster carer households in North West Leicestershire etc.

Consultation exercise results is available to view on the Council's website total number of responses received was 132 from current Council Tax Benefit claimants

This consultation was undertaken by all Districts and Borough Councils at the same time.

The responses from the consultation did not support that everyone should pay more than 10%, 49% said no when compared with 44% who said yes.

The response concerning other adults living in the household 58% respondents said yes that they should contribute to the household.

B. What does this information / data tell you about diverse group? If you do not hold or have access to any data/information on diverse groups, what do you need to begin collating / monitoring? (please list)

- Population density comparable with UK average
- Low number of flats and rented accommodation
- High affluence area, mainly detached housing, low deprivation, high proportion of manufacturing employment
- Ranked 252th out of 326 in the 2010 deprivation index LA ranking. Highly polarised area.
- 6.4% of population receiving benefit income, which is higher than the national average

Step 3 – Do we need to seek the views of others? If so, who?

A. In light of the answers you have given in step 2, do you need to consult with specific groups to identify needs / issues? If not please explain why.

Consultation

Welfare, social sector landlords and voluntary groups have been consulted on the proposed scheme and have been invited to respond. This has included a number of road shows on this within the locality as well as across the County.

Letters have been issued to current Council Tax Benefit claimants to participate in the consultation process

Citizen Advice Bureau assisted in delivering road show events across the County

Awareness

Taxpayers may also need to seek debt advice prior to April 2013 if they are already struggling to pay their bills or ensure that they are currently claiming all of the benefits that they are entitled to under the current scheme. A series of debt advice road shows aimed at 3rd sector organisations are being held in conjunction with the Leicestershire County Council Housing Partnership. These road shows will not only provide awareness of the council tax changes in April 2013, but bring together practitioners from other areas of welfare reform changes.

Information, Advice and Guidance

Taxpayers may need tools to help them understand the impact of changes to their household. Once the scheme has been agreed, scenarios will be revised and published, the council may produce a 'council tax scheme calculator' to help taxpayers work out the cost of changes.

Information will be delivered to each household with annual council tax bills to explain changes.

Discretionary fund and other sources of help for those impacted negatively will also be communicated to 3rd party organisations, groups and vulnerable people.

Step 4 – Assessing the impacts

	<p>In light of any data/consultation/information and your own knowledge and awareness, please identify whether the policy has a positive or negative on the groups specified and provide an explanation for your decision. (please refer to the general duties on the front page)</p>
<p>Age</p>	<p>Working age claimants on a low income</p>

Disability (physical, visual, hearing, learning disabilities, mental health)	Working age claimants on a low income
Sex	Working age claimants on a low income
Religious Belief	Working age claimants on a low income
Racial Group	Working age claimants on a low income
Sexual Orientation	Working age claimants on a low income
Transgender	Working age claimants on a low income
Other protected groups (pregnancy & maternity, marriage & civil partnership)	Working age claimants on a low income
Other socially excluded groups (low literacy, priority neighbourhoods, socio-economic, etc)	None specific to other groups, however there may be feelings of social injustice for those affected in their communities, this may create tension within small hamlets and villages.
All	Working age claimants on a low income

Step 5 – Action Plan

Please include any identified concerns/actions/issues in this action plan: <i>The issues identified should inform your Service Plan and, if appropriate, your Consultation Plan</i>			
Question Number (Ref)	Action	Responsible Officer	Target Date
1	Advice from Leicestershire Valuing People Team to run specific event targeted at people with learning difficulties Arrange for documentation to be available in Easy Read format	Chris Lambert	30 th August 2012
2	How many people are likely to be affected? To be advised after modelling of a) vulnerable groups and b) the scheme.	Sue Williams-Lee Leigh Butler (The Leicestershire Partnership)	31 st October 2012
3	Help tax payers work out cost of changes 'Council Tax calculator'	Leila Wilson Programme manager	30 th November 2012
4	Notify working age customers of Council decision	Ray Bowmer Sue Williams-Lee Leigh Butler	31 st January 2013

Step 6 – Who needs to know about the outcomes of this assessment and how will they be informed

	Who needs to know (Please tick)	How they will be informed (we have a legal duty to publish EIA's)
Employees	Council Staff – in particular those within Revenues and Benefits, Customer Services, Housing and other front facing service areas	Staff briefings, email, intranet/internet.
Service users	Council Tax Benefit claimants	The council's 'Vision' magazine, press releases in local papers, on the council's website, posters, leaflets, discussion at forum meetings.
Partners and stakeholders	CAB, Money Advice, 3 rd sector voluntary groups, Housing Associations, Housing departments	Liaison meetings, email updates, briefings/awareness sessions.
Others		
To ensure ease of access, what other communication needs/concerns are there?		We need to be able to communicate with all sectors of the community. Therefore we may need to provide information in other languages, Braille, large print etc. We may also need to arrange appointments with customers or their representatives to directly explain changes in a manner which meets their particular needs.

Step 7 – Conclusion (to be completed and signed by the [Service Head](#))

Please delete as appropriate
I agree / disagree with this assessment / action plan
If <i>disagree</i>, state action/s required, reasons and details of who is to carry them out with timescales:
Signed (Service Head):
Date: