

# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

## COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2024

<b>Report Title</b>	Council Tax Support Scheme			
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To set a Council Tax Support Scheme for the period 01 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.			
<b>Decision(s)</b>	<b>The Council RESOLVES to adopt the scheme for 2024/25 as recommended by the Strategy and Resources Committee.</b>			
<b>Consultation and Feedback</b>	Consultation took place between Monday 06 November 2023 and Friday 22 December 2023.			
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<b>Options</b>	Council could choose to adopt a local scheme that reduces the Council Tax support that working age claimants receive			
<b>Background Papers</b>	None			
<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix A – Summary of Scheme 2024/25			
<b>Implications (Further details at the end of the report)</b>	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

### 1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished Council Tax benefit. Section 10 of the 2012 Act added a new section 13A to the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 so that, in respect of dwellings in England, a person's liability to pay Council Tax is reduced in accordance with the billing authority's Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Liability may be reduced "to such an extent as the billing authority thinks fit." Billing authorities can apply a reduction in particular cases or by determining a class of case. Liability for Council Tax can be reduced to nil.
- 1.2 Each billing authority is required to develop a local Council Tax Support scheme each year for working age people.
- 1.3 Since 2013/14 the Council has adopted the Governments default scheme which has meant no changes or reduction in the support we provide.
- 1.4 Council Tax Support is provided to around 5,500 households at an annual cost of £6.1m which includes both working age and pension age claimants. Working age caseload is around 2,900 households.
- 1.5 Within Gloucestershire some of our neighbouring authorities have reshaped their schemes to an income-based scheme and more recently income tolerance levels have been adopted to simplify the administration process alongside Universal Credit.
- 1.6 Between 6 November 2023 and 22 December 2023, a consultation was carried out on the Councils website. This was seeking views from residents, as well as interested parties such as Citizens Advice, on the Council Tax support scheme. The consultation provided very little feedback.
- 1.7 Residents over state pension age are protected from any changes.

## **2. MAIN POINTS**

- 2.1 Since 2013/14 the funding from central government to support the local working age scheme has continued to reduce in line with other central funding cuts. The council has so far absorbed any shortfall in funding assisted by utilising our local powers to reduce council tax discounts on empty properties, along with premium charges.
- 2.2 If we were to look to reduce costs to the council, changes would have to be made to the level of support provided to working age claimants. Several authorities nationally have incorporated a reduced level of support onto their scheme; however, it is not considered appropriate to do so at the present time having consideration for the cost of living crisis.
- 2.3 In 2022/23 we made some changes to reduce the administrative complexity of the scheme. This meant income changes of £10 or less per week do not require the reassessment of a claim. This has proved very successful in managing the workload of the Benefits Team and in giving claimants more certainty in managing their finances.

## **3. CONCLUSION**

- 3.1 To give support to households through the cost-of-living crisis the report recommends we continue to provide up to a maximum of 100% support with 2 minor amendments, as below, to the scheme for 2024/25.
- 3.2 Where claimants are self-employed and are or were receiving Universal Credit, we will follow Universal Credit and use the relevant minimum income floor to make an assessment on their income where their profit is below this figure or have declared no profit.
- 3.3 Where the Council has evidence of fraud and/or error, it reserves the right to withhold and/or recalculate Council Tax Support whether or not the resident is in receipt of a benefit administered by the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 3.4 The 6 districts in Gloucestershire have agreed to explore introducing a county wide scheme from 2025/26 and further information will come before committee as it is received.

## **4. IMPLICATIONS**

### **4.1 Financial Implications**

The Medium-Term Financial Plan assumes the continuation of the scheme in the current form.

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### **4.2 Legal Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.

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### **4.3 Equality Implications**

The council is committed to equality and the fair application of the policy, ensuring that people receive fair outcomes in the standard of service they receive from the Council, regardless of their race, gender, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status and/or disability in line with the principles set out in the Equalities Act 2010.

### **4.4 Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.