



Equality Analysis (EA) (formally Equality Impact Assessment) Record Form 2020/21

Department: Benefits

Team or Service Area Leading Assessment: Council Tax Support Project Team

Title of Policy/ Service or Function: Working Age Council Tax Support Scheme Equality Assessment

Lead Officer: Louise Jones

STEP 1 - IDENTIFYING THE PURPOSE OR AIMS

1. What type of policy, service or function is this?

Existing policy

2. What is the aim and purpose of the policy, service or function?

From April 2013, as part of the government's Welfare Reform agenda, Council Tax Benefit was abolished and replaced with a locally determined Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme. Pensioners continue to be protected at their existing levels of benefit under a national scheme whilst new schemes were set up for Working Age customers at a Local Authority level. Under this system, it is billing authorities who will decide who is eligible to get support and the support will be awarded by way of a Section 13A Council Tax discount. The grant provided by the Government continues to be reduced; Local Authorities therefore have to manage the reduction in funding in developing local Council Tax Reduction Schemes and have to ensure that their scheme also covers the impact of any future increase in Council Tax Reduction recipients.

Fylde Council will need to operate under three major constraints:

1. The cut in funding (which may in practice be higher if demand for support increases in the future).
2. The desire to protect vulnerable groups and the exhortation to do this by the Government (as set out in "Localising Support for Council Tax: Vulnerable people – key local authority duties" published by the Department of Communities and Local Government in May 2012).
3. The desire to incentivise work and not contradict the incentives to work in Universal Credit (as set out in "Localising Support for Council Tax: Taking work incentives into account" published by the Department of Communities and Local Government in May 2012).

The Government has stated (in the above document on vulnerable people) that they do not intend to prescribe the protection that local authorities should provide for vulnerable groups other than pensioners. Rather the guidance reminds local authorities to have due regard to how their local scheme may impact on people based on the following:

- Age

- Disability
- Sex and sexual orientation
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief

The above guidance refers to specific legislation that local authorities should have due regard to when designing their local scheme. This includes:

- The Equality Act 2010 (particularly the Public Sector Equality Duty)
- The Child Poverty Act 2010 (duty to mitigate the effects of child poverty)
- The Housing Act 1996 (duty to prevent homelessness)

In addition, it advises that local authorities consider the impact under The Armed Forces covenant published in May 2011.

The local scheme sets out:

- the classes of person who are entitled to a reduction
- the reductions which are to apply to those classes
- the procedure by which a person may apply for a reduction.

The timetable for development of the original 2013/14 Equality Analysis is shown below and this document is reviewed and updated annually to consider the impact of the Scheme and any changes to it.

Action	Timescale
Set up Working Group	May 2012
Assign Officers to EA	May 2012
Develop first draft of the proposed schemes	Jun 2012 -Jul 2012
Start Equality Analysis based on proposed scheme	Jul 2012 – Oct 2012
Consultation with Affected Groups/Stakeholders	Aug 12 – Oct 2012
Post Consultation Review of EA taking consultation into account	Oct 2012 – Nov 2012
Develop EA Action Plan to mitigate impact of the changes	Oct 2012
Review EA with Equalities team	Oct 2012
Send EA with Council Report to decide the scheme	Nov 2012
Ensure Monitoring arrangements are in place	Dec 2012 – Jun 2013
Consultation exercise on removal of the family premium in CTRS claims	Sep 2015 – Oct 2015
Post consultation review of EA taking consultation comments into account	Oct 2015 – Nov 2015
Develop EA action plan to mitigate impact of the changes	Oct 2015 – Nov 2015
Send EA with Council Report to decide the scheme	Nov 2015
Consultation exercise on amendments to the scheme	22 Aug 2016 – 15 Oct 2016
Post consultation review of EA taking consultation comments into account	Oct 2016
Develop EA Action Plan to mitigate impact of the changes	Oct 2016
Send EA with Council Report to decide the scheme	Nov 2016
Review EA document to continue to mitigate the impact of the scheme	Oct 2017
Send EA with Council Report to decide the scheme	Nov 2017
Review EA document to continue to mitigate the impact of the scheme	Sep 2018

Send EA with Council Report to decide the scheme	Nov 2018
Review EA document to continue to mitigate the impact of the scheme	Sep 2019
Send EA with Council Report to decide the scheme	Nov 2019

3. Please outline any proposals being considered.

The Council is considering continuing with the existing 2019/20 scheme, ensuring the scheme is cost neutral to the Council with continued reduced support for working age claimants of 22.7%.

4. What outcomes do we want to achieve?

A framework to provide Council Tax Reduction with the following objectives:

- The scheme is similar to the old national scheme in terms of eligibility criteria to determine who will receive support.
- Supports work incentives and in particular, avoid disincentives to move into work.
- Achieves the required savings and allows room for future take-up of the discount.
- The scheme is cost effective to administer.
- The impact of the scheme can be assessed and future adjustments can be made.

5. Who is the policy, service or function intended to help/ benefit?

Each billing authority in England must design a scheme specifying the reductions which are to apply to amounts of council tax support payable in respect of dwellings situated in its area by:

- Persons of working age whom the authority considers to be in financial need; or
- Persons of working age in classes consisting of persons whom the authority considers to be, in general, in financial need

6. Who are the main stakeholders/ customers/ communities of interest?

The main stakeholders are:

- The Preceptors e.g. Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service, Lancashire Police Authority, Lancashire County Council
- Any resident who is liable to pay Council Tax
- Any current Working Age Council Tax Reduction customers
- A range of 3rd party organisations providing support and advice to a wide range of customers

7. Does the policy, service or function have any existing aims in relation to Equality/ Diversity or community cohesion?

The scheme will continue to apply the same percentage reduction to all Working Age customers.

STEP 2 - CONSIDERING EXISTING INFORMATION AND WHAT THIS TELLS YOU

8. Please summarise the main data/ research and performance management information in the box below.

<p>Data/ information</p> <p>The main performance information to assist in the design of the Council Tax Reduction scheme will be databases and statistics held for the following purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Billing and Recovery of Council Tax• Awarding Council Tax Reduction• Census data including index of deprivation• Benefits caseload data to establish trends• Information held by the Office of National Statistics
<p>Research or comparative information</p> <p>Local authorities have clearly defined responsibilities in relation to, and awareness of, the most vulnerable groups and individuals other than pensioners in their areas. This includes responsibilities under:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Child Poverty Act 2010, which imposes a duty on local authorities to have regard to and address child poverty and their partners, to reduce and mitigate the effects of child poverty in their local areas.• The Disabled Persons Act 1986, and Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, which include a range of duties relating to the welfare needs of disabled people.• The Housing Act 1996, which gives local authorities a duty to prevent homelessness with special regard to vulnerable groups. <p>Figures quoted below were correct as at Oct 2015.</p> <p>Population</p> <p>Fylde has a resident population of 77,000, some 20,100 (26%) are aged over 65. Fylde has just under 35,000 households. It is an affluent area with low levels of unemployment, quality housing and crime rates.</p> <p>Deprivation</p> <p>Fylde has 21 wards broken down into 51 lower-layer super output areas (LSOA's) of which only 1 is in the most deprived 10% and over a third of which are in least deprived 30% nationally. Fylde ranks, 217th out of 326 local authorities for average deprivation score. Health deprivation is lower than average.</p> <p>Housing</p> <p>The number of households in Fylde was just under 35,000 with a higher percentage of owner occupied dwellings than England and a lower proportion of social housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ 73% - owner occupied (England: 63%)○ 17% - privately rented (England: 17%)○ 7% - social rented (England: 18%) <p>Household Composition</p> <p>The households in Fylde have slightly higher proportions of lone adults over 65 and a lower proportion of lone parents than England.</p> <p>Household types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 17% - lone adults over 65 years (England: 12%)• 18% - lone adults under 65 years (England: 18%)

- 9% - lone parent families (England: 11%)
- 12% - single families with all adults over 65 (England: 8%)
- 40% - single families with all adults under 65 (England: 43%)

Disability

2,650 (5.9%) of working age residents claim employment support allowance/incapacity benefit and a further 510 claim disability living allowance (1.1%). These are both slightly lower proportions than England as a whole.

Child Poverty

11% of children in Fylde live in low income families, around 1,500 children overall.

Pension Credit

Fylde has 2,170 claimants in receipt of Pension Credit Guarantee Credit only, or both Guarantee Credit and Savings Credit, equivalent to 78% of claimants (Nationally 80%)

Means-tested claimants in receipt of Pension Credit 'Savings Credit' only is much lower at 610 claimants compared, equivalent to 22% of claimants (Nationally 20%)

As a proportion of the population, 14% of the 65+ age group claim pension credit, much higher than England at 19%.

National Data

As Council Tax Reduction is a locally administered scheme, no national statistics are collated so reference must be made to old Council Tax Benefit statistics.

According to the Single Housing Benefit Extract, as at January 2011 there were 3.1 million Council Tax Benefit claimants under 65 in the United Kingdom.

According to the Family Resources 2009/10 Survey data, of these:

- 48% of households have at least 1 adult or child who is disabled
- 18% of households have at least 1 adult with caring responsibilities
- 17% of households have at least 1 adult requiring informal care

Information from administrative sources can also provide more limited information on carers and disabled people and shows the number of Council Tax Benefit claimants who were carers or households in receipt of a disability premium and not passported onto full Council Tax Benefit. At January 2011:

- 34,790 non-passported under 65 Council Tax Benefit claimants were carers
- 219,580 non-passported under 65 Council Tax Benefit claimants were in receipt of a disability premium

Since some of the passported claimants are also likely to be carers or receiving a disability premium this underestimates the total number that could be affected.

9. What are the impacts or effects for Key Protected Characteristics?

Age

Older People of pension age

Potential Impact

The Department for Communities and Local Government has stated that pensioners must receive the same level of support under the new scheme as they received under the Council Tax Benefit scheme. They will therefore be treated more favourably than other groups under the proposed changes.

In Fylde we currently have 5062 Council Tax Reduction recipients of who 1836 are single and of pension age. In addition we have 561 couples over 60 in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. Of these 20 have child dependents.

Eligible 'pensioners' can be divided into the three groups below:

PASSPORTED CLAIMANTS

Those in receipt of Pension Credit Guarantee Credit

Pension Credit 'Guarantee Credit' acts as a passport to maximum Council Tax Reduction support. Pensioners apply to the Pension Service and if successful are prompted to apply for Council Tax Reduction by the Local Authority.

MEANS-TESTED CLAIMANTS

Means-tested claimants in receipt of Pension Credit 'Savings Credit' Only

Pension Credit applicants may be awarded 'Savings Credit' only. This group are also prompted to apply for Council Tax Reduction by the Local Authority.

Other means-tested claimants

Customers can also apply directly. Claimants who have attained the qualifying age for State Pension Credit are means-tested by the Local Authority on application, to determine eligibility for support. The exact amount of support needed will depend on a range of factors, such as age, income, capital, the personal circumstances of the individual and the Council Tax band their home falls into.

We currently do not have data that would allow us to break the Fylde Council figures down into the categories above.

People of Working Age (over 25)

Potential Impact

People under pension age will be treated less favourably under the scheme than pensioners. In addition it is possible that some people in this group will be affected more because of the greater difficulties they may face in finding paid employment e.g. over the age of 55.

People of Working Age (under 25)

Potential Impact

Under the current Council Tax Reduction scheme the system of applicable amounts differentiate between those under and over 25. Claimants who are under 25 have a lower applicable amount and are treated as having lower living costs than those aged 25 and over. In addition, young single people may be more at risk of becoming homeless and/or there will be pressure on these people to return or remain in the family home.

Current Welfare Reforms in Housing Benefit will affect the same group of Working Age customers.

Disability

Potential Impact

The definition of disability used is based on entitlement to certain state benefits or to entitlement to a Council Tax disabled band reduction. This can reflect the circumstances of any member of the claimant's household.

The relevant benefits/additions to benefit include:

- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payments
- Universal Credit
- Employment Support Allowance
- Disability Premium
- Severe Disability Premium
- Enhanced Disability Premium
- Disabled Child Premium
- Disabled Earnings Disregard
- Carers Allowance
- War Disablement Pension
- War Widows Pension
- Council Tax Disability Reduction

Nationally, 18% of households in receipt of Council Tax Benefit aged under 65 had at least one adult or child who is disabled in the household during 2012/13.

It is possible that some people in this group will be affected less favourably because of the greater difficulties they may face in coping with the changes, for example by finding paid employment. This may result from their reduced capacity to work due to the nature of their disability and/or discrimination based on the perceptions of employers or the fact that the place of work has not been adapted to meet the needs of disabled people.

Other welfare reforms may further impact on some members of this group and also some of the services that members of this group receive are being reduced under austerity measures.

It should also be noted that in some cases (depending on the nature of the disability) there may be potential communication issues where information available in standard formats is not the best method of communicating with benefit recipients. This may cause greater difficulty in understanding their changed liability. This may lead some to fall into arrears more easily with all the associated problems this can cause.

Some individuals in this group who also receive Social Care support from Lancashire County Council may be able to have the extra Council Tax they could be expected to pay deducted from their income for fairer charging purposes (unless they pay the full cost because they have capital over the current threshold). It is acknowledged that this will not help disabled people who do not receive chargeable support from Lancashire County Council. However, the most severely disabled are likely to receive this support.

Extensive consultation was carried out prior to the introduction of the 2013/14 scheme with specific disabled stakeholder groups i.e. the Disability Partnership Forum, the Learning Disabilities Self Advocacy Forum and the Disability First open day in order to make them aware of the changes, help them to understand the potential impact and to discuss any support mechanisms that can be built in for affected groups. As the proposed 2020/21 scheme is the same as 2019/20 scheme, no further specific consultation has been carried out with these groups.

Fylde Council's preferred option continues to be a bottom slice i.e. maintaining the current benefit rules but reducing the level of council tax reduction by the same amount for all working age Council Tax Reduction recipients. This will be a fairer option for all affected customers and would enable disability benefits to continue to be disregarded in the calculation of Council Tax Support. However, someone with a disability would still have something to pay under the new scheme.

It is recognised that the level of a customer's disability could mean they are more disadvantaged over another disabled customer. There may be the opportunity for a less disabled person to increase their income in order to pay for the increase in Council Tax whereas this may not be an option for a more severely disabled person. Because of this issue, the action plan will contain potential areas that could be considered to mitigate the impact of the scheme. Applications can be made to the Council Tax Reduction hardship scheme for anyone who is struggling to pay their Council Tax and an income and expenditure calculation will be completed.

The examples shown below are taken from the 2012/13 Equality Analysis and illustrate the potential impact of the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction scheme over the old Council Tax Benefit scheme.

Example 1

Single person aged 45, unable to work because of his disabilities; lives alone in a Housing Association flat costing £100 per week and with Council Tax of £17 per week (estimated Band B property in Fylde Council with the 25% Single Person Discount); no savings.

Current weekly income

£157.35 Employment Support Allowance (Income-related)
£51.85 DLA (middle rate care component)
£54.05 DLA (higher rate mobility component)
£100.00 Housing Benefit so has no rent to pay**
£17.00 Council Tax Benefit so has no Council Tax to pay

Impact of proposed changes

A 20% decrease in Council Tax Reduction would mean he would have to pay £3.40 per week towards his Council Tax rather than nothing as at present.

A 25% decrease in Council Tax Reduction would mean he would have to pay £4.25 per week towards his Council Tax rather than nothing as at present.

Example 2

Couple with no children, both disabled, she works for 25 hours per week at the minimum wage, he doesn't work. Living in a 2 bedroom rented property costing £150 per week and with Council Tax of £29.14 per week (estimated Band D property in Fylde Council); no savings.

Current weekly income

£105.05	His Employment Support Allowance (contributory) Support Group**
£51.85	His DLA (middle rate care component)
£20.55	His DLA (lower rate mobility component)
£20.55	Her DLA (lower rate care component)
£151.29	Her net income from wages
£70.32	Her Working Tax Credit
£62.35	Housing Benefit so has to pay £87.65 towards the rent.
£3.03	Council Tax Benefit so has to pay £26.11 per week towards the Council Tax.

Impact of proposed changes

A 20% decrease in Council Tax Reduction would mean they would have to pay an extra **£0.61** per week towards their Council Tax, i.e. £26.72 per week in total.

A 25% decrease in Council Tax Reduction would mean they would have to pay an extra **£0.76** per week towards their Council Tax, i.e. £26.87 per week in total.

The examples above show the impact of a 20% and 25% reduction in Council Tax Reduction and are based on benefit rates that applied during 2012/13 and estimated Council Tax Bands (as Fylde has a number of parishes). They show what the difference would be if the proposals were applied now. These examples are only indicative; the effect on each individual will vary according to their particular personal circumstance and the impact of other proposed changes in benefits and allowances (see note 1 below).

Gender Reassignment**Potential Impact**

The proposed changes to the scheme could have a negative impact on all working age single people and couples who are recipients of Council Tax Reduction regardless of their gender identity. No information is collected on the gender reassignment status of Council Tax Reduction claimants. However, it is acknowledged that transgender people experience higher levels of disadvantage and social/financial exclusion and therefore may face greater difficulties in responding to the changes, for example by finding work.

Marriage and Civil Partnership**Potential Impact**

The latest figures show that there are 1066 couples in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. Of these, 308 (29%) had child dependents and 758 (71%) had no child dependents.

There are 502 couples in receipt of Council Tax Reduction who are of working age, of whom 296 (59%) had child dependents and 206 (41%) had no child dependents.

The main scheme will have an impact on working age families/couples whether they are living together/married or in civil partnerships but will not treat marriage or civil partnership any differently. Married couple and civil partnerships are recognised equally in the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme as people are living together as if they are in such legal partnerships.

Families with a large number of children are more likely to live in a bigger property and therefore one with a higher Council Tax Band. The proposed scheme for 2020/21 would ensure that these customers would not be disadvantaged over smaller families as the Council Tax Reduction would be based on the actual Council

Tax band for the property and the percentage reduction would be the same across all groups of claimants.

The examples shown below are taken from the 2012/13 Equality Analysis and illustrate the potential impact of the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction scheme over the old Council Tax Benefit scheme.

Example 1

Couple in their 40s with 2 children (aged 9 and 13); man works 40 hours per week at the minimum wage with a net income after tax and national insurance of £214. Living in a 3 bedroom rented property costing £170 per week and with Council Tax of £29.14 per week (estimated Band D property in Fylde Council); no savings.

Current weekly income

£214.00 Net earnings

£ 40.57 Working Tax Credit

£113.68 Child Tax Credit

£33.70 Child Benefit

£116.49 Housing Benefit so has to pay £53.51 towards the rent.

£12.54 Council Tax Benefit so has to pay £16.60 per week towards the Council Tax.

Impact of proposed changes

A 20% decrease in Council Tax Reduction would mean they would have to pay an extra **£2.51** per week towards their Council Tax, i.e. £19.11 per week in total.

A 25% decrease in Council Tax Reduction would mean they would have to pay an extra **£3.14** per week towards their Council Tax, i.e. £19.74 per week in total.

Example 2

Couple in their late 20s with 2 children (aged 3 and 6); man works 37 hours per week at the minimum wage with a net income after tax and national insurance of £201.62. Living in a 2 bedroom rented property costing £150 per week and with Council Tax of £25.90 per week (estimated Band C property in Fylde Borough Council); no savings.

Current weekly income

£201.62 Net earnings

£ 47.76 Working Tax Credit

£113.68 Child Tax Credit

£ 33.70 Child Benefit

£ 99.88 Housing Benefit so has to pay £50.12 towards the rent.

£ 10.58 Council Tax Benefit so has to pay £15.32 per week towards the Council Tax.

Impact of proposed changes

A 20% decrease in Council Tax Reduction would mean they would have to pay an extra **£2.17** per week towards their Council Tax, i.e. £17.49 per week in total

A 25% decrease in Council Tax Reduction would mean they would have to pay an extra **£2.65** per week towards their Council Tax, i.e. £17.97 per week in total

The examples above show the impact of a 20% and 25% reduction in Council Tax Reduction and are based on benefit rates that applied during 2012/13 and estimated Council Tax Bands (as Fylde has a number of parishes). They show what the difference would be if the proposals were applied now. These examples are

only indicative; the effect on each individual will vary according to their particular personal circumstance and the impact of other proposed changes in benefits and allowances (see note 1 below).

Pregnancy and Maternity

The proposed main scheme could have a negative impact on all working age single people and couples who are recipients of Council Tax Reduction regardless of whether they are pregnant/recently given birth or not.

Whilst at this moment we consider that this impact is unlikely to be disproportionately greater on households where a member is pregnant or recently given birth, we acknowledge that they may face greater difficulties in responding to the changes, for example by finding work.

In addition, women on maternity leave may find that they now have to pay an increased amount of Council Tax Reduction on a reduced income with little prospect of increasing their income in the short term.

Race

Potential Impact

The proposed main scheme will have a negative impact on all working age single people and couples who are recipients of Council Tax Reduction regardless of race or ethnicity. We do not have any data regarding the ethnicity of Council Tax Reduction recipients in Fylde Council. However, national data shows that 90% of households who received Council Tax Benefit pre April 2013 were white, and 10% were ethnic minorities. This compared to a total population of 91% white and 9% ethnic minorities.

At the moment we consider that the impact of any of the proposed changes to the scheme are unlikely to be disproportionately greater on households of different ethnicity within the working age group. There will be no difference in the way ethnic groups are treated under any new Council Tax Reduction scheme. However, some ethnic groups experience different levels of disadvantage and therefore they may find it more difficult to cope with the changes. This may be because they face unofficial discrimination in the job market and possibly because of access to skills including language skills are limited in some cases.

There may also be potential communication issues where English is not the benefit recipient's first language and where documents printed in Standard English is not the optimum method of communicating.

Claimants whose first language is not English may have greater difficulty in understanding their changed level of Support, particularly if they are being asked to pay some Council Tax for the first time. This may lead some to fall into arrears more easily leading to the associated problems this can cause.

A road show was held for the 2012/13 consultation with the Equality Forum to further highlight the potential impact of this change and further work could be carried out to contact groups who have traditionally failed to engage with the community to make them aware of the changes.

This targeted approach could be face to face, by telephone or by utilising translation services, if appropriate.

Religion and Belief

Potential Impact

The proposed scheme will have a negative impact on all working age single people and couples who are recipients of Council Tax Reduction regardless of religion or belief. We do not have any data regarding the religion or beliefs Council Tax Reduction recipients in Fylde Council. We do not envisage the impact of the proposed changes to be greater for people with particular religions or beliefs.

Sex

Potential Impact

The latest figures show that in Fylde there are 3997 single people in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. Of these, 2599 (65%) are female, and 1398 (35%) are male.

Of the 2599 female recipients, 694 (27%) are lone parents and of the 1398 male recipients, 63 (5%) are lone parents.

If we look only at those of working age, 53% of all single working age female recipients are lone parents. Of the male recipients 8% of all single working age male recipients are lone parents.

Of all lone parents in Fylde in receipt of Council Tax Reduction, 92% are female and 8% are male.

On the face of it we will continue to treat both men and women equally in the proposed main Council Tax Reduction scheme from 1st April 2020. However, given the higher number of female recipients (65%), changes to the current Council Tax Reduction scheme could impact on women more than men. National data does confirm that more women than men experience financial deprivation. In addition, because many more female claimants will be lone parents, they may be treated less favourably indirectly because lone parents may face greater difficulties in responding to the changes, including by finding work.

The examples shown below are taken from the 2012/13 Equality Analysis and illustrate the potential impact in individual cases on the change in benefits. The financial impact in each case will be the same regardless of the gender of the individual.

Example 1

Single person aged 28, not working and claiming Income-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). Living in a 1 bedroom rented flat costing £80 per week and with Council Tax of £17 per week (estimated Band B property in Fylde Council with the 25% Single Person Discount); no savings.

Current weekly income

£71.00 JSA

£65.00 Housing Benefit so has £15 to pay towards their rent**

£17.00 Council Tax Benefit so has no Council Tax to pay.

Impact of proposed changes

A 20% reduction in Council Tax Reduction would mean they would have to pay **£3.40** per week towards his Council Tax rather than nothing as at present.

A 25% reduction in Council Tax Reduction would mean they would have to pay **£4.25** per week towards his Council Tax rather than nothing as at present.

**As s/he is a single claimant under 35, the maximum he can claim for Housing Benefit is restricted to the shared accommodation rate which in Fylde Borough is £58.50 per week.

Example 2

Lone parent with 1 child aged 3, not working and claiming Income Support. Living in a 2 bedroom rented property costing £110 per week and with Council Tax of £19.43 per week (estimated Band C property in Fylde Council with the 25% Single Person Discount)* no savings.

Current weekly income

£71.00 Income Support

£62.00 Child Tax Credit

£20.30 Child Benefit
£110.00 Housing Benefit so have no rent to pay
£19.43 Council Tax Benefit so had no Council Tax to pay.

Impact of proposed changes

A 20% decrease in Council Tax Reduction would mean that they would have to pay **£3.89** per week towards their Council Tax rather than nothing as at present.

A 25% decrease in Council Tax Reduction would mean that they would have to pay **£4.86** per week towards their Council Tax rather than nothing as at present.

The Single Person Discount of 25% is applied when there is only one adult living in the property; it is not means-tested.

The examples above show the impact of a 20% and 25% reduction in Council Tax Reduction and are based on benefit rates that applied during 2012/13 and estimated Council Tax Bands (as Fylde has a number of parishes). They show what the difference would be if the proposals were applied now. These examples are only indicative; the effect on each individual will vary according to their particular personal circumstance and the impact of other proposed changes in benefits and allowances (see note 1 below).

Sexual Orientation

Potential Impact

The proposed changes to the scheme will have the same level of impact on all working age single people and couples who are recipients of Council Tax Reduction regardless of their sexual orientation. We have no data on the sexual orientation of Council Tax Reduction claimants locally and at this moment we consider that the impact is unlikely to be disproportionately greater on recipients with different sexual orientations. However, national data demonstrates that some Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual people experience higher levels of disadvantage and financial exclusion than other groups and therefore may face greater difficulties in responding to the changes, for example by finding work. For the 2012/13 scheme, specific consultation was carried out with the Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde LGBT Forum.

Other Relevant Groups

Potential Impact

Troubled Family Programme

The 'Troubled Families' programme is a national program where families with specific circumstances are provided intensive support and advice. Further consideration of targeted communication to the Troubled Families service will be undertaken, if required.

Child Poverty

The impact of the proposed scheme on Child Poverty has been considered and it is believed that by continuing to disregard Child Benefit and Child Maintenance consideration of this area has been sufficiently taken into account.

Homelessness

The impact of the proposed scheme on the Council's Homelessness Strategy has been considered and by continuing to work the Housing team, sufficient promotion of how the scheme will work will be available. Targeted communication to other Council Services to promote the final scheme will also be undertaken.

Armed Forces Covenant

The impact of the proposed scheme on the Armed Forces has been considered and it is believed that by continuing to disregard War Disablement Pension, War Widow's Pension and War Widower's Pension consideration of this area has been sufficiently taken into account.

Note 1

Other relevant benefit changes that apply from April 2020

The 2020/21 Council Tax Reduction scheme will come in from 1st April 2020. At the same time other proposed changes to the benefit and tax systems will continue to affect people in receipt of/potentially eligible for Council Tax Reduction. The other changes include the following:

1. *Working age benefit rates (Tax Credits, applicable amounts) continue to be frozen.*
2. *Universal Credit Full Service rollout has commenced*

10. What do you know about how the proposals could affect community cohesion?

- There may be an effect on community cohesion as pensioners are not being affected by the new Local Council Tax Reduction scheme and will continue to receive their current levels of support whilst Working Age customers will have reduced levels of help. Whilst we recognise the inequalities of the two schemes (Working Age and Elderly), we are unable to do anything about them but will monitor the impact of the scheme between age groups during consultation to ensure any comments are recorded.
- If any other protections are made within the working age group, some groups may feel they are "shouldering the burden" of the scheme more than others.
- There may be an increase in transience, as people move to more affordable accommodation in order to be able to afford to pay for their increased contribution to Council Tax.
- There could be an increase in the number of people leaving Fylde Council to move to a neighbouring authority with a more generous Council Tax Reduction scheme.

STEP 3 - ANALYSING THE IMPACT

11. Is there any evidence of higher or lower take-up by any group or community, and if so, how is this explained?

- There was traditionally a lower take up of Council Tax Benefit from pensioners, however, as pensioner support is now being delivered through a national framework of criteria and allowances and is a discount rather than a benefit, take up could be reasonably expected to increase.
- Within some other community groups there is traditionally a low take up because individuals either do not need support or do not like to claim benefit. To mitigate this, there will be a programme of marketing and communication which will include liaison to target hard to reach groups.

12. Do any rules or requirements prevent any groups or communities from using or accessing the service?

There will be an initial eligibility criteria for Fylde Council's Council Tax Reduction scheme (in line with the Council Tax Benefit scheme), which will exclude the following:

- Any person who is not a Council Tax payer as they do not need to pay Council Tax
- Anyone who is not able to claim state benefits in accordance with the Central Government regulations in the Local Government Finance Bill
- If the property is a second home

Once the eligibility criteria have been established, there will be a means tested assessment of entitlement to Council Tax Reduction, which could mean that some people are not entitled but this is the case now also.

13. Does the way a service is delivered/ or the policy delivered create any additional barriers for any groups of disabled people?

Access

The scheme will offer the same level of access to the service as there is within the current system of Council Tax Reduction, as follows:

- Face to face access
- Telephone access
- Home visit if required
- Online claim form

Policy

Disabled people may not be exempt for the purposes of calculating Council Tax Reduction. The rationale behind this is:

- The scheme will support people on a low income and will be means tested. Disabled people receive additional income for disabilities and Fylde Council's options allow for the continued disregard of disability incomes in the calculation.
- Disability relief, which is a reduction in the amount of Council Tax payable, applies where adaptations have been made to a property to accommodate a disabled person. Exempting disability benefits in the calculation of Council Tax Reduction would put those people at a financial advantage.
- The Council Tax Reduction Scheme must continue to cost less than the Council Tax Benefit regime. The saving would be unachievable if disabled applicants were disregarded.
- Disability Benefits are disregarded in DWP assessment therefore issues of vulnerability have been addressed prior to our calculation.

However, we recognise that even within the category of disability, some people will be more affected than others in that they will be unlikely to be able to increase their income and therefore policies need to be established to mitigate the impact of the scheme. The Council Tax Reduction Hardship Fund would provide a mechanism for additional support for disabled people.

STEP 4 - DEALING WITH ADVERSE OR UNLAWFUL IMPACT

14. What can be done to improve the policy, service, function or any proposals in order to reduce or remove any adverse impact or effects identified?

N/A

15. What would be needed to be able to do this? Are the resources likely to be available?

N/A

16. What other support or changes would be necessary to carry out these actions?

N/A

STEP 5 - CONSULTING THOSE AFFECTED FOR THEIR VIEWS

17. What feedback or responses have you received to the findings and possible courses of action?
Please give details below.

2013/14 Scheme

Removal of Backdates

Comments have been received from a Councillor as follows:

“What's being proposed is that no council tax benefit claim can be backdated however good the reason is. Claimants asking for their claims to be backdated are frequently those who lack knowledge of how the system works, they are often vulnerable, some of them have experienced trauma. If this proposal is put into practice it would lead to some claimants having housing benefit claims backdated while their simultaneous council tax benefit claims are refused. This would send out a message that Fylde Borough Council believed in unfairness.”

Response:

11/12 numbers of people on CTB backdates (WA and Elderly): 209

Value of backdates in CTB: £6,899.73 total

Maximum backdate period: 6 months WA

Average value of CTB backdate: £33.01

Genuine cases of hardship could have a Section 13A discretionary award made to cover the Council Tax.

Liaison with the Lancashire Deaf Service

“Andie Vowles, a Community Development Officer for the Lancashire Deaf Service, attended the Council Tax Support road show held at Fylde Town Hall on the 27th Sept 2012. He has been approached by numerous clients who have received a copy of the survey in the post and were struggling to understand the documentation and how it would affect them. He works and supports deaf people across the Fylde Borough, Fylde and Wyre area. With the help of an interpreter he asked if I could run through each of the questions on the survey in fine detail so that he could clearly understand what was being asked. Due to the complex subject matter it was necessary to run through the questions more than once and in some cases detailed examples and calculations were required in order to illustrate the outcome of an option more clearly, particularly when explaining options A and B. Andie made notes throughout and in order to clarify he had understood the options correctly and he summarised each question for me in his own words before

moving on to the next. Andie felt it was vital that he felt confident that he had grasped each question sufficiently before moving on so that he could successfully cascade the information to his clients. Once we had dealt with the questions Andie asked me about the potential answers. For each question he wanted me to clarify and summarise what customers would actually be suggesting they think should happen if they were to choose either agree or disagree. This helped put the possible answers in context with each specific question and helped rule out any misinterpretation. The appointment took around two hours however by the end Andie felt he was more equipped to help his clients complete the survey and was going to be able to advise them of how each option was likely to impact them if it were to be of part of the final scheme. I gave him my name as a contact should any future issues arise and the Fylde Borough council tax support email box should he have any further comments he would like to make. I explained that other boroughs in the Lancashire area that he may have contact with could quite feasibly introduce a different scheme to Fylde Borough which he fully understood. He is going to work on a newsletter for his clients featuring the Council Tax Support scheme and information about the survey which will be posted on their website www.elds.org.uk.”

Additional Suggestions

- Progressive council tax rates

Comment: This comment will be included in the report to be sent to Full Council for formal adoption of the scheme.

- All money coming in should be counted as income

Comment: Some income is provided for specific purposes e.g. disability income is provided to help meet the additional costs incurred by being disabled. The current Council Tax Benefit system already has a series of incomes that are disregarded in the interests of taking account of vulnerability and various statutory requirements e.g. the Armed Forces Covenant.

- Means test for people struggling to pay

Comment: The preferred option for Fylde Borough would ensure that the means test would continue.

- Two customers have contacted us upon receipt of the survey to highlight that they already do not have enough money to live on even before being expected to pay more Council Tax under the scheme.

Comment: All of these customers have been visited to ensure they have maximised the potential benefits they are receiving and that they are signposted for additional support or debt advice if applicable.

- Reduce the rate of Single Person Discount from 25% to 20%

Comment: Central Government have resisted Local Authority requests for the discretion to reduce the Single Person Discount. It therefore remains set by Regulations at 25% and is unable to be changed.

- Can people who claim Single Person Discount falsely be penalised. Any fine money could then be put into the fund to reduce the impact of the scheme.

Comment: There is legislation in place to issue a penalty for providing false information for Council Tax . The administration and collection costs for the penalties would mean that it is unlikely to produce a surplus that would be a useful amount.

- How are people expected to cope with the loss of money?

Comment: We will ensure that the most vulnerable people who do not have the opportunity to increase their incomes will be able to apply to the Council's Discretionary Discount Scheme and we will also ensure that Benefits maximisation is carried out.

- Is this something that just Fylde Borough Council is doing or are other Council's doing it?

Comment: All Council's who will not be operating the Government's default scheme i.e. where the Council will be finding the 10% cut, are consulting on their schemes. The schemes could all have different elements in them.

- How is the consultation being carried out and how will people be informed about it?

Comment: The following consultation methods have been used:

- All Working Age recipients of Council Tax Benefit (the people who will be affected) have been sent a survey for an opportunity for them to have their say
- Press release and several articles have been placed in the Gazette
- Several public road show events have been held and these have been advertised in the Gazette and on the Council's website
- Area forum events have been attended
- Online survey on the Council's website
- A number of presentations have been given to special interest groups
- Large print surveys are available on request

- If people cannot access the internet, how will they be consulted and how can their input be recorded?

Comment: See above for how the Council have advertised the consultation. All consultation methods have also included a phone number should someone wish to ask for a paper copy of the survey.

- Request from the Royal British Legion (letter dated 1st Nov 2012) to disregard War Widow's Pension, War Disablement Pension and payments from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme.

Comment: Response sent back:

Fylde Borough Council have always disregarded customer's income in respect of War Disablement Pension and War Widows Pension. The value of a personal injury payment from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, or any payment of income from that trust, has also always been disregarded in full in accordance with the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Regulations 2006, unless that payment is in respect of a deceased relative.

Two elements of Fylde Borough Council's consultation on the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme were:

- that an award of Support would be based on a means tested assessment broadly similar to the existing Council Tax Benefit Regulations
- that the income from War Disablement Pension and War Widow's Pension should continue to be disregarded in full.

Consultation supported both these options and will be put forward to full Council for adoption shortly. Should the scheme be approved with both these elements, the concerns raised in your letter would be addressed in full.

2014/15 Scheme

- Should be based around people and their ability to pay. Sometimes peoples circumstances change it shouldn't just be the house

Comment: The means test ensures that people are assessed on their ability to pay dependent on their income and the Council Tax band of the property they live in.

- Disabled people unable to work should be excused c.tax as they have enough physical and financial problems and any further increase on top of other cutbacks they have suffered will push many of them into extreme poverty ad debt

Comment: The Council recognises that some groups could be more adversely affected than others and therefore the Council Tax Reduction Hardship Policy has been developed.

- The scheme should be purely based upon income with no special categories e.g. soldiers

Comment: Fylde Council has always disregarded customer's income in respect of War Disablement Pension and War Widows Pension. The value of a personal injury payment from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, or any payment of income from that trust, has also always been disregarded in full in accordance with the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Regulations 2006, unless that payment is in respect of a deceased relative so there is no change to previous policy. In addition, local authorities must consider the impact of any scheme under The Armed Forces covenant published in May 2011.

- The reduction should not be paid for by a general increase in council tax bills for those not eligible i.e. those paying full council tax should not have to subsidise the reduction

Comment: Any increase in Council Tax bills is not linked to the Council Tax Reduction scheme

- I agree with the principle but disagree that it should only include working age people. Pensioners should be included also but working age people who are unable to work due to mental health problems should be excluded from paying anything

Comment: Central Government have set up a national scheme for pensioners and are therefore excluded from any local Council Tax Reduction scheme. Anyone with severe mental health problems can apply to be exempted from Council Tax. Apart from this, The Council recognises that other groups could be more adversely affected than others and therefore the Council Tax Reduction Hardship Policy has been developed.

2015/16 Scheme

No scheme changes therefore no consultation undertaken and no comments

2016/17 Scheme

- You should take off DLA and disability premium from income. People on these benefits do not have the spare income those benefits are there for a purpose because cost of living is already higher

Comment: Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments and Attendance Allowance are not included in the calculation of Council Tax Reduction and there are no plans to change this for the 2016/17 scheme

- Seems reasonable to me

Comment: None

2017/18 Scheme

- Four weeks is seen as reasonable, particularly if people are in receipt of financial support

Comment: No comment

- *It is sensible to align information regarding the Work Related Activity component based on the information given*

Comment: No comment

- Limiting the applicable amount in the calculation of Council Tax Reduction to two with effect from April 2017 is the “persecution of women and children, who may not have choices”

Comment: Exceptions in Housing Benefit are proposed for claimants who have multiple births and those that have been subject to sexual assault.

- Limiting the applicable amount in the calculation of Council Tax Reduction to two with effect from April 2017 should be based upon the number of conceptions e.g. having twins should count as one instance

Comment: Exceptions in Housing Benefit are proposed for claimants who have multiple births and those that have been subject to sexual assault.

- Treating people in receipt of Universal Credit in the same way as those on carer’s allowance would in effect reduce the income of those giving care

Comment: Within the current regime there are inequalities where someone in receipt of carer’s allowance is not receiving the same level of support as someone in receipt of Universal Credit (carer’s element). The proposed changes would end this inequality. In addition there are currently only 4 claimants in receipt of Universal Credit (carer’s allowance) who would be affected by these changes due to the current application restrictions applied to those claiming Universal Credit i.e. claims have to be straight forward.

- Treating people in receipt of Universal Credit in the same way as those on carer’s allowance seems a reasonable approach to standardise payments

Comment: No comment

- In relation to the alignment with Housing Benefit rules, The Council should protect local people

Comment: The scheme is designed to ensure that all Working Age claimants have to contribute 22.7% towards their Council Tax bill.

- In relation to the alignment with Housing Benefit rules, any reduction in administrative burden has merit

Comment: No comment

2018/19 Scheme

No scheme changes therefore no public consultation undertaken and no comments.

2019/20 Scheme

No scheme changes therefore no public consultation undertaken and no comments.

2020/21 Scheme

No scheme changes therefore no public consultation undertaken and no comments.

18. If you have not been able to carry out any consultation, please indicate below how you intend to test out your findings and recommended actions.

N/A

STEP 6 - ACTION PLANNING

Please outline your proposed action plan below.

2020/21

Issues/ adverse impact identified	Proposed action/ objectives to deal with adverse impact	Targets/Measure	Timeframe	Responsibility	Indicate whether agreed
Customers may end up suffering severe financial hardship	Review Discretionary Discount Guidance for staff and provide training to staff to identify cases where there is an issue	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Ensure the Council’s hardship scheme is still available 2.Review criteria to apply the fund for Owner Occupiers 3. Review criteria to apply the fund for tenants 4.Ensure debt advice and benefit maximisation assistance is available 5.Review and possibly reduce recovery of other Council bills e.g. Sundry Debts, Housing Benefit overpayment 6.Ensure a DHP award cannot be made 7.Ensure all available help from Housing team has been explored 	<p>Jan 20</p> <p>Jan 20</p> <p>Jan 20</p> <p>Apr 20 – Mar 21</p> <p>Apr 20 – Mar 21</p> <p>Apr 20 – Mar 21</p> <p>Apr 20 – Mar 21</p>	Benefits Service Discretionary Team Advice team	Agreed
Monitor legislation progress in case there are changes to the proposed amendments to Housing Benefit, in which case alignment to HB rules may not apply	If this client group is no longer impacted by the changes the EA will need to be revisited	1.Review Equality Analysis in light of any legislation changes	Apr 20 – Mar 21	Benefits Service	Agreed

Issues/ adverse impact identified	Proposed action/ objectives to deal with adverse impact	Targets/Measure	Timeframe	Responsibility	Indicate whether agreed
Take Up Campaign	There will be a number of customers who are not claiming the other Benefits they should be doing therefore a take-up campaign is proposed to help them increase their income.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All frontline staff are aware of the potential that customers are not claiming all the benefits they are entitled to and where to signpost customers to. 2. Increased take up of Council Tax Reduction by Universal Credit customers by proactively working with other agencies and groups e.g. Job Centre Plus to ensure take up of all benefits is maximised 3. Data match against Council Tax records to identify people who have arrears but may not be claiming CTR 	Jan 2020 – Mar 2021	Benefits Service	Agreed

STEP 7 - ARRANGEMENTS FOR MONITORING AND REVIEW

Please outline your arrangements for future monitoring and review below.

Agreed action	Monitoring arrangements	Timeframe	Responsibility	Added to Service Plan etc.
Review of scheme and it's impact	Establish baseline position for review Review impact of scheme on protected characteristic groups Review collection rates amongst affected customers Consider whether discretionary policy is sufficiently robust	Apr 2020 - Mar 2021	CTS Project Team	Ongoing
Potentially propose changes to the scheme as a result of the review and the impact of the scheme and other proposed welfare reforms	Consider consultation requirements Report to Full Council to formally adopt any recommended changes to the scheme for 2021/22	May 2020 – Jul 2020 Nov 2020	CTS Project Team	

Date completed:

17th October 2019

Signed:



Name:

Louise Jones

Position: Head of Benefits Shared Service