

Uttlesford District Council October 2019

Local Council Tax Support (LCTS)

A summary report on the survey about Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) provision in Uttlesford for the financial year 2020-2021.

Uttlesford District Council has been consulting local residents regarding the Local Council Tax Support Scheme since 2012 during which time the Scheme has undergone various changes.

For the current consultation, surveys were made available to citizens across the district, town and parish councils and key preceptors (Essex County Council and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner). The online survey was publicised through the council's website which provided a direct link to web version of the questionnaire. Paper copies of the survey were also made available from the council's main access points in Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Thaxted. A link to an online version of the survey was sent directly to Essex County Council, the PFCC and to all town and parish councils in the district. Further publicity throughout the consultation period included a press release to all local media, promotion via the council's e-newsletters and through social media.

The survey questions were presented so that respondents could 'tick' their preferred response. However, some additional comments were sent directly to the council's Consultation team and are included as an appendix to this report.

Results – Public Survey

Counts = the number of surveys returned or the number of answers to a particular question

Percentage = the proportion of surveys returned or people who answered a question in a certain way

Overall submissions	Result counts (percentage)
Total number of paper forms returned:	3 (2.24%)
Total number of web forms submitted:	131 (97.76%)
Total number of responses to the survey:	134 (100%)
Number of people who entered their postcode:	86

Question	Result counts (percentage)	Overall result
<p>Q1 The Government has said pensioners on low income must be given full protection from the implications of the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme. Uttlesford's current scheme also protects disabled people on a low income and carers on a low income.</p> <p>Do you agree with this?</p>	<p>Yes a - 86 (92.47%)</p> <p>No - 7 (7.53%)</p>	Yes
<p>Q2 In the past few years the level that working age recipients in Uttlesford contribute towards their Council Tax bill has been set at 12.5%. This is the lowest contribution of any council in Essex.</p> <p>Should the council keep the rate at 12.5%?</p>	<p>Yes - 64 (67.37%)</p> <p>No - 31 (32.63%)</p>	Yes
<p>If "No", do you think the discount should be larger or smaller?</p>	<p>Larger - 13 (43.30%)</p> <p>Smaller - 17 (56.70%)</p>	Smaller

Results – Survey of town and parish councils, Essex County Council and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

Surveys were made available electronically to town and parish councils and the key preceptors, Essex County Council and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

Some parish and town councils submitted more than one response and some sent a comment by email rather than completing an online form. A summary of responses to questions has been included in the results below and the additional comments are included at the end of the report.

Overall submissions	Result counts (percentage)
Total number of web forms submitted:	20 (90.91%)
Total number of comments emailed directly:	2 (9.09%)
Total number of responses to the survey:	22 (100%)
Organisations who supplied their name:	18

Headline question	Result counts (percentage)	Overall result
<p>Q1 The Government has said pensioners on low income must be given full protection from the implications of the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme. Uttlesford's current scheme also protects disabled people on a low income and carers on a low income.</p> <p>Do you agree with this?</p>	<p>Yes - 19 (100%)</p> <p>No - 0 (0.00%)</p>	Yes
<p>Q2 In the past few years the level that working age recipients in Uttlesford contribute towards their Council Tax bill has been set at 12.5%. This is the lowest contribution of any council in Essex.</p> <p>Should the council keep the rate at 12.5%?</p>	<p>Yes - 12 (63.16%)</p> <p>No - 7 (36.84%)</p>	Yes
<p>If "No", do you think the discount should be larger or smaller?</p>	<p>Larger - 2 (66.67%)</p> <p>Smaller - 1 (33.33%)</p>	Larger

Summary

In summary, responses to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme questions indicates a majority view that the current scheme should remain unchanged.

Additional comments received in conjunction with the survey about Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) provision in Uttlesford for the financial year 2020-2021.

Additional Comments – Public Survey

Thank you for embarking on this consultation; I'm pleased to have the opportunity to offer my views.

As part of this consultation, please could you register my strong opinion that the 12.5% minimum tax rate should be reduced to 0%. I would also like to offer some addition comments and suggestions.

I applaud the improvements to some UDC information that now explain 'Anyone in Uttlesford on a low income and entitled to Disability Living Allowance or Carers Allowance will have some protection' – rather than saying vulnerable and disabled people are protected as has been stated in some previous years. For a variety of reasons, most disabled people don't receive DLA. However, please check whether you really mean 'recipients of DLA' rather than people entitled to DLA. The difference is important. Many people lack the health or other resources to complete the DLA application process, let alone appeal DLA initial decisions. It will really help if the UDC avoids inadvertently misleading residents about the realities of DLA (and PIP). The UDC could make this small further contribution to being part of the DLA/PIP solutions rather than part of the DLA/PIP problems.

The UDC consultation questions seemed to me to be inadequate. Q1 asked about whether we should 'protects vulnerable and disabled people'. This misleading. Whilst I realise, and applaud that, UDC offers a lower minimum rate of tax than some councils, despite our best efforts, we only protect some 'vulnerable and disabled people'. By no means all. We should not pretend otherwise.

Member response – The question correctly says that LCTS reduction is available to various categories of people on a low income. It doesn't imply that it covers for example disabled people who are not on a low income. Receipt of DLA is one of many factors on the LCTS application form, which includes other disability related questions, in order to determine eligibility. However, it is very much agreed that the forms are long. Council staff are available and happy to help residents complete the forms.

Additional Comments – Public Survey

Q2 omitted to enquire whether the tax rate should be lowered, and if so, to what %. I realise that financially it's hard for the Council to reduce its income. However, I would maintain that the Council has more options to raise its income, and to 'get by' than its constituents living in poverty, and/or with chronic illness and/or disability. In my opinion, such constituents should not be required to pay any Local Council Tax.

The survey omitted including a meaningful question concerning the accessibility of Local Council Tax Support. I'd suggest that, at the very least, the UDC should collect information as to why everyone entitled to UDC LCTS doesn't claim it. A vague question about the UDC information strategy seems to me woefully inadequate in this respect. Lastly, whilst I understand that analysis and summary of comments is not easy and adds to the cost of a survey, I believe that omitting the option of additional comments in the survey itself makes it harder for the UDC to accurately interpret the responses to the questions.

Member Response - An 'open ender' comments section was not included because the questions were very specific and only about LCTS. Analysing, categorising and responding to comments which could be on any topic and not necessarily related to LCTS was outside the scope of this survey.

If you want my honest opinion we should not have to pay it at all because the policing is so poor in area (big question is where did the money for the old Police Station go).

Additional comments – Town and parish councils and preceptors (Essex County Council and Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner)

I'm writing on behalf of Saffron Walden Town Council to respond to the UDC consultation on the Local Council Tax Support.

Our response is that it

AGREES with the statement in Question 1: "The government has said pensioners on a low income should be given a discount under the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme. Uttlesford's current scheme also protects vulnerable and disabled people and carers on a low income."

FURTHER the Town Council considers that all people on low incomes should be given support, and not just those in the categories listed.

Localising Council Tax Support for Town and Parish Councils 2020-21

The loss to Saffron Walden Town Council of the withdrawal of the LCTS for the financial year 2018-19 represented the equivalent of 2.7% of the Precept for our tax payers. This is money that the Council must find by cutting other projects to the detriment of the people of Saffron Walden.

Rt. Hon. Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, in his speech to the National Association of Local Councils in October made a number of salient points:

"I know that not enough cash from the principal support grant is finding its way down to your level and that's just not right.

Principal authorities should be devolving responsibilities to local councils because you are best placed to deliver more tailored services.....not so that they can save a few pounds and get important work done on the cheap.

They certainly shouldn't be using parish precepts as a means of avoiding their own cap on council tax increases."

Additional comments – Town and parish councils and preceptors (Essex County Council and Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner)

“The government has previously issued guidance to billing authorities on this, making clear that they should work with parish and town councils to pass down appropriate levels of funding.

But from my conversations with you, it’s clear that too many top-tier councils aren’t following that guidance closely enough.

So let me promise you all today that I’ll be exploring ways in which I can strengthen the requirement for principal authorities to pass a share of local council tax support to their towns and parishes.

It’s the least you deserve.

As you do more for your residents, so their interest in your work is likely to increase.”

“Ask most British people where they live and they won’t name their principal local authority area.

They’ll tell you about their town, their village, their neighbourhood.

Local identity isn’t about lines on a map, it’s about community.

People are more attached to their town or village than to their district or borough.”

Since our last submission to Uttlesford in November 2017 the Council has faced a number of calls on its resources.

The Rates charged on our premises have increased from between 2.3% to 12.5%. Next year the Council will no longer receive the grant from Uttlesford to operate the toilets in Hill Street, this will result in SWTC needing to fund the upkeep from its own resources. The threat by the Government to charge VAT on market lettings would have serious repercussions for a town like saffron Walden and would be an additional cost the Council would have to pass on to its stall holders. This is in spite of frequent assurance that town high streets must remain viable.

Saffron Walden Town Council earnestly requests that Uttlesford District Council reinstates its previous policy of sharing the LCTS with local Town and Parish Councils.

Additional comments – Town and parish councils and preceptors (Essex County Council and Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner)

Member Response - In 2013 the Government provided funding at 90% of the cost of the previous year's CTB scheme to local councils for the LCTS scheme, year on year the council has seen funding allocations reduce significantly in excess of the level of funding originally allocated. Whilst the funds were available the council were able to allocate grants to support preceptors but with no direct funding to be shared, each preceptor takes the burden pro rata to their precept.