

Public Consultation Report



Council Tax Support Scheme Consultation Report

Introduction

The Council is facing unprecedented financial challenges and has identified over £53m of savings that potentially will be need to be made over the next 3 years. Savings have been identified from the current CTSS .In support of the proposed changes to the CTSS the Council is required to consult with the public. The consultation regarding the proposed amended scheme took place between the 19th November and the 20th December 2014. This took the form of writing to all residents who potentially would affected by the proposed changes, an online survey and the holding of two public meetings. There were also notices in the local newspaper.

Consultation aims

LBBB consulted separately on the overall savings proposals and the proposed amendments to the new CTSS scheme.

The aims of the consultation were to;

- Inform residents and to help them to understand the impact that the proposals would have on them.
- Clarify why the proposals are being made.
- Detail alternative proposals that are being looked at.
- Give residents the chance to have their say.
- To be meaningful in our approach, taking on board the opinions of residents and giving purposeful consideration to realistic alternative proposals put forward.
- Identify what was important to residents and whether they did or did not support the proposals put forward by LBBB.
- To be fully compliant with the steer given by the Supreme Court in the case “R (on the application of Moseley (in substitution of Stirling Deceased)) (AP) (Appellant) v London Borough of Haringey (Respondent)”.

APPENDIX 1 – Public Consultation Results

What we did

Online consultation began on the 19th November via a link hosted on the home page of LBBDs website. A press release was issued in the local newspaper “The Post” with a shortened URL (link) to the online content. Letters were also sent to 15,441 working age CTS claimants on 21st November 2014 inviting them to participate in the consultation and online survey.

Online, residents opinions were recorded via the survey. Residents could also view detailed information about the CTS proposals. This included the policy draft itself, an extensive FAQ, case studies and a list of realistic alternative proposals considered with details as to why these alternatives were not put forward. Each proposal was explained in a “what and why” fashion; what the changes were and reasons as to why these proposals were selected.

As referred to the consultation was open from 19th November to 20th December 2014. Consultees were also invited to two public meetings held on 4th and 11th December 2014. These meetings were also advertised on the Council’s website and via press release. There were also digital signposts at Barking Learning Centre and Dagenham Library and front line staff also were proactive in promoting that the consultation was taking place.

Consultees were asked to give their considerations to the proposals and encouraged to put forward other realistic alternative solutions. Consultees were able to do this through the online survey and through the public meetings (where also paper surveys were provided) and two scribes and other official attendees took notes and spent time with individuals; listening to them, their concerns and ideas (if any).

Presentations were given at the public meetings. The presentation content was also made available online. Those who attended (a total of 48 residents over the two meetings) were given the opportunity to speak and ask questions during the course of the meetings.

The Council received 147 responses from residents during the consultation period.

The Council’s response to the consultation was posted online after considering the comments and proposals put forward by residents. This response directly answered queries and comments made throughout the consultation period. It also addressed realistic alternative proposals put forward by residents. Consideration has been given to these proposals.

Survey Results

(1) Should working age claimants continue to pay something towards their Council Tax Bill?

62.76% agreed that working age claimants should continue to pay something towards their bill.

			Agree or Disagree		
Strongly agree	22.07%	32			
Agree	40.69%	59	Agree	62.76%	(91)
Neither agree nor disagree	8.28%	12			
Disagree	11.72%	17	Disagree	26.21%	(38)
Strongly disagree	14.48%	21			
Don't know	2.76%	4			
[No Response]	-	2			

Total

147

(2) Do you support the lowering of the maximum support level from 85% to 75%

66.9% did not support the lowering of the maximum support level.

			Agree or Disagree		
Strongly support	8.28%	12			
Support	12.41%	18	Agree	20.69%	(30)
Neither	9.66%	14			
Do not support	18.62%	27	Disagree	66.90%	(97)

APPENDIX 1 – Public Consultation Results

Strongly do not support	48.28%	70
Don't know	2.76%	4
[No Response]	-	2
Total	100.00%	147

(3) Should a reduction to the maximum support be applied equally to all working age claimants?

63.89% did not agree that all working age claimants should have the same maximum support level.

Strongly agree	10.42%	15	Agree or Disagree	
Agree	16.67%	24	Agree	27.08% (39)
Neither agree nor disagree	6.94%	10		
Disagree	25.69%	37	Disagree	63.89% (92)
Strongly disagree	38.19%	55		
Don't know	2.08%	3		
[No Response]	-	3		
Total	100.00%	147		

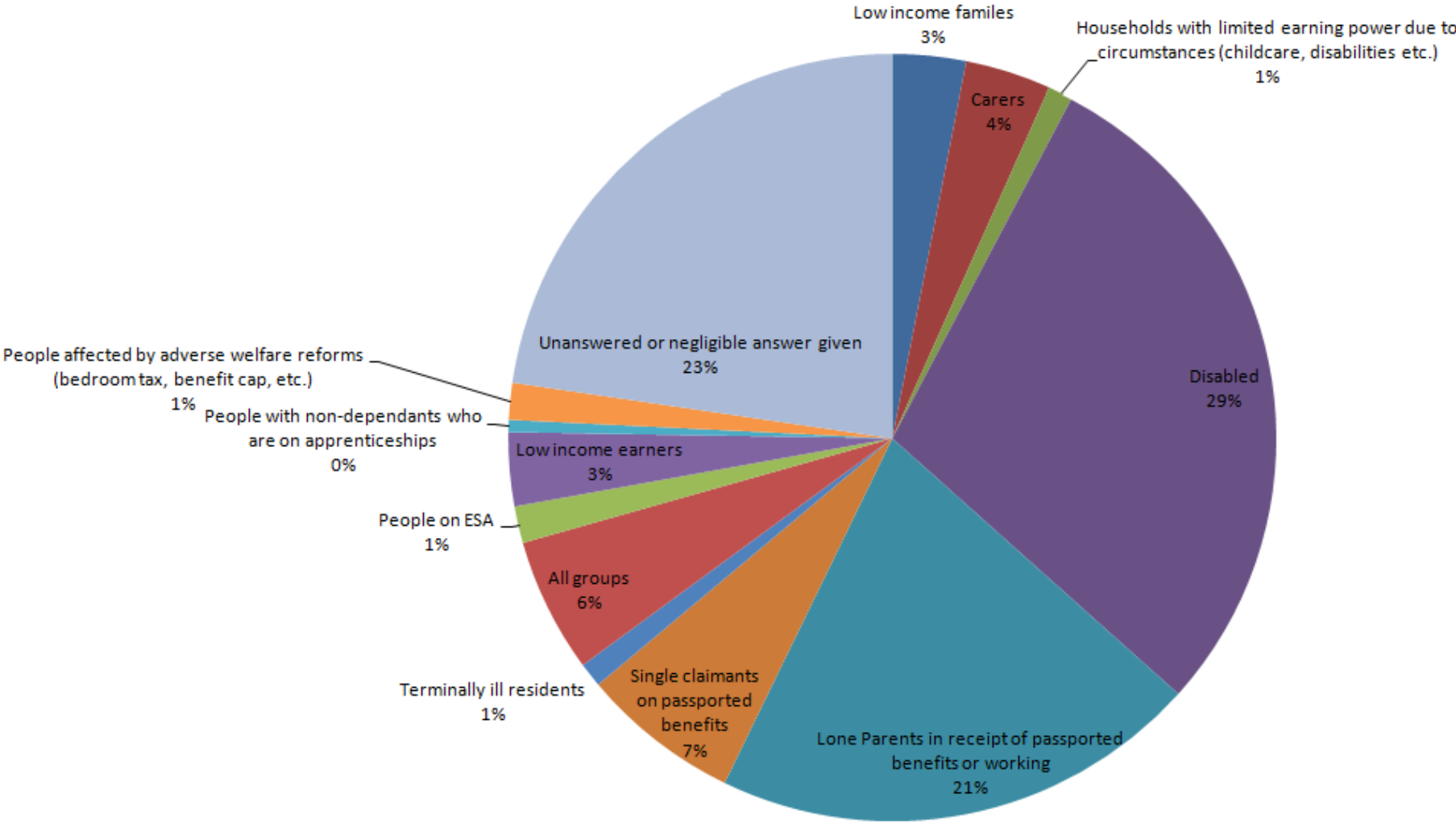
(4) Do you think certain groups will be affected more than others?

The majority of consultees answered yes 78.62%.

(4a) If yes, what groups will be affected more and why?

23% of people did not give an answer to this question however, 29% of consultees stated those with disabilities would be affected more and 21% stated lone parents would be worse off.

Who should be protected?



APPENDIX 1 – Public Consultation Results

(5) Would you support a proposed Council Tax increase instead of a cut to Council Tax Support?

53.1% stated that they would not want an increase to Council Tax instead of a cut to CTS.

Yes, Council Tax should be increased instead	28.28%	41
No, Council Tax should not be increased	53.10%	77
I would support both	8.28%	12
Don't know	10.34%	15
[No Response]	-	2
Total	100.00%	147

(6) Would you support the removal of Second Adult Rebate?

38.62% did not agree with the removal of Second Adult Rebate.

Strongly support	14.48%	21	Agree or Disagree		
Support	15.17%	22	Agree	29.66%	(43)
Neither	15.86%	23			
Do not support	20.00%	29	Disagree	38.62%	(56)
Strongly do not support	18.62%	27			
Don't know	15.86%	23			
[No Response]	-	2			
Total	100.00%	147			

(7) Do you support a drop of the Capital Limit from £16,000 to £6,000?

45.52% supported a drop of the capital limit.

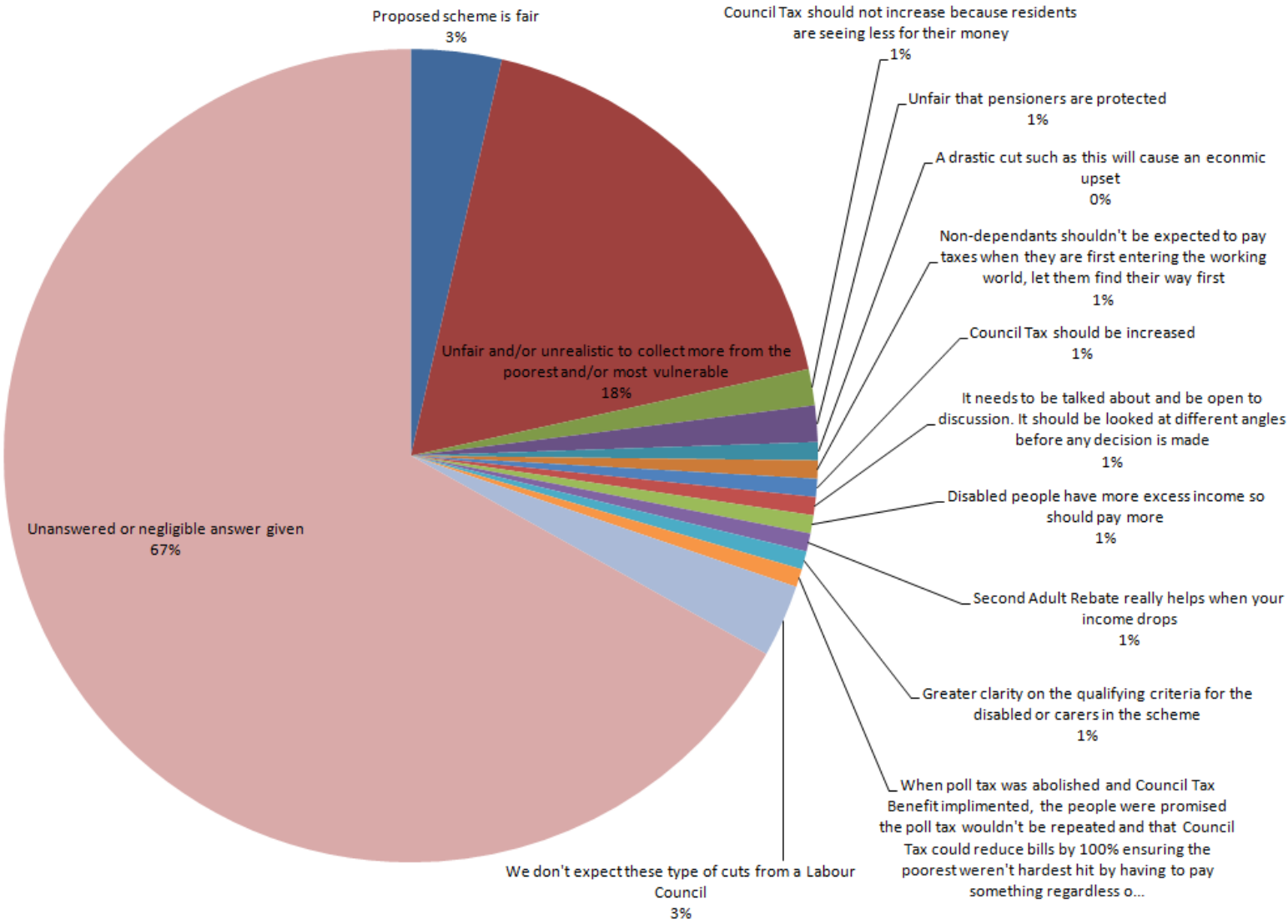
Strongly support	22.07%	32	Agree or Disagree		
Support	23.45%	34	Agree	45.52%	(66)
Neither	8.28%	12			
Do not support	20.69%	30	Disagree	37.93%	(55)
Strongly do not support	17.24%	25			
Don't know	8.28%	12			
[No Response]	-	2			
Total	100.00%	147			

APPENDIX 1 – Public Consultation Results

(8) Your comments about the proposed scheme... (attitude towards the proposed scheme)

67% of residents that responded to the consultation did not add any further comments. Residents that did leave a comment (18%) believed that the proposals if applied would disadvantage the poorest and the most vulnerable.

Attitude/comments about and towards the proposed scheme



Other comments were made which have been addressed in the response to consultation (see below).

Who participated?

(9) Responding as...

The vast majority of consultees were individuals living in Barking and Dagenham (95.14%):

an individual who lives in Barking and Dagenham	95.14%	137
an individual/organisation providing services that support local people	3.47%	5
someone who represents local people i.e. a Councillor, community organisation, faith group	1.39%	2
[No Response]	-	3
Total	100.00%	147

(10) How Consultees described their households:

26.11% of consultees said they were from households with someone who is disabled. Lone parents made up 19.75% of the consultees.

A family with one or two children	17.83%	28
a family with three or more children	8.28%	13
A lone parent household	19.75%	31
A household with full and/or part time workers	8.92%	14

APPENDIX 1 – Public Consultation Results

A household that includes someone who is disabled	26.11%	41
A single person household or a couple with no children]	13.38%	21
None of these	5.73%	9
[No Response]	-	10
Total	100.00%	167

(11) Are you a carer?

74.63% of people responding were not carers:

Yes	25.37%	34
No	74.63%	100
[No Response]	-	13
Total	100.00%	147

(12) If yes, who do you care for?

Those carers who responded 33.33% cared mainly for a disabled child under 14 years (33.33%) or some other person in their household (45.45%):

A child or children under 14 years	7.48%	33.33%	11
A disabled person within your family	10.20%	45.45%	15
An older family member	2.72%	12.12%	4
Other	2.04%	9.09%	3

APPENDIX 1 – Public Consultation Results

[No Response]	77.55%	-	114
Total	100.00%	100.00%	147

(13) Do you receive Council Tax Support?

Almost all consultees answered yes (88.24%) of those who answered the consultation stated that they are Council Tax Support.

(14) What is your age group?

91.85% of consultees stated that they were of working age

Under 20	0.00%	0
20-39	39.26%	53
40-59	52.59%	71
60-65	8.15%	11
66-75	0.00%	0
76+	0.00%	0
[No Response]	-	12
Total	100.00%	147

(15) Gender?

60% of respondees were females (60%, 81) took the survey than male (40%, 54)

(16) Transgender?

3 consultees (2.59%) said they were or that they identify themselves as transgender.

(17) Ethnic group?

The majority of consultees (67.65%) identified themselves as British:

APPENDIX 1 – Public Consultation Results

"African"	8.09%	11
"Any other Asian background"	2.94%	4
"Any other Black / African / Caribbean background"	0.74%	1
"Any other mixed / multiple ethnic background"	1.47%	2
"Any other White background"	7.35%	10
"Bangladeshi"	2.21%	3
"Caribbean"	1.47%	2
"English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British"	67.65%	92
"Indian"	0.74%	1
"Irish"	2.21%	3
"Pakistani"	3.68%	5
"White and Black African"	1.47%	2
[No Response]	-	11
Total		147

(18) Do you consider yourself disabled?

30.08%

of the consultees who took the survey identified themselves as disabled.

(19) Type of disability:

Of those that considered themselves disabled, the vast majority to not disclose their disability (60%), of those that did, reduced mobility (37.50%) was the highest answer given:

Visual impairment	4.17%	3
Speech impairment	0.00%	0
Hearing impairment	4.17%	3
Wheelchair user	6.94%	5

APPENDIX 1 – Public Consultation Results

Mental health issues	22.22%	16
Restricted mobility	37.50%	27
Learning difficulty	6.94%	5
Other impairment	18.06%	13
[No Response]	-	108
Total	100.00%	180

(20) Religion?

Most consultees considered them to be either Christian (48.53%) or as having no religion (36.03%):

No religion	36.03%	49
Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)	48.53%	66
Buddhist	0.00%	0
Hindu	2.21%	3
Jewish	1.47%	2
Muslim	9.56%	13
Sikh	0.00%	0
Any other religion	2.21%	3
[No Response]	-	11
Total	100.00%	147

(21) Sexual orientation?

Most consultees identified themselves as heterosexual (93.85%):

APPENDIX 1 – Public Consultation Results

Heterosexual (straight)	82.99%	93.85%	122
Gay man	2.04%	2.31%	3
Lesbian	0.68%	0.77%	1
Bisexual	0.68%	0.77%	1
Other	2.04%	2.31%	3
[No Response]	11.56%	-	17
Total	100.00%	100.00%	147

Responding to comments rose during consultation

During consultation, either through the survey or the public meetings, consultees used the opportunity to suggest their alternative proposals and also comment on the proposals put forward. This next section shows the response given.

Comments and Questions Raised by Consultees

1. The proposals are unfair and it is unrealistic to expect the poorest and/or most vulnerable to pay more Council Tax.

The council do not disagree with this and are open to receiving alternative proposals from residents. The council have lobbied against the cuts to its funding and will continue to do so. However, in the meantime, we must make difficult decisions.

2. Council Tax should not increase because residents are seeing less for their money.

An increase in Council Tax for all would be to keep front line services and certain important but non-statutory services running for residents. The council cannot keep services running on cuts alone and so must also look at generating extra revenue.

3. It is unfair that pensioners are protected from these proposals.

The council must protect pensioners, this is a policy set down by central government. The council recognises that this may seem unfair and that a cut to all, both working age and pension age people, would have seen a lower drop in support.

4. We don't expect these cuts from a Labour Council.

It is important to recognise that these cuts are being passed down from central government. The council does not want to make these cuts but must in order to keep front line services running. The council has already made £90m savings which has been passed up to central government and now must make a further £54m over the next three years.

5. Why are the disabled not protected?

The council did not propose providing full or partial protection for persons who are deemed disabled because this would mean other groups would be asked to pay more than currently being proposed. The council believe it to be less of a burden overall if everyone (of working age) contributes.

6. How are people on already low incomes supposed to find the money to pay the extra tax?

There is no easy answer to this question however; there are bodies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Disablement Association of Barking & Dagenham who are there to help by providing advice and support. Where people are deemed to be in exceptional financial hardship they may qualify for a discretionary reduction.

7. How can disabled people (who do not have the capacity to work) be expected to pay?

Those that are unable to their council tax bill, especially those with disabilities that make work impossible will receive help through the Discretionary Reduction scheme which is aimed to help people in those circumstances.

8. Is this how the scheme is going to be? Set in stone?

No. That is why we have consulted with residents, to explain the challenges the council faces and why cuts must be made. The hope from consultation is that residents can put forward their comments for consideration by Assembly. Perhaps more importantly, it is also the hope that residents can put forward alternative ideas that meet the savings needed whilst being better suited to residents needs.

9. Why hasn't central government taken into account the level of disabled people in each borough and allocated funding where it is needed most?

Simply, this is not how central government allocate funding. Central government have a "simple is best" policy when it comes to allocating funding. Unfortunately, putting simplicity over fairness has the undesired result of deprived boroughs not receiving adequate funding.

Proposal ideas put forward by consultees

- 1. Do not disregard non-dependant deductions for disabled people.**
- 2. Cuts should be made from higher cost departments such as transport.**
- 3. Exclude new migrants from the scheme unless they work.**
- 4. Make cuts from money spent on religious and social events.**
- 5. Remove the council tax exemptions for those with mental health problems.**
- 6. Charge non-dependant household members separately based on their income.**
- 7. Cut more management posts within the Council to increase efficiency.**

Alternative Proposal	Description	The Council's Response
(1) Remove the disregard that exempts disabled persons from a non-dependant deduction	<p>Currently, people who qualify for the disability premium and whom have a non-dependant living in the household; do not receive a deduction in their support for that non-dependant.</p> <p>This proposal would see disabled applicants seeing a deduction for any non-dependant that resided in their home.</p>	<p>In the proposals put forward by the Council, disabled persons are not protected from the maximum support level drop. However, assurances to protect the higher applicable amounts and rules like this one were important to protect.</p> <p>The council recognises that in a number of cases, disabled people have family members living with them to support their living. This is a result of their disability so we do not believe this would be the fairest approach to making the savings needed.</p>
(2) Make cost cuts from higher cost departments such as transport	Instead of cutting Council Tax Support, make cuts to higher cost services.	The Council has considered all possible cost saving proposals. There are difficult decisions to make,
(3) Exclude new migrants from the scheme unless they work	Exclude EEA and other foreign nationals entering the country from receiving support towards their Council Tax.	The scheme already has rules surrounding this area which do exclude some migrants from receiving support.
(4) Cut money spent on religious and social events	Reduce funding of council funded social and religious events	Any grant application is considered on its own merits
(5) Remove the Severely Mentally Impaired (SMI) Exemption	The SMI exemption reduces the council tax charge to zero for those that satisfy the qualifying conditions.	This is a statutory exemption. The Council have no power to remove this.
(6) Charge non-dependant household members separately.	Instead of non-dependants making a contribution towards the applicant's council tax charge, they should be charged separately instead.	If the non-dependant adult is living with the owner or lead tenant of a property then they cannot be charged separately because they are not a liable person. This is statutory.
(7) Cut management posts within the Council	Make efficiency cuts within the management structure of the council.	The Council has considered all possible cost saving proposals – there are many managerial jobs that will be lost through major restructures of