

Survey results:

Council Tax Reduction Scheme Survey Report

October 2016



1. BACKGROUND

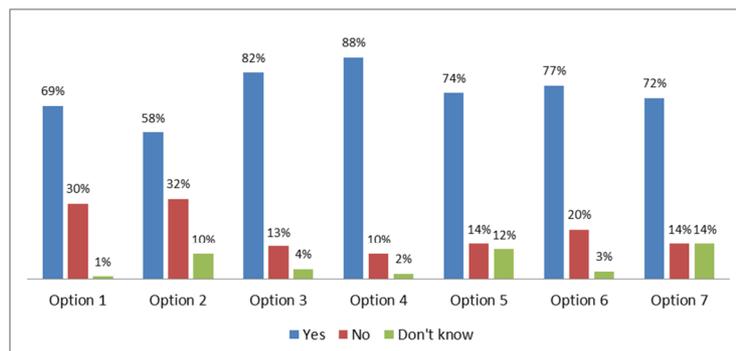
- 1.1 Each year Arun District Council decides whether to change the Council Tax Reduction scheme (CTR) for working age applicants in the district. This year the Council has decided that changes should be considered to bring the Council Tax Reduction scheme in line with the changes made by Central Government in Housing Benefit and Universal Credit and is consulting with residents on the changes proposed.
- 1.2 Over the past two years, support from the Government for the scheme has reduced and has been absorbed into the general grant the Council received. The reduction in this grant means there is less money available, not only to help towards CTR, but also towards supporting the cost of delivering other services the Council provides. To help the Council to deliver a wide range of high quality services to the public it has been identified that some savings could be made by reducing the amount of help provided via the CTR.
- 1.3 The Council is consulting on a range of options to change the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme from 1st April 2017, some of which would reduce the cost of the scheme. The survey ran from 25th July to 16th October and was available on the Arun District Council website and Facebook page. 158 responses were received¹.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Three in five respondents (61%) feel that the Council should not keep the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme (i.e. should not continue to reduce Council Tax for applicants in the way and to the extent that it does at the moment). Just one in three (34%) feels the Council should keep the current system. Hence the view, by almost two to one, is to replace the current system.
- 2.2 Reasons given for not protecting it include: everyone needs to share the problem and pay a bit more; everyone should pay something so they are aware of the bill; the contribution proposed is minimal and can be easily managed over the year.
- 2.3 Reasons given for protecting it include: the scheme means the poorest members of society have more to spend on essentials; small amounts of money are costly to collect; the burden of many of the cuts falls on the least able to pay (those with large families or the disabled); savings could be made from council wastage of money elsewhere.
- 2.4 Of the seven options put forward, option 4 (reducing the permitted absence period) receives the greatest level of support, whilst option 2 (removing the Family Premium for all new working age applicants) receives the least support. Even so, more than half of respondents support this option, with nearly three in five in favour. The figure overleaf summarises the level of support for each of the options.

¹ This is subject to a maximum standard error of +/-7.8% at the 95% confidence level on an observed statistic of 50%. Thus we can be 95% confident that if the whole population had responded the actual figure would lie between 42.2% and 57.8%.

Respondent agreement with each of the options to change the current Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme [Base: 158]

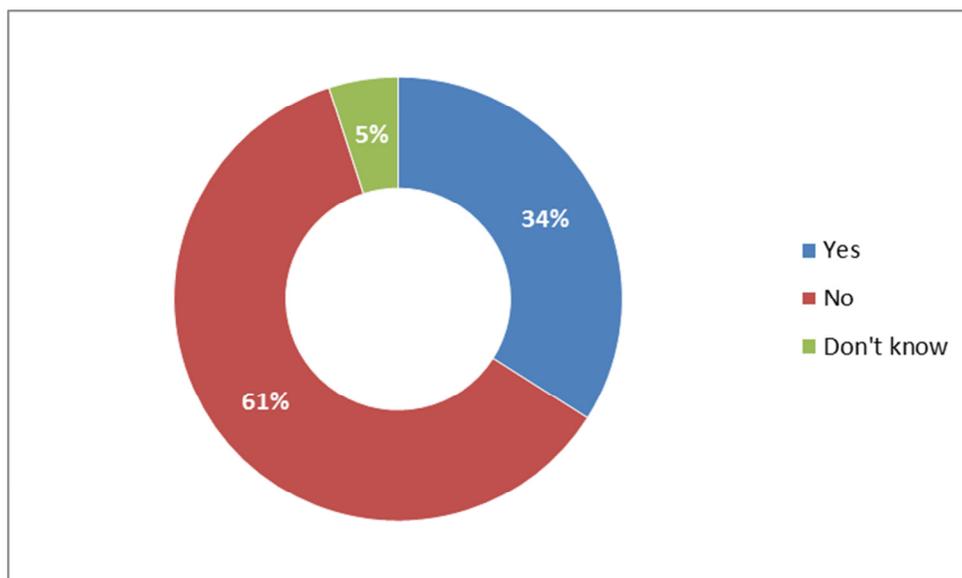


- 2.5 The following themes emerged across most options: some people genuinely would not be able to afford the extra cost; very low income households must be protected; should seek savings from council money being “wasted” elsewhere; ask all Council Tax payers to increase the amount they pay; charge larger properties more (let the well-off help the less well-off); the financial burden should be borne by everyone including pensioners; it’s too difficult to administer; do not target the disabled.
- 2.6 If the Council were to keep the current scheme, it will need to find savings from other services to help meet the expected reduction in Government grant. Three alternatives were set out for respondents to consider. There is no strong support for any of these options, however using the council’s savings is the preferred option, followed by increasing the level of council tax, closely followed by reducing funding available for other council services.
- 2.7 Respondents were given the opportunity to make any other comments on the proposals.
- Comments in favour included: the proposals seem very sensible and bring local council policy in line with government policy; looks good, some sensible suggestions; there is a need to amend the current scheme as suggested to reflect financial reality and make it fairer.
- Comments against included: punishing the less well-off is never acceptable; not a cost effective measure as in the long term it would cost the Council more in supporting those affected by it.
- 2.8 Asked if the Council should consider any other options to save money/increase income, comments included: reduce costs of staffing or office associated costs; increase income generation; cut redevelopment schemes, consultants etc; lobby government to increase the Council Tax valuation bands; target all claimants, not just the ones trying to work for a living.
- 2.9 Further comments included: it is about time this change is made to make the burden fairer for all; leave poor people alone, they have it tough enough as it is; it is a small amount that could be recouped from current Council Tax payers; pension age applicants get a far better deal than working age ones, change the scheme to amend this.

3. KEY FINDINGS

- 3.1.1 Three in five respondents (61%) feel that the Council should not keep the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme (i.e. it should not continue to reduce Council Tax for applicants in the way and to the extent that it does at the moment). Just one in three (34%) feels the Council should keep the current system and the remaining one 5% say they don't know (see figure 1). Hence the view, by almost two to one, is to replace the current system.

Figure 1 - Should the Council keep the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme? (Should it continue to reduce Council Tax for applicants in the way and to the extent that it does at the moment?) [Base: 158]



- 3.1.2 Respondents were given the opportunity to provide comments on protecting the Council Tax Reduction Scheme from cuts. Full comments are provided in appendix B (under section B.1). A selection of comments is provided below:

Reasons for protecting it:

“Protecting the current scheme means the poorest members of society have more to spend on essentials such as food, electricity and gas.”

“Small amounts of money are costly to collect.”

“The burden of many of the cuts that you have outlined seem to fall on the least able to pay (those with large families or the disabled). This is shameful and should be regarded as counter to the ethos of a District Council.”

“There are more obvious savings to be made.”

The council should bear the cost:

“Seek savings from current council wastage of money elsewhere.”

It should not be protected:

“Councils are struggling for money, and even if those on benefits have to pay £5 per year, that is still an increase in the council's income.”

“I do not agree with keeping the current scheme - everyone needs to share the problem and pay a bit more.”

“I think everyone should pay something so they are aware of the bill.”

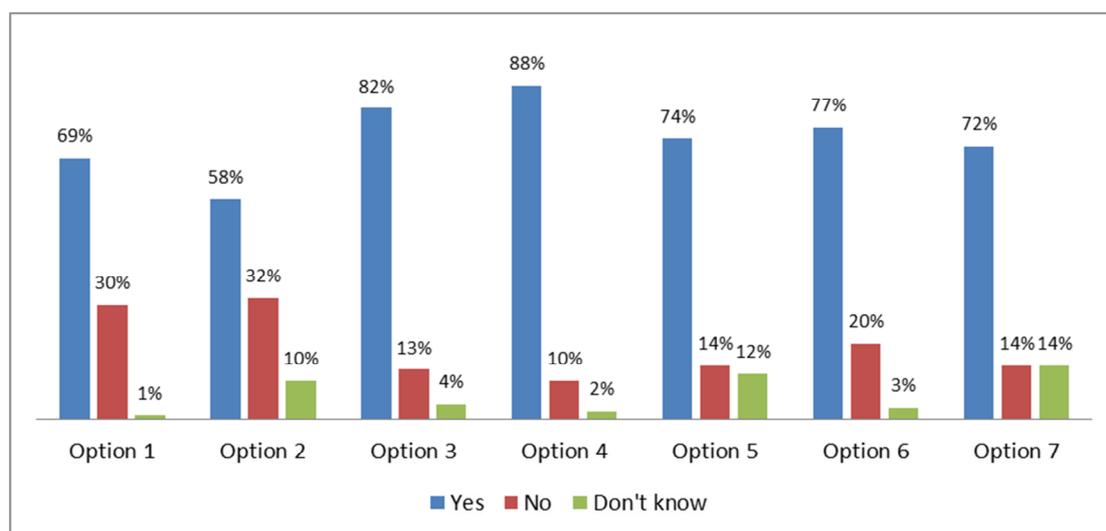
“The small amount we are asking them to contribute is minimal and can be easily managed over the year in terms of repayment for the customer.”

3.2 The survey asked for views on each of the seven options the Council is consulting on to reduce the cost of the existing Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working age applicants from 1st April 2017. These are listed below and explained in full in appendix A (with the description and the impacts of each option):

- **Option 1** – Require all working age applicants to pay at least £3.70 per week Council Tax (currently up to 100% support)
- **Option 2** – Removing the Family Premium for all new working age applicants (currently £17.45 per week)
- **Option 3** - Reducing backdating to one month (currently three months)
- **Option 4** - Reducing the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Reduction to 4 weeks
- **Option 5** - To remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants
- **Option 6** - To limit the number of dependent children within the calculation for Council Tax Reduction to a maximum of two (currently no limit)
- **Option 7** – To remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them.

3.3.1 Figure 2 summarises respondents’ views on each of these seven options. Option 4 (reducing the permitted absence period) receives the greatest level of support, with almost nine to one in favour; whilst option 2 (removing the Family Premium for all new working age applicants) receives the least support. Even so, more than half of respondents support this option, with nearly three in five in favour.

Figure 2 – Respondent agreement with each of the options to change the current Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme [Base: 158]



3.3.2 Table 1 analyses these findings by respondent characteristics:

- Those in receipt of a Council Tax reduction appear less likely than those who are not to agree with options 2, 5, and 7².
- Female respondents appear more likely than male respondents to agree with all of the 7 options.
- Those with health problems are less likely than those without to agree with any of the 7 options.

Table 1 - Respondent agreement with each of the options to change the current Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme [Bases vary]

	Base	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5	Option 6	Option 7
All respondents	158	69%	58%	82%	88%	74%	77%	72%
Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?								
As an individual	155	69%	59%	82%	88%	75%	77%	73%
On behalf of organisation	3 ³	67%	0%	100%	67%	33%	67%	33%
Are you, or someone in your household, currently receiving a Council Tax Reduction?								
Yes	20	70%	50%	85%	85%	65%	75%	65%
No	133	69%	61%	82%	89%	77%	78%	74%
Are you....?								
Male	56	61%	55%	79%	86%	73%	66%	71%
Female	93	78%	63%	87%	91%	77%	86%	77%
What is your age?								
18 - 34	21	81%	43%	95%	95%	71%	76%	81%
35 - 44	26	81%	65%	88%	88%	73%	88%	69%
45 - 54	40	55%	50%	75%	88%	73%	65%	73%
55 - 64	40	73%	60%	83%	83%	75%	80%	73%
65+	23	78%	78%	78%	96%	83%	83%	78%
Are your day to day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?								
Yes	9	33%	44%	67%	78%	44%	67%	44%
No	134	73%	58%	83%	90%	76%	78%	74%

² Option 2 - Removing the Family Premium for all new working age applicants; Option 5 - To remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants; Option 7 – To remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them)

³ Warning: low base

3.3.3 Respondents were given the opportunity to provide comments on each of the seven options put forward. Full comments are provided in appendix B (see sections B.2 to B.8 inclusive, sorted by theme).

3.3.4 The following themes emerge across many of the options:

“Some people genuinely would not be able to afford the extra cost.”

“Very low income households must be protected.”

“Seek savings from council money wastage elsewhere.”

“Ask all Council Tax payers to increase the amount they pay.”

“Charge larger houses more - let the well-off help the less well-off.”

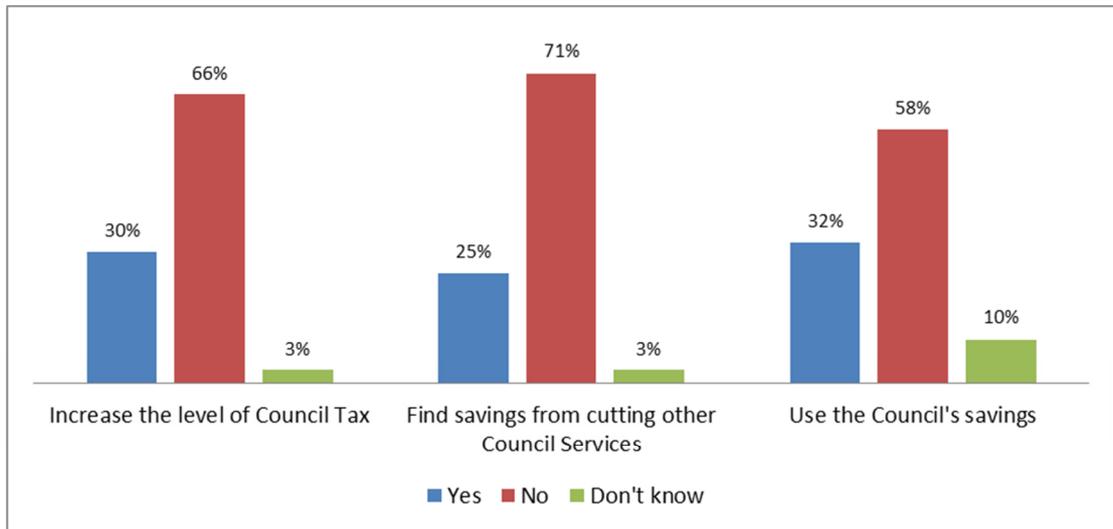
“The financial burden should be borne by everyone, including pensioners.”

“Too difficult to administer.”

“Do not target the disabled.”

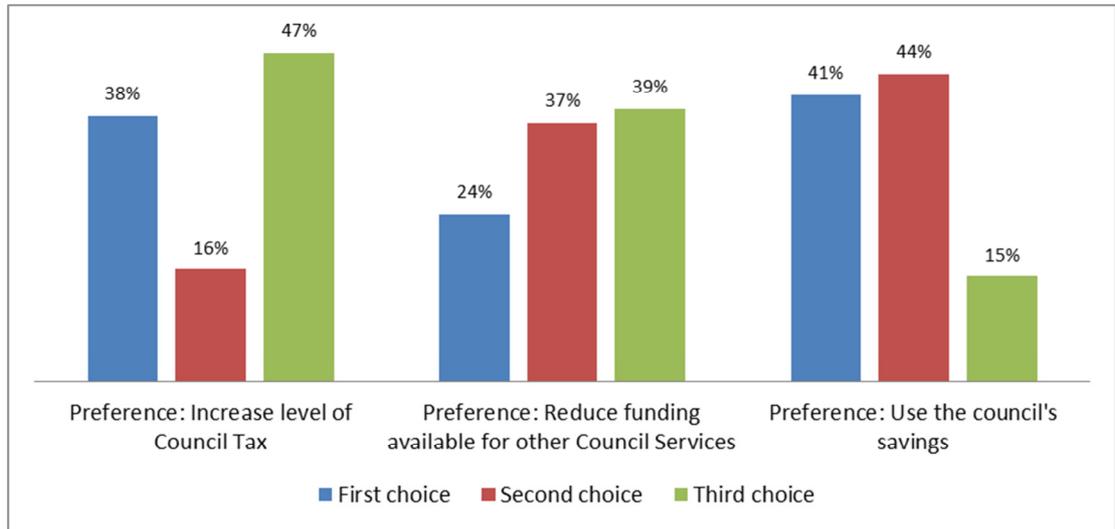
3.4 If the Council were to keep the current scheme it will need to find savings from other services to help meet the expected reduction in Government grant. Three alternatives were set out for respondents to consider. Figure 3 summarises their views on each of these. There is no strong support for any of these options, with “yeses” ranging from one in three down to just one in four.

Figure 3 – Do you think we should choose any of the following options rather than the proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme? [Base: 146]



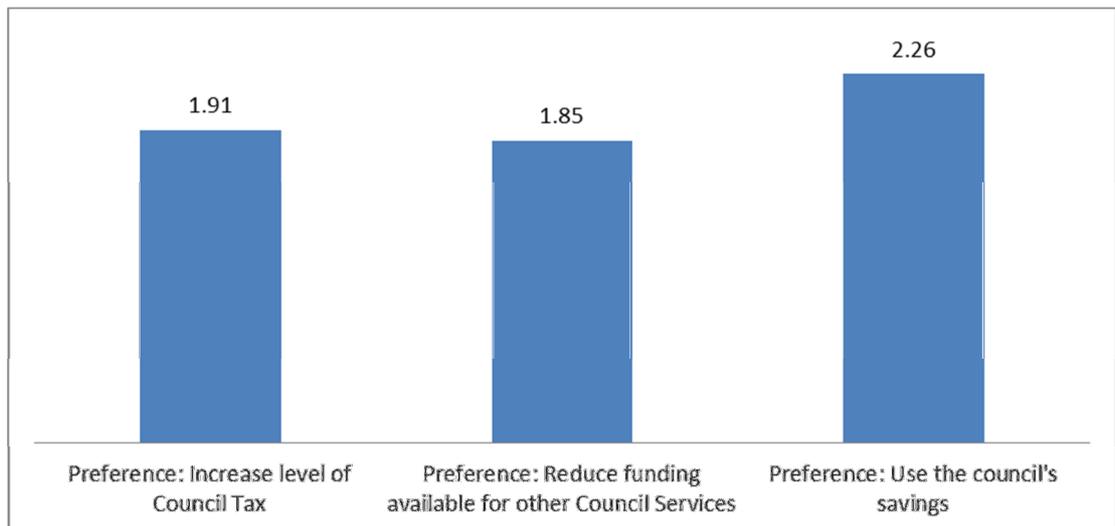
3.5.1 Respondents were asked what their order of preference would be if the Council were to decide to choose these other options to make savings. Figure 4 summarises responses (also see figure 5 overleaf).

Figure 4 – Respondent order of preference for these alternative options to save money [Base: 146]



3.5.2 As figure 4 is somewhat difficult to interpret, figure 5 has been produced to show the net preference for each option (here the results have been weighted so that a first choice scores 3, a second choice scores 2 and a third choice scores 1. This shows that using the council's savings is the preferred option, followed by increasing the level of council tax, closely followed by reducing funding available for other council services.

Figure 5 – Respondents' order of preference for the alternative options to save money [scale from 3 = first choice, down to 1 = third choice] [Base: 146]



3.5.3 Table 2 analyses these findings by respondent characteristics:

- Those in receipt of a Council Tax reduction appear more likely to prefer a general increase in the level of Council Tax than reducing funding available for other Council Services.
- Those whose day to day activities limited because of a health problem or disability also appear more likely to prefer a general increase in the level of Council Tax than reducing funding available for other Council Services.
- Older respondents tend to prefer a general increase in the level of Council Tax than reducing funding available for other Council Services, whereas those aged 35-44 are more likely to prefer reduced funding than an increase in Council Tax.

Table 2 – Respondents' order of preference for the alternative options to save money [scale from 3 = first choice, down to 1 = third choice] [Bases vary]

	Base	Preference: Increase level of Council Tax	Preference: Reduce funding available for other Council Services	Preference: Use the council's savings
All respondents	144	1.91	1.85	2.26
Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?				
As an individual	142	1.92	1.84	2.25
On behalf of an organisation	2 ⁴	1.00	2.50	2.50
Are you, or someone in your household, currently receiving a Council Tax Reduction?				
Yes	20	2.10	1.70	2.20
No	120	1.91	1.85	2.26
Are you....?				
Male	50	1.98	1.78	2.25
Female	87	1.87	1.87	2.25
What is your age?				
18 - 34	20	1.95	1.95	2.20
35 - 44	26	1.58	2.08	2.35
45 - 54	34	1.91	1.91	2.15
55 - 64	36	2.11	1.64	2.24
65+	22	1.91	1.68	2.41
Are your day to day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?				
Yes	7	2.43	1.14	2.50
No	123	1.86	1.90	2.25

⁴ Warning: low base

- 3.6 Respondents were given the opportunity to make any other comments on the Proposals. Full comments are provided in appendix B (see section B.9). A selection of comments is provided below:

Positive comments:

"I agree with all the proposals, they seem very sensible and bring in local council policy in line with government policy."

"Looks good, some sensible suggestions."

"Need to amend the current scheme as suggested to reflect financial reality and make it fairer."

Support for retaining CTRS for working age applicants:

"As much as I agree that the changes are required I do feel that it is unfair that the people who are most affected are the ones trying to work. It seems to me that the main people that should be targeted are the people we need to encourage to get back to work and by reducing their 'free ride' might spur them in the right direction."

"I am appalled that you are considering penalising the poorest members of the community but not increasing Council Tax. What about revaluing all the properties at the same time?"

"Punishing the less well-off to is never acceptable."

"This is not a cost effective measure as in the long term it would cost the Council more in supporting those affected by it."

Should not be just aimed at working age claimants:

"I do not think this should solely be targeted to working age claimants. Many claimants who do not come under this category have more money each month than people who actually work, so why can't we ask them to pay!!"

"Perhaps pensioners should pay a portion also and the Government should review this."

- 3.7 The next question asked if respondents would like the Council to consider any other options to save money. Full comments are provided in appendix B (see section B.10). A selection of comments is provided below:

The Council should bear the cost:

"Council should consider joint working with other District councils where this might reduce costs of staffing or office associated costs - rents, heating, lighting etc."

"Income generation."

"You have wasted £millions on stupid redevelopment schemes, consultants etc, plus getting into areas councils shouldn't be in. Make big cuts in all that."

Others should bear the cost:

“Increase the Council Tax for all.”

“We should be lobbying the government to increase the Council Tax valuation bands so that the upper limit is increased. It seems unfair in a system based on property values that the maximum band is so low - meaning that there is no differentiation between the wealthy and the super-rich.”

“Yes, target all claimants, not just the ones trying to work for a living!”

- 3.8 Respondents were invited to provide any further comments or questions to make regarding the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Full comments are provided in appendix B (see section B.11). A selection of comments is provided below:

Broadly agree with the proposals:

“I am in no doubt that people who are receiving CTR, use more council services than the likes of people who are working and paying full council tax. Also, people on benefits, especially if they have children or a disability, receive more money than the likes of myself, on minimum wage. I'm fed up with it, like many others I'm sure.”

“It is about time this change is made, to make the burden fairer for all.”

Disagree:

“Leave poor people alone - they have it tough enough as it is.”

Others should bear the cost:

“Still believe it is a small amount that could be recouped from current Council Tax payers.”

Include pensioners:

“Pension age applicants get a far better deal than working age ones. Change the scheme to amend this, or if you can't then lobby central government about it.”

APPENDIX A

A.1 Option 1 – Require all working age applicants to pay at least £3.70 per week Council Tax

- The Council currently allows all working age applicants to claim up to 100% support towards their Council Tax depending on their income and circumstances. This option would require all applicants who claim Council Tax Reduction, to pay a minimum of £3.70 per week. Reducing this support would mean that some working age applicants would need to pay more than they do under the current scheme.
- The Council is conscious that any minimum payment must be affordable given the household's circumstances and the Council is minded that the minimum payment of £3.70 per week is fair.
- The impacts are:
 - It is fair, everyone shares the increase
 - It is a simple change to the scheme which is easy to understand and administer
 - All working age households receiving Council Tax Reduction will be required to pay a minimum payment unlike previous years.

A.2 Option 2 – Removing the Family Premium for all new working age applicants

- The removal of Family Premium from 1st April 2017 for new claims will bring the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in line with Housing Benefit. The family premium is part of how we assess the 'needs' of any applicant, which is compared with their income. Family Premium is normally given when an applicant has at least one dependent child living with them. Removing the Family Premium will mean that when we assess an applicant's needs it would not include the Family Premium (currently £17.45 per week). This change would not affect those on Universal Credit, Income Support, Income Related Employment and Support Allowance or Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance.
- The impacts are:
 - It brings the working age Council Tax Reduction Scheme in line with Housing Benefit changes proposed by Central Government. The change has already been introduced for pension age applicants by Central Government
 - New working age residents may see a reduction in the amount of support they receive
 - Some households with children will pay more.

A.3 Option 3 - Reducing backdating to one month

- Currently claims for Council Tax Reduction from working age applicants can be backdated for up to three months. Central Government has reduced the period for Housing Benefit claims to one month. It is proposed that the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme be aligned with the changes for Housing Benefit.
- The impacts are:
 - It is a simple alteration to the scheme which is easy to understand when claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction
 - New working age residents may see a reduction in the amount of support they receive if they are unable to claim on time.

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

- Within the current scheme, applicants can be temporarily absent from their homes without it affecting the Council Tax Reduction. This replicated the rule within Housing Benefit. Housing Benefit has been changed so that if a person is absent from Great Britain for a period of more than 4 weeks, their benefit will cease. It is proposed that the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme is amended to reflect the changes in Housing Benefit. There will be exceptions for certain occupations.
- The impacts are:
 - The treatment of temporary absence will be brought into line with Housing Benefit - It is seen as fair
 - There are exceptions for certain occupations including the armed forces and mariners

- If a person is absent from Great Britain for a period which is likely to exceed 4 weeks, their Council Tax Reduction will cease from when they leave the Country. They will need to re-apply on return.

A.5 Option 5 - To remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants

- From April 2017, all new applicants of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) who fall within the Work Related Activity Group will no longer receive the component in either their ESA or within the calculation of Housing Benefit. It is proposed that the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme is amended to reflect the changes.
- The impacts are:
 - The treatment of ESA will be brought into line with Housing Benefit
 - It avoids additional costs to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme
 - Persons receiving ESA will not experience any decrease in Council Tax Reduction due to this change.

A.6 Option 6 - To limit the number of dependant children within the calculation for Council Tax Reduction to a maximum of two

- Within the current scheme, applicants who have children are awarded a dependant's addition of £66.90 per child within their applicable amounts. There is no limit to the number of dependant's additions that can be awarded. From April 2017 Central Government will be limiting dependant's additions in Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and Tax Credits to a maximum of two. This will only affect households who have a third or subsequent child on or after 1st April 2017. It is proposed that the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme is amended to reflect the changes in Housing Benefit and Central Government Benefits. There will be exceptions where there are multiple births after 1st April 2017 (and the household is not already at their maximum of two dependants within the calculation); adopted children or where households merge.
- The impacts are:
 - Council Tax Reduction will be brought into line with Housing Benefit, Universal Credit and Tax Credits
 - It is simple and easy to administer
 - Applicants who have a third or subsequent child after 1st April 2017 (and are not excepted from the rules) may receive less Council Tax reduction than an applicant who has more children born before 1st April 2017.

A.7 Option 7 – To remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them

- Currently when another person is paid Carers Allowance to look after a Council Tax Reduction applicant, then the Severe Disability Premium is not included when working out their needs (Applicable Amounts). The reason for this is that it avoids paying for the same care twice. This proposed change will align the scheme with Housing Benefit by treating persons who receive the Universal Credit (Carers Element) in the same way as anyone receiving Carers Allowance.
- The impacts are:
 - Council Tax Reduction will be brought into line with Housing Benefit
 - It is simple and easy to administer
 - There are no drawbacks to this change as persons receiving Universal Credit (Carers Element) will be treated in the same way as those receiving Carers Allowance who look after any person who claims Council Tax Reduction.

APPENDIX B

B.1 Please use the space below to make any comments you have on protecting the Council Tax Reduction Scheme from cuts.**Reasons for protecting it:**

“Because of the serious impact on some of our most vulnerable families if it is removed.”

“Council tax is a big percentage of people's monthly expenditure and as residents we support our area in lots of different ways, so anything the council can do to support its residents has to be a good thing.”

“CTR is for the poorest and most vulnerable in society and needs protecting.”

“However the weekly amount of £3.80 will be very difficult for clients with no earned income and means tested benefits which will not increase for the next 4 years.”

“It is the most vulnerable that need the scheme and any change will affect them.”

“People can find themselves redundant at the employer's whim in an area with virtually no other employment. Council tax is already high and help is needed to pay this high charge.”

“People could be put into debt if the discount is reduced.”

“People on the scheme are already poor.”

“Protecting the current scheme means the poorest members of society have more to spend on essentials such as food, electricity and gas.”

“Recovery of the amount due will be costly. It is inevitable that these people who are likely to have very little spare income will default. For the sake of £200 per year, the costs and efforts to recover debt will be higher.”

“Small amounts of money are costly to collect.”

“The burden of many of the cuts that you have outlined seem to fall on the least able to pay (those with large families or the disabled). This is shameful and should be regarded as counter to the ethos of a District Council.”

“The CTRS is there to help individuals/families (working and non-working) to keep their finances afloat. To scrap it would mean that it would cost the Council more as they in some cases would need to resort to other publicly funded support, for example housing benefit, if it means losing their home.”

“The idea that £3.70 is somehow automatically affordable for everybody is a fallacy. I would agree that taking £3.70 from somebody's benefits when they have no other deductions ought to be acceptable, but what if they already have deductions from their Housing Benefit and from their income related benefits? The proposal to remove the 100% rate from the people who are, by definition, the very poorest in society is manifestly unfair.”

“There are more obvious savings to be made.”

“These people have no money and even £3.70 a week is a lot to them.”

“We need to protect the less well-off where possible.”

“We should do whatever we can to protect those in our community that cannot afford to pay.”

The council should bear the cost:

“Cuts should be made internally within the council's top bracket wages and on money wasted by council officials, before taking money from people on low incomes.”

“Cuts to benefits cause hardship to the vulnerable. This will compound cuts made by Central Government. Arun has an increased housing stock, therefore an increased council tax.”

“Seek savings from current council wastage of money elsewhere.”

Others should bear the cost:

“HMO and residential properties that use part of their premises for commercial purposes, inflicting higher social planning issues and vehicle parking issues, should be made to incur higher charges. People are fed up subsidising these types.”

“I cannot afford one penny more for rented accommodation. Owners should pay the Council Tax, not renters.”

CTRS should not be protected:

“Councils are struggling for money, and even if those on benefits have to pay £5 per year, that is still an increase in the council's income.”

“CTRS should not be protected from the cuts. Everyone needs to pay in regardless.”

“Happy with the small minimum weekly charge.”

“I believe everyone should pay something.”

“I can see no valid reason to protect this service over others, particularly when other households pay a full contribution and receive lesser service.”

“I do not agree with keeping the current scheme - everyone needs to share the problem and pay a bit more.”

“I think everyone should pay something so they are aware of the bill.”

“It should be changed, not protected.”

“Pension age CTR recipients are over protected from these proposed reductions. Where possible the council should look to correct this imbalance.”

“Should be fair and ensure that those who possibly "play the system" make a small contribution, whether it be those with two properties or those who currently do not pay anything.”

“The council must be fair to all payers and as such must make cuts where they can.”

“The small amount we are asking them to contribute is minimal and can be easily managed over the year in terms of repayment for the customer.”

“This would help towards providing services which are vital.”

Other comments:

“I am only using a small proportion of the services as I live by myself.”

“I feel the only reduction given should be for single residency occupancy.”

“It could be spread across all the normal households. It would be a small amount.”

“It needs to change fairly.”

“It should also reflect on those people who are working in holiday camps in the area, who are not on many hours of work from October to April of the following year.”

“It works.”

“It would be nice to protect it but not sure it can be afforded”

“More transparency and equity is needed.”

“Raising the Council Tax rate would be a fairer solution (my family would be happy to pay more towards preventing these cuts). How about looking into adding additional Council Tax bands?”

“There are plenty of people who are struggling to pay their council tax, both working age and those retired.”

“With the extra health appointments and associated public transport costs, I do not agree to the options penalising those with health problems claiming ESA in Work Related Group.”

B.2 What alternative would you propose to Option 1 – Require all working age applicants to pay at least £3.70 per week Council Tax?

Disagree:

“Everyone sharing the amount needed rather than just those who are in need of assistance through CTR.”

“Everyone sharing the increase does not make it fair as some are less able to pay than others.”

“Leave the scheme at 100% support.”

“Some people genuinely would not be able to afford the extra cost.”

“The full amount should be able to be claimed, especially if over 50 when employers won't look at you but you pension is a distant dream.”

“There are families who have no spare income at the moment, so will be pushed further into poverty.”

“Very low income households must be protected.”

To pay an amount – but lower than £3.70 per week:

“£2.50 per week.”

“A slightly less amount, for example £10 per month.”

The Council should bear the cost:

“Cut executive salaries.”

“Deduct the shortfall from the councillors' pension fund.”

“Reduce Arun's spending on consultants. In an internet age there is little need for local authorities to restamp health education and all the rest of the 'literature' that gets produced every year, rehased under an Arun banner.”

“Seek savings from council money wastage elsewhere.”

“The scheme stays the same and the councils meet the shortfall.”

“Without seeing exactly what the council wastes money on this is difficult. But perhaps reduce wage bill paid out by council to top bracket earners.”

Others should bear the cost:

“A Council Tax increase across the District made by every household to support those in need.”

“Asking all CT payers to increase the amount they pay.”

“Charge larger houses more - let the well-off help the less well-off.”

“Charging people who can afford it more.”

“For the cost to be spread out across all households in the Arun area, not just those in receipt of CTR.”

“HMO, flats and non-business rated property should pay a larger proportionate share.”

“I agree with some of the other proposals. Working age applicants are less able to contribute towards the increase as central government freezes on welfare benefits rates including applicable amounts in HB & CTR are effectively a reduction in income. Pension age applicants should contribute more.”

“Increase council tax for all, do not target the poor.”

“Increase Council Tax for the very richest, rather than increasing it for the very poorest. It is disingenuous to say that this option "is fair, everyone shares the increase" because (a) only people who are poor enough to get CTR will pay, and (b) only working age people will pay.”

“Increase council tax for those who can pay.”

“Increase Council Tax.”

“Keeping it as it is and considering an increase in Council tax to cover loss of central government funding.”

“Owners should pay not renters.”

“Raise council tax for others who can afford it.”

“Spread cost across all CT payers.”

“That the financial burden is borne by everyone including pensioners.”

Other comments:

“If the council would publish its criteria on how it assesses income and expenditure coupled with this proposal, I would be able to make a fully informed decision. As it stands, I have concerns that individuals with a high level of non-priority debts would be forced into dire financial status. Would the assessment of affordability be fair for those individuals?”

“Proportional payment based on household income.”

B.3 What alternative would you propose to Option 2 – Removing the Family Premium for all new working age applicants?

Agree:

“Families with children have more to spend already.”

Disagree:

“Do not remove it.”

“I don't know but when you work and have to find childcare costs for all year not just the 32 weeks you get, how would people with kids find the extra money?”

“I would be against this if it meant further administration on behalf of the Council to enforce. These changes affect poor households the worst.”

“Leave it as it is.”

“One of the other options. This would significantly impact low wage/part time working families.”

“Support for working families on a low income. Council tax based on income!”

“That houses with children should be given the family premium.”

“The reasoning is nothing more than yet another financial cut to the vulnerable and low paid. There is much more that Arun can do to cut their expenditure.”

“The removal of the Family Premium will already reduce the household income for families - you are proposing we increase the impact of that change. If you take money away from households with children, you will reduce the life prospects for the children.”

“This particular option I find unfair on families. Options 1, 3, and 4, could work at the same time.”

The Council should bear the cost:

“Again, the councils should meet any shortfall.”

“Seek savings from council money wastage elsewhere -- such as excessive use of consultants.”

Others should bear the cost:

“Again get the better off to help. Start telling the government that these cuts are not fair, we will all support and back you.”

“Charge people who can afford it more.”

“Increase council tax for all, do not target the poor.”

“Increase Council Tax.”

“Keeping it as it is and considering an increase in Council tax to cover loss of central government funding.”

“No-one has any spare money. Owners should pay not renters. Owners benefit from good services by charging more rent and increased property values with taxes paid by renters.”

“Raise council tax for the better off.”

“Raise Council Tax.”

Other comments:

“A Full and Fair declaration needs to be carried out.”

“Again, insufficient data has been provided. I fear this may make a lone parent who works, out of pocket.”

“Again, it needs to be looked at from a personal point of view. Housing benefit is way out of line compared to rent. As council housing is virtually non-existent, private rental figures should be taken into account.”

B.4 What alternative would you propose to Option 3 - Reducing backdating to one month?

Disagree:

“Keep it as it is.”

“Keep limit to 3 months but only if there is a legitimate and reasonable excuse why claim was not submitted earlier.”

“Keep to 3 months.”

The Council should bear the cost:

“Seek savings from council money wastage elsewhere -- such as excessive use of consultants.”

Others should bear the cost:

“Again get the better off to help. Start telling the government that these cuts are not fair, we will all support and back you.”

“Consider an increase in Council tax to cover loss of central government funding.”

“Increase council tax for all, do not target the poor.”

“Increase Council Tax.”

Speed up the process:

“Making the whole system easier and better known about so that people can claim it more quickly and do not need it back dating.”

“Only if claims can be processed quickly.”

“The applications have taken so long to process in the past this creates hardships. Payments need to be granted from the day of application.”

“The speed and efficiency of HB claims is at an all time low. Your ability to claw back 'overpayment' far exceeds the claimants ability to back date any change in circumstances. Putting the onus on young inexperienced claimants is a disgraceful way of abdicating government assistance.”

Other comments:

“Yes I agree with this change but could there be an appeal for some circumstances e.g. hospitalisation? (over 1 month)”

B.5 What alternative would you propose to Option 4 - Reducing the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Reduction to 4 weeks?

Agree:

“If they can afford a holiday they should pay.”

Disagree:

“Keep it as it is.”

“Keep the current arrangement. Why should the poor be penalised for a one off event?”

Other time period:

“A 3 months absence. It would not be unreasonable for a person to visit an overseas relative for more than a month, maybe paid for by the relative.”

“That the absent period be longer, about 6 weeks.”

Difficulty in administering/monitoring this:

“Ensure that they are in the UK.”

“How can you accomplish this without incurring more costs (officers' time checking, disputes etc). If this is a HB 'rule' it is also questionable as to how this can be accomplished also as a 'cost saving' exercise.”

“I cannot see how it will be established that they are absent without much cost.”

“I wonder also how this will be policed; will the onus be on the claimant to prove they were not out of the country for longer than 4 weeks?”

“There's no point if you can't monitor it...”

“Too difficult to administer.”

Others should bear the cost:

“Consider an increase in Council tax to cover loss of central government funding.”

Other comments:

“Leave the situation as it is, if they are not in the country they are not using services. If they have rented their property, tax is being paid.”

“This is effectively a right wing, racist policy. It is purely made to impact on people from other countries or poor people who "we" deem are undeserving of long term holidays. The alternative is to

fund it for 4 weeks each time and any continued absence where they are not resident it should then be cancelled.”

B.6 What alternative would you propose to Option 5 - To remove the element of a Work Related Activity Component in the calculation of the current scheme for new Employment and Support Allowance applicants?

Disagree:

“Keep it as it is.”

“Not that.”

“This is unfair on disabled people.”

The Council should bear the cost:

“Pay a proper full benefit to those in need, cut excess council expenditure such as the chief executive's wages and stop penalising the poor!”

“Seek savings from council money wastage elsewhere -- such as excessive use of consultants.”

Others should bear the cost:

“Again get the better off to help. Start telling the government that these cuts are not fair, we will all support and back you.”

“Consider an increase in Council tax to cover loss of central government funding.”

“Increase Council Tax.”

“Raise council tax.”

“Stop penalising disabled people and charge people who can afford to pay.”

Other comments:

“Options 1, 3, and 4, could work at the same time.”

“Your statement "will not experience any decrease in 'council tax reduction' due to this change" is different from your consultation document which says "will not experience any decrease in 'council tax' due to this change" - so which is correct?”

B.7 What alternative would you propose to Option 6 - To limit the number of dependent children within the calculation for Council Tax Reduction to a maximum of two?

Disagree:

“I would be against this if it meant further administration on behalf of the Council to enforce. These changes affect poor households the worst.”

“Leave as is.”

“Ridiculous! This would push poorer families deeper into poverty. In line with the government's most ill thought out policy, but surely unethical and immoral. Other options are more suitable.”

“This is going to kill split families and CMS.”

“This will increase child poverty. Arun already has areas of nationally high child poverty. This does nothing to alleviate an already acknowledged situation. In fact local government is going to pay dearly for central government's penny pinching.”

“Will increase child poverty and is not likely to be a factor in family planning, if indeed any takes place.”

Other limit/formula:

“A formula involving numbers in the house ÷ income. Old people can be added to a family too.”

“A reduction per child but with a cap on the total amount any household is able to claim.”

“I think 3 kids is fairer than 2.”

“If people have 4 kids. Not just 2.”

“That the limit be increased to 3 children in the calculation.”

The Council should bear the cost:

“Seek savings from council money wastage elsewhere -- such as excessive use of consultants.”

Others should bear the cost:

“Increase Council Tax for everybody. The idea of punishing people for having children is absurd. When you take money away from a household with children, it is the children whose standard of living is hardest hit, and with it, their life chances.”

“Increase Council Tax.”

“Increase the charges for second and empty homes in the district.”

“Keeping it as it is and considering an increase in Council tax to cover loss of central government funding.”

“Owners should pay Council tax increases not our poorest residents.”

“Raise Council Tax.”

“The previous options are ask all payers to increase.”

Other comments:

“Government should not interfere with family rights to have children.”

“Options 1, 3, and 4, could work at the same time.”

B.8 What alternative would you propose to Option 7 – To remove entitlement to the Severe Disability Premium where another person is paid Universal Credit (Carers Element) to look after them?

Disagree:

“Do not target the disabled.”

“Give them the full benefit of relief.”

“Keep it as it is.”

“Leave it as is.”

“Leaving disabled people alone.”

“None, carers and people with severe disabilities should be exempt from any cuts.”

“Unfair on disabled people.”

Others should bear the cost:

“Consider an increase in Council tax to cover loss of central government funding.”

Other comments:

“Options 1, 3, and 4, could work at the same time.”

“Paying the carers a decent wage for their hours of work.”

B.9 Please use this space to make any other comments on the scheme:

Positive comments:

“Council tax takes ten per cent of our income, it's only fair that everyone pays something so we don't have to have more increases.”

“I agree with all the proposals, they seem very sensible and bring in local council policy in line with government policy.”

“I think that all households should pay towards council tax. I would like to see everyone paying at least 50%, regardless of benefits received.”

“Looks good, some sensible suggestions.”

“Need to amend the current scheme as suggested to reflect financial reality and make it fairer.”

“Seeing as those on a low income can afford the full SKY package, the latest smartphones, nice cars, tattoos and to go out drinking they can pay £3.70.”

Negative comments (support for retaining CTRS for working age applicants):

“50% discount for single occupancy, NOT 25% which is unjust.”

“Affordability is an issue.”

“Aligning benefits is nonsense as the criteria of any benefit is judged on 'personal circumstances'.”

“All of my household are in full time employment and claim no benefits, and yet I still feel those who are already living in poverty should not be targeted.”

“As much as I agree that the changes are required I do feel that it is unfair that the people who are most affected are the ones trying to work. It seems to me that the main people that should be targeted are the people we need to encourage to get back to work and by reducing their 'free ride' might spur them in the right direction.”

“Council Tax has been artificially depressed for several years for some reason. If we are having difficulties now then it is a direct result of that profligacy. It is really not fair that the people who can afford it have effectively been given a discount for those years, and we are now talking about asking the people who can't afford it to pay for that discount.”

“I am appalled that you are considering penalising the poorest members of the community but not increasing Council Tax. What about revaluing all the properties at the same time?”

“I do not think it would be fair to increase council tax or reduce services in other areas, when this option is available.”

“I feel that those who are on ESA and JSA should still not have to pay council tax. The burden should be spread across all paying householders.”

“I have had to take advantage of full council tax benefit in the past due to my circumstances, and because my housing benefit never came anywhere near to covering my rent, the fact that I didn't have to worry about council tax as well meant that I managed to stay clear of any debts.”

“If you squeeze the poor too much, they end up with nothing to live for, then they rebel or commit suicide!”

“Punishing the less well-off to is never acceptable.”

“Rethink as the people in dire need will be worse off.”

“The Councillors have made the decision not to raise our Council Tax for a number of years, presumably for political reasons. Residents of Arun are used to gradual increases in the cost of living and I would not have objected to increases each year. I do object to punishing poor residents now that circumstances relating to funding have changed. The other benefit changes referenced are all about making work pay. There are fewer opportunities for work in the Arun district than in other areas of the country and I do not think we should replicate the government's policy changes here.”

“There are other fairer ways to raise council tax.”

“This is not a cost effective measure as in the long term it would cost the Council more in supporting those affected by it.”

Should not be just aimed at working age claimants:

“I do not think this should solely be targeted to working age claimants. Many claimants who do not come under this category have more money each month than people who actually work, so why can't we ask them to pay!!”

“Perhaps pensioners should pay a portion also and the Government should review this.”

Other comments:

“Any changes should be individually communicated to current claimants so they can plan/budget for April 17 onwards. We are eligible but didn't know about the proposals or this consultation.”

“How has this consultation been publicised? Only found out by accident.”

“It would depend on what other areas of the council spending would be cut to fund the council tax as to whether I would agree with it or not.”

“Put up Council Tax, everything is getting more expensive, people should expect to pay more. Stop cutting services, we're just digging a hole for ourselves.”

“See how much savings can be made by bringing it into line with Housing Benefit.”

“Seek savings from council money wastage elsewhere -- such as excessive use of consultants.”

“Stop fraud. Campaign against it. Stop illegal HMO and residential properties waiving paying business rates. Multiple vehicles and waste households should pay more.”

“The Council should petition DCLG that pensioners cannot be touched. This is purely done for votes.”

“The level of Council tax for those not claiming reductions should be as low as possible.”

“Universal council tax increases or reduction in services for people already paying a full contribution to fund any shortfall in the CTR scheme should be considered completely unacceptable.”

B.10 Please use the space below if you would like the Council to consider any other options:

The Council should bear the cost:

“Bring ADC HR policies in line with WSCC - if staff used their own leave over the Christmas holiday (between Christmas Day and New Year's Day), more staff will be in during normal working time, meaning that you may not need to employ further staff, saving salary costs!”

“Council should consider joint working with other District councils where this might reduce costs of staffing or office associated costs - rents, heating, lighting etc.”

“Cut the pay of top councillors, relocate all Arun offices into one.”

“Cut the wages of those at the top, cut the useless posts, the diversity officers etc and save money that way. Reduce expenses claimed on jollies and 'meetings'.”

“Income generation.”

“You have wasted £millions on stupid redevelopment schemes, consultants etc, plus getting into areas councils shouldn't be in. Make big cuts in all that.”

Others should bear the cost:

“A small yearly increase to all households would be more appropriate, with an element of empowerment to those on benefit income. Perhaps a token payment of £1 per week would be more affordable. It would also mean that a debt will remain small if this occurs.”

“Charge buy to let owners of properties not renters. Charge vacant and second homes a penalty rate. Tax wealth not poverty.”

“Charge people who can afford to pay and stop penalising people for being old / disabled which they cannot help.”

“Consider a referendum to raise the Council Tax, or be able to take voluntary contributions towards Council work.”

“Increase charges for second and empty homes. Lobby government to create council tax bands greater in value than H.”

“Increase the Council Tax for all.”

“Perhaps council tax could be raised at the rate of around 5% of net household income?”

“Put up the council tax and stop penalising the poor and disadvantaged for Conservative austerity cuts.”

“We should be lobbying the government to increase the Council Tax valuation bands so that the upper limit is increased. It seems unfair in a system based on property values that the maximum band is so low - meaning that there is no differentiation between the wealthy and the super-rich.”

“Yes, target all claimants, not just the ones trying to work for a living!”

Other comments:

“1. Not award any CTR if less than £5.00 weekly. Remove 2nd adult rebate . Any claimant/ partner /child in receipt of DLA care PIP care and ESA support component should be excluded from the £3.70 restriction as well as pensioners”

“Campaign for more funding from central government to cover essential services.”

“Instead of wasting time with collection through the bailiffs, the council should focus on accessing the earnings to get Council Tax liabilities paid, when these are missed.”

“Make those out of work volunteer to cover cost their council tax, by carrying out work related activity to benefit the district.”

“More checks if people are single occupants.”

“Usually most households pay over 10 months (I believe from memory). Why not ask for smaller contributions over those remaining 2 months?”

“What % of the increased households within Arun (ie extra council tax) has been spent increasing services? Exactly what 'shortfall' can there be?”

“What options are other Councils in the UK looking at?”

B.11 If you have any further comments or questions to make regarding the Council Tax Reduction Scheme that you haven't had opportunity to raise elsewhere please use the space below:

Broadly agree with proposals:

“Everyone should pay something towards their council tax.”

"I am in no doubt that people who are receiving CTR, use more council services than the likes people who are working and paying full council tax. Also, people on benefits, especially if they have children or a disability, receive more money than the likes of myself, on minimum wage, I'm fed up with it, like many others I'm sure."

"It is about time this change is made, to make the burden fairer for all."

"Make all claimants pay!!!!"

"Why should ordinary working people who don't get any reductions have the council tax increased to make up for the loss of council tax from people who claim benefits? Should apply to everyone to make a contribution."

Disagree:

"Leave poor people alone - they have it tough enough as it is."

The Council should bear the cost:

"Do not use council tax to pay pensions, those of us in private employment do not have taxpayers paying huge amounts into our pension pots."

"Perhaps we should stop making town centres pretty at great expense. Stop spending hundreds of thousands of pounds on consultants when we employ so called experts in their field at great expense. Perhaps after over 20 years of being asked, told and financially motivated to reduce costs, ADC SHOULD start cutting them."

Others should bear the cost:

"Savings should not come from raising Council Tax, this is unfair on everyone in the district who work hard but still don't have a lot of money. So many people earn 'too much' to claim any kind of benefit, but still are on the breadline. Raising their costs is unfair when so many benefit claimants get loads already. The saving should come from them."

"Still believe it is a small amount that could be recouped from current CT payers."

Include pensioners:

"It's a shame pensioners cannot be affected by changes."

"Pension age applicants get a far better deal than working age ones. Change the scheme to amend this, or if you can't then lobby central government about it."

Other comments:

"As a single/widowed parent of a child travelling who is therefore unable to provide an address I have had to argue with the Council about getting my single person's reduction. I think this is discriminatory against single parents whose adult children go travelling as they are encouraged to do to broaden their horizons and therefore do not have a specific address to go to."

"Difficult to consider these changes in isolation to the overall scheme. No changes are said to be planned for those of 'pension age' but what is 'pension age'? It varies! Also if one isn't of pension age how does one know that that aspect remains fair and balanced with the new proposals?"

"I agree with most of the changes but I think the disabled should be left alone, they have enough to deal with and so do there carers."

"There is no mention in this consultation about the cost of trying to recover £3.70 per week from the very poorest in society."

"Think about the administrative, recovery and legal costs of this scheme. This would mean leaving the CTR largely as is, would be cheaper."

“Where there is a possibility of beneficiaries of CTR that are able to work, the option of doing community work could be offered along or instead of payment.”

“Why do you not have any fraud investigators who can properly deal with CTRS fraud and SPD fraud? Real investigators are required.”

“Will it affect the 25% discount for single occupancy?”