

Uttlesford District Council September 2021

Local Council Tax Support (LCTS)

A summary report on the survey about Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) provision in Uttlesford for the financial year 2022-2023.

In April 2013 Council Tax Benefit was abolished and replaced by a new local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme. The government required councils to protect pensioners so that they would receive the same level of support as they did under Council Tax Benefit. This means that LCTS has applied only to working age people.

Uttlesford District Council has been consulting local residents regarding the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (the scheme) since 2012 during which time the scheme has undergone various changes. For the financial year 2022/2023, the council has proposed that the scheme is set on the same basis as that for 2020/2021, namely:

- The contribution rate is frozen for the seventh consecutive year at 12.5%
- The council continues to protect vulnerable and disabled resident and carers on a low income

For the current consultation, there were no questions requiring a specific 'yes' or 'no' answer. As with the 2020 consultation (for the 2021-22 scheme), respondents were asked to consider the proposals and provide their views in an 'open text box'. The survey invited (but did not require) participants to provide their name and a contact email address. Participants were also asked to identify if their response was on behalf of an organisation (such as a major preceptor). The survey ran from 22 July to 31 August 2021.

The online survey took the form of a simple web form on the Uttlesford District Council website which could be accessed via a direct link or from the website home page. Emails inviting participation in the survey were sent directly to Essex County Council, the PFCC and to all town and parish councils in the district on 22 July.

The survey was widely publicised to the citizens of Uttlesford who were encouraged to take part with a press release, which went to all local media and newspapers on 22 July. E-newsletters were also sent to all of the subscribers on our mailinglists (in excess of 8,800 contacts) on 20 July and again with a follow-up on 5 August. In addition to this, the consultation was promoted on Facebook just after the launch in July and again twice in August to remind users of the closing date of the survey – these posts together reached over 2,000 people. Similar posts were also put out on Twitter and Instagram.

Finally, for those who do not use digital services, we offered (details were provided on the website, in the press releases and in all publicity) to send out by post paper copies of the survey. We did not receive any requests for paper copies.

Results – Overall submissions

The LCTS scheme survey conducted in 2020 received a total of 27 responses. This year the response rate was much the same with a total of 28 responses, as shown in the table below.

Overall submissions	Result counts (percentage)
Total number of paper forms returned	0
Total number of web forms / direct emails submitted	28 (100%)
Total number of comments received	28 (100%)
Number of responses on behalf of/from representatives of preceptors	2* (7.1% of total responses)
Number of responses providing an email contact address	17 (60.7%)

*The survey was sent to Essex County Council, the PFCC and the town and parish councils in the district; a total of 54 email addresses. We received 2 responses from preceptors or from representatives of those preceptors. In 2020 we received 3 replies from preceptors.

Results – Submitted comments

Of the submitted comments, 16 (or 57.1% of all the comments received) either directly supported the proposals, or could clearly be interpreted as such. This includes 2 responses on behalf of/from representatives of preceptors. These are identified in the tables below.

A further 11 comments proposed expanding or making amendments to the proposed scheme.

A single comment did not comment directly on the scheme but instead offered an opinion on fraud in relation to benefits in general.

All the comments received are listed in this report.

Comments received generally in favour of the proposed scheme

Responses on behalf of/from a representative of a preceptor

Henham Parish Council supports the proposals and has no comments.
I would like Uttlesford District Council to continue the LTCS support scheme. There will be a continuing need to support those of us who are struggling to survive in the current and post Covid era.

Responses from citizens

It has been a difficult time for all but particularly those on low incomes and benefits I am in favour of maintaining LTS scheme at 12.5%
I agree to continue the same tax benefit for the vulnerable for 2022/23
I agree with the proposed scheme to support those in need. In these difficult times the council must have an obligation to help people who are in trouble.
This scheme currently makes the difference between being able to live not in hardship. Continue with it.
I agree that the scheme should remain the same as last year.
I support the Council intention to continue support to low earners and vulnerable citizens.
I agree.
I support the proposal that the LCTS scheme will be maintained at the same rate of 12.5% because I think that is our duty to support the disabled and vulnerable people in our community especially through this time of pandemic.
I am quite happy that you continue as in the previous year.
I agree that the current subsidies should continue at 12.5%
Agree. Keep the figure at 12.5%

I support the proposal that the local council Tax support Scheme for 2022/23 shall provide the same support as in the current year 2021/22 and should continue to support vulnerable and disabled resident and carers on low income.

I agree with the proposals for the 2022/23 LCTS scheme. I appreciate UDC continuing with this level of support for people on a low income.

Dear Uttlesford Councillors

As a recipient of pension credit, I am also a very thankful recipient of Uttlesford council tax support; and this is an opportunity to express to you my gratitude for a benefit which makes an enormous difference to my wellbeing and to the quality of my daily life.

As you will be aware, pensioners on minimum income have a total of about £7,000 a year. So if I were paying the full Uttlesford council tax, I would be paying about a sixth of my total income - roughly two months' of my household income each year - on council tax.

This is of course a very different situation to that of people on average income, which I believe is nationally about £31,000. So the council tax is about 4% of their income. But many people in Uttlesford have a much higher income than that, so for many people locally, council tax is 2% of their salary, or even less.

I do of course live modestly; I don't run a car, don't drink, smoke, nor do I have expensive hobbies or recreations. But there are some big expenses which are inevitable: a plumber's bill or a broken kettle may be a mere inconvenience, or an outgoing to make a plan about - or a crisis, depending on whether there is spare money in one's purse. For me, the council tax support has provided the cushion that makes it possible to be merely irritated instead of heart-sick when the kettle packs up; and to be - almost - philosophical when a plumber or other workman is needed (though yes, I do procrastinate when any household repair is required.....). I am looking forward nervously to the increases in energy prices which we have been told to expect, and, again, it is the cushion of Uttlesford's council tax support that means people in my position won't have to make the difficult choice between groceries and warmth.

So, what I am saying is thank you enormously for the council tax support hitherto, and, also, that I hope it continues at the highest possible level in the future. I have been proud, as well as thankful, that Uttlesford has been one of the most generous councils in the country in this respect. I am a pensioner - but people of working age on Income Support are in an even more stringent financial position (hence, sadly, the need for food banks, even in relatively affluent Uttlesford), and it simply seems unjust that in many parts of the country they are required to spend their small income from central government on paying local government taxes. I am so thankful that up to now Uttlesford council has chosen to be clement about council tax for the very poor. I do hope that this will continue in 2022/3 and beyond.

Comments received suggesting the proposed scheme be expanded or amended

Uttlesford has a diverse mix of residents, ranging from wealthy to those living in poverty. In a fair society it is morally appropriate for those able to support those who are struggling to do so. I am in favour of increasing support to those who need, it via an increase in Council Tax if necessary.

After having been left in financial difficulty twice at the hands of your council incompetent administration skills, I personally feel that this scheme would be of great benefit.

Sadly due to this terrible government more and more normal people are finding it harder and harder to pay bills every month. (You try paying all these things on minimum wage that doesn't increase in line with inflation)

Support should be offered to those who need it not just carers. After my family was forced to pay 9 months council tax in just 4 months after an administration error on your part that you openly admitted was your fault, all we got was a verbal sorry for; I completely understand the need for help and support.

Please please expand payment options and schemes to help those who like my family through no fault of our own were left struggling financially for months after.

LCTS should not be cut for the coming tax year. If anything it should be increased. Paying 12.5% CT when you are on benefits of a very low income puts people in debt.

We live in a well off area and most people can afford a little more to help those who are struggling. I think that Uttlesford District Council can afford to increase any support it gives.

Increase the amount of money that is given.

With reference to the invitation to comment on the Council tax support scheme, I don't have a comment as such, just a question as to why the rate in Uttlesford is so much lower than all the other Local Authorities in Essex. I haven't been able to 'get my head around' the subject sufficiently to be able to comment but the large divergence in the rates does make me wonder whether Uttlesford could / should increase its rate to anyway 15% - perhaps in 2023/24 by when hopefully the effect of the pandemic will have lessened somewhat.

The minimum amount of council tax should be increased to 20% especially as it has not been increased for the last 7 years. This would bring it inline with other councils and according to your own information would only mean an increase of £2 per week. This amount is not excessive . Council tax in Uttlesford is extremely high and costs need to be shared. People who do not quite fall into the category of needing benefits are also struggling with high bills.

I think this is too little and I'd lift it to 20% progressively over the next three years. Given the government's cap of Council Tax you may have to lobby them to remove or lift it so as to pay for this by increase local taxation. I speak as a householder who does not like more tax but is frustrated by central Gov't attitude to local discretion.

For anyone that can't pay council tax up To 100% should be funded. If I was struggling financially I would prioritise the following; Food Heat / fuel Commuting costs Rent Clothing (basics) Council tax

There should be more help for those in work with no kids who only just earn above the cut off for any benefits. There is help available for the low income families, disabled, vulnerable and elderly in many different forms. But there are no provisions for those in work but don't qualify for other help. Council tax is a huge burden for this forgotten group and Uttlesford could pave the way to highlighting this

I think you should increase in line with other councils if possible and perhaps this year at least increase it to 20% to help the people who need help post pandemic too which is by 5%,

Comments received not specifically relating to the proposed scheme

With all benefit schemes as we all know they are abused and non deserving people take advantage and financially gain considerable amounts of money and get away with it. I don't have a problem with genuine cases of hardship benefitting but I REALLY do have a problem with the systems being abused. Providing the means testing is rigorous enough to stop abuse and if fraudulent claims are identified the FULL force of the law must be used.