

## Appendix A

### London Borough of Brent - Customer Services

### Local Council Tax Support Scheme - Consultation

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## **1.0 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Council undertook a consultation on its proposals for replacing the existing national Council Tax Benefit scheme with a local Council Tax Support scheme in compliance with draft statutory requirements.
- 1.2 The 9 week consultation period ran from 11<sup>th</sup> June 2012 until 10<sup>th</sup> August 2012 in recognition of the fact that policy statements of intent (PSOI's) were only published by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012 and to permit sufficient time for responses to be evaluated and for the financial implications to be included within the Council's budget setting timetable.
- 1.3 The consultation was undertaken through the following means:
  - A consultation questionnaire was available on line and on paper,
  - Public meetings were attended by members and officers,
  - Members and officers attended Area Consultative Forums,
  - Officers attended service user forums,
  - Email correspondence including responding to detailed enquiries
  - Publication of information on the Council's website,
  - Meetings with welfare advice, interest groups and individuals attended by officers.
- 1.4 The consultation also benefited from initial media coverage in the local newspapers at the commencement of the consultation.
- 1.5 Data comprised within this report for the Borough as a whole has been compiled from 2001 census data as the most recent 2011 census data is not yet available. Consequently, the reliability placed upon this should be given caution. Additionally, the low response rate to the consultation means that the degree to which this is representative of the population as a whole should be given caution. For example, response rates from some minority groups are higher than the Borough population suggesting a degree of bias is present in the results obtained. Also, a number of respondents did not answer all of the questions or may have given more than one response to some questions that may have the effect of distorting some of the results.
- 1.6 In view of the comments outlined in section 1.5 above, Members should be aware of these potential shortcomings as they consider the weight they give to the outcomes of the consultation alongside other drivers for change, including the equalities impact assessment.

## **2.0 Purpose and scope of the consultation**

- 2.1 The purpose of the consultation was to engage with the GLA, residents and organisations within Brent concerning the Council's proposals for its local Council Tax Support scheme as required by draft regulations issued at that time.

- 2.2 The consultation commenced with the GLA on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2012 in compliance with draft regulations concerning the sequence in which key activities were to occur. The Council's draft scheme was published on the Council website on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2012 and available for access from the 5 public libraries (i.e. excluding Kilburn which was closed for refurbishment during the consultation period) and customer service local offices within the Borough from the same date. The consultation questionnaire was available for accessing online and in hard copy format from the same venues from 11<sup>th</sup> June 2012.
- 2.3 The consultation informed residents and other stakeholders of the intended changes and the Council's proposals for addressing these. Access to the Council's draft scheme was also available from the Council website and the locations outlined in section 2.2 above. A copy of the draft scheme is included in Appendix A1 to this document.
- 2.4 Respondents were asked the following questions:
- To rank in order of importance their preferences for each of the proposed changes,
  - To state whether they agreed or disagreed that each of the proposed changes was fair
  - To give details of any other groups that the Council should protect from the proposed changes and reasons
  - To add any additional comments to support responses given to the ranking of importance and fairness questions or alternative options that the Council should consider
  - To comment on whether the proposed changes are likely to affect particular individuals or groups more than others and if so, how these may be addressed
  - To provide any other additional comments concerning the proposals
- 3.0 Current use of Council Tax Benefit Services**
- 3.1 The Council collects and applies a significant amount of data about Council Tax Benefit recipients through the Benefit application process generally and via a range of online resources.
- 3.2 The core methodologies applied for the consultation were intended to facilitate a qualitative and quantitative picture to be determined of current Benefit Service customers as well as to obtain the views of residents and other stakeholders on the options for delivering the new Council Tax Support service.
- 3.3 There are currently 35,792 (i.e. 31.7%) Council Tax Benefit claimants out of the 112,603 Council Tax Payers in the Borough of which 24,604 (i.e. 68.7% of claimants) are directly affected by the proposed changes. The remaining 11,188 (i.e. 31.3%) claimants are persons of pensionable age that will generally be protected from the effects of the changes.
- 3.4 A consultation is almost always partial as non-users of services and those perceived as least affected by the proposed change are less likely to get involved. However, given the above and the other caveats indicated within

this report, the data gathered from the consultation, including the questionnaire responses can generally be used to assist and inform the development of the service offer.

3.5 Analysis of the specific answers received and the further comments contributed provides evidence of customer views and needs in relation to Benefits services.

3.6 The revised Council Tax Support service offer will outline the ways in which those needs are to be met and advantages of these for both individuals and the wider community.

## **4.0 Methodology**

4.1 A range of approaches were used to capture responses to the proposals for the Council's Local Council Tax Support Scheme as set out below:

- All consultation documentation including the questionnaire was available on Brent Council's Consultation Tracker website - [www.brent.gov.uk/consultation](http://www.brent.gov.uk/consultation)
- A specific email address was provided and included on consultation documentation to deal with any requests for information or to log supplementary comments. All correspondence has been logged and has been referenced within this report.
- A text message was sent on two occasions to 2694 existing Benefit customers outlining the nature of the consultation and providing details of how to access the consultation documentation
- An email was sent on two occasions to approximately 1770 existing Benefit claimants outlining the nature of the consultation and providing details of how to access the consultation documentation
- A leaflet was issued with 13,000 Council Tax bills to Council Tax Payers in the Borough outlining the nature of the changes and providing details of how to access the consultation documentation.
- Meetings and presentations were held with organisations including the voluntary sector comprising representatives (and in some instances members) of Mencap, Citizens Advice Bureau, Help Somalia Foundation, Advocacy Project, Private Tenant Rights User Group, Older Persons Partnership Board, Brent Housing Partnership, Brent Mental Health User Group and representatives from Lynton Close Travellers Site. Proposals were outlined and comments and options were provided as appropriate and confirmed by Council representatives in writing.
- An email was sent to 600 Area Consultative Forum members and 640 Citizens Panel members on two occasions outlining the nature of the consultation and providing details of how to access consultation documentation.

- Paper copies of the documentation were distributed upon request and were available at each of the Brent Council Libraries (excluding Kilburn that was closed for refurbishment during the consultation period), and Customer Services Local Offices at the Town Hall, Willesden Green and Brent House.
- Alternative formats of consultation documentation were available on request.
- A feature on the consultation was published in both the May and July edition of the Brent Magazine and the consultation was publicised in the local media including the Harrow Times and the Brent and Kilburn Times at the commencement of the consultation.
- Two public meetings were arranged and held at Willesden Mosque and Brent Town Hall respectively for which there were 16 attendees.
- Council proposals were outlined at each of the 5 Area Consultative Forums for which there were 267 attendees.
- A pop up screen outlining the nature of the consultation and how to access the online consultation documentation was activated each time one of the Brent public library PC's was accessed by a customer. During the consultation period, there were 5,607 customer sessions where this message was displayed.
- Letters outlining the consultation arrangements were sent by post / email to 30 organisations including Housing Associations with a property interest in the Borough and welfare organisations to inform them of the nature of the consultation and how they may access the consultation documentation.
- Letters outlining the consultation arrangements were sent by email to 136 voluntary organisation representatives on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2012 informing them of the nature of the consultation and how they may access the consultation documentation. (See Appendix A2 for letter issued).
- Letters outlining the consultation arrangements and how to access the consultation documentation were also sent to the three Brent MP's and Chamber of Commerce.
- The Voluntary Sector Service Users Forum meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> June was attended by 20 people representing 18 voluntary organisations where the consultation arrangements were outlined. A briefing note was given to the attendees informing them of how they may access the consultation documentation and attendees were advised to meet with officers as appropriate if they wished to obtain further details about the scheme.

- Posters advertising the consultation and how to access documentation were displayed on 80 advertising hoardings around the Borough for a period of two weeks from 24<sup>st</sup> July 2012.
- A focus group meeting was arranged for 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2012 with 9 Council Tax Benefit claimants although only one attended the meeting.

4.2 Correspondence with Council officers and records of Question and Answer sessions at public meetings and forums have been logged and have helped to inform the analysis of the consultation feedback and the findings of this report.

## 5.0 Consultation Responses – Analysis

5.1 The format of the questionnaire used for the consultation is shown in Appendix A3 of this report.

5.2 This was made available on the Council's Consultation Tracker throughout the consultation period and printed copies of the document were distributed at all meetings and forums attended. Printed copies were also available upon request and were available at Brent Council libraries (excluding Kilburn which was closed for refurbishment during the consultation period) and Customer Services Local Offices.

5.3 There were 184 consultation questionnaire responses received, comprising 97 online responses (52.7%) and 87 paper responses (47.3%).

5.4 The consultation questionnaire response rate is lower than had been anticipated although comments were also received from a number of organisations that were either visited as part of the consultation programme or who submitted written comments for consideration.

5.5 Table 1 below shows the analysis of ethnic groups obtained from the consultation questionnaire responses compared to that of the Brent population based upon 2001 census data and the existing Council Tax Benefits caseload.

Table 1

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Proportion of Borough Population</b>	<b>Proportion of Benefits Caseload</b>	<b>Number of Consultation Responses</b>	<b>Proportion of Responses Received (%)</b>
Asian:Bangladeshi	0.5	0.6	1	0.70
Asian: British	0	0	4	2.82
Asian: Chinese	1.1	0.4	1	0.70
Asian: Indian	18.5	8.0	12	8.45
Asian: Pakistani	4.0	3.6	6	4.23
Asian: Other	4.8	11.3	6	4.23

Black: African	7.8	18.8	12	8.45
Black: Caribbean	10.5	15.2	14	9.86
Black: Somali	0	0	19	13.38
Black: Other	1.6	1.5	3	2.11
Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	1.0	1.1	2	1.41
Mixed: White and Black African	0.7	1.0	0	0
Mixed: White and Asian	1.0	0.7	0	0
Mixed: Other	1.1	1.0	1	0.70
White: British	29.2	15.7	35	24.65
White: Irish	7.0	5.0	1	0.70
White: Other	9.1	11.7	12	8.45
Other	2.3	4.4	8	5.63
Prefer not to say	0	0	5	3.52
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>100</b>

**Notes:**

1. The above totals do not equate to 100% in all cases due to rounding differences.
2. There were 42 respondents that did not answer this question.
3. Black: British has been included within the group Black: Other in the table above.
4. Black: Somali has been shown as a separate group for the purposes of the consultation responses although in the census and for the Benefits caseload generally, this group is likely to have been incorporated within Black: African.
- 5.6 Table 2 below shows how the proportions of each group as represented by the Borough population and Benefits caseload compare to that obtained from the consultation responses received. This indicates that Asian: Pakistani, Black: African, Black: Caribbean, and White: Other have the closest representation from the consultation responses to the 2001 census data and that Asian: Indian has the closest representation from the consultation responses to the Benefits caseload allowing for a 10% variance.

**Table 2**

Ethnic Group	Proportion of Borough Population (A)	Proportion of Benefits Caseload (B)	Proportion of Responses Received ( C )	% Difference between Population and Responses	% Difference between Benefits Caseload and Responses
Asian:Bangladeshi	0.5	0.6	0.7	40	17
Asian: British	0	0	2.82	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!
Asian: Chinese	1.1	0.4	0.7	-36	75
Asian: Indian	18.5	8	8.45	-54	6
Asian: Pakistani	4	3.6	4.23	6	18
Asian: Other	4.8	11.3	4.23	-12	-63
Black: African	7.8	18.8	8.45	8	-55
Black: Caribbean	10.5	15.2	9.86	-6	-35
Black:Somali	0	0	13.38	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!
Black: Other	1.6	1.5	2.11	32	41
Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	1	1.1	1.41	41	28
Mixed: White and Black African	0.7	1	0	-100	-100
Mixed: White and Asian	1	0.7	0	-100	-100
Mixed: Other	1.1	1	0.7	-36	-30
White:British	29.2	15.7	24.65	-16	57
White:Irish	7	5	0.7	-90	-86
White: Other	9.1	11.7	8.45	-7	-28
Other	2.3	4.4	5.63	145	28
Not declared	0	0	3.52	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!

**Note:** Where the response in the table is shown as “DIV/0!” because the denominator in the calculation performed is equal to zero.

### 5.7 Status of Respondent

In relation to the status of the respondent, 145 were individuals, 3 were organisations and 36 did not declare a status. This may be further analysed between paper and online responses as shown in Table 3 below:

**Table 3**

Status of Respondent	Paper Volumes	Paper Proportions in %	Online Volumes	Online Proportions in %
Individual	76	87.36	69	71.13
Organisation	0	0	3	3.09
Not declared	11	12.64	25	25.77
<b>Totals</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

### 5.8 Do you Pay Council Tax to Brent Council?

Of the 184 respondents, 121 (i.e. 85.82% of those that responded to the question) indicated that they paid Council Tax to Brent Council and 20 (i.e. 14.18% of those that responded to question) did not.

There were 43 respondents that did not given an answer to this question.

### 5.9 Are you currently receiving Council Tax Benefit in Brent?

Of the 184 respondents, 87 (i.e. 60.84% of those that responded to the question) were currently in receipt of Council Tax Benefit and 56 (i.e. 39.16%



of those that responded to the question were not. There were 41 respondents that did not give an answer to this question.

- 5.10 **If you are not receiving Council Tax Benefit, have you ever received it?**  
Of the 184 respondents, 17 (i.e. 27.87% of those that responded to the question) indicated that they had previously received Council Tax Benefit and 44 (i.e. 72.13% of those that responded to question) had not.

There were 123 respondents that did not given an answer to this question.

- 5.11 The tables below set out the composition of respondents that completed the consultation questionnaire:

Table 4

<b>Status of Respondent</b>	<b>Total of Responses</b>	<b>Responses as Proportion of Total (%)</b>
Pensioner	23	16.67
Student	3	2.17
Employed	37	26.81
Employed Part Time	15	10.87
Unemployed	54	39.13
Disabled	6	4.35
<b>Totals</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>

The overall response rate to this question was 75% of the total of 184 respondents.

There were 46 respondents that did not give an answer to this question representing 25% of the total of 184 respondents.

Table 5

<b>Status of Respondent</b>	<b>Total of Responses</b>	<b>Responses as Proportion of Total (%)</b>
Living as a Couple	14	16.67
Married	44	52.38
Civil Partnership	1	1.19
Prefer not to say	25	30
<b>Totals</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100</b>

The overall response rate to this question was 45.65% of the total of 184 respondents.

There were 100 respondents that did not give an answer to this question representing 54.35% of the total of 184 respondents.

- 5.12 An analysis of the age composition of the Borough in comparison to the Benefits caseload is shown in Tables 6 and 7 below:

Table 6 – Borough Census and Benefit Caseload

Age Range	Borough average from Census	Council Tax Benefit Cases	Index Score (where 100 = average)
15-24	18.2%	3.24%	18
25-34	24.2%	14.42%	60
35-44	19.4%	21.98%	113
45-54	13.5%	21.11%	157
55-59	5.5%	7.99%	146
60+	19.3%	31.26%	162

5.13 Table 6 shows an index score in relation to the Council tax Benefit cases as a proportion of the Borough average taken from the 2001 census. The age categories for 15 to 24 and 25 to 34 have a lower proportion of claimants than expected based upon the Borough average that may be explained by the fact that a claimant has to be aged 18 or over and liable to pay council Tax to qualify for Council Tax Benefit and recent ONS reports appear to suggest that a greater number of persons are choosing to remain at home with their parents due to the high costs of renting, buying a property and other costs.

Table 7 – Consultation Responses

Age Status of Respondent	Total of Responses	Responses as Proportion of Total (%)
Under 18	0	0
18 to 24	6	4
25 to 34	20	14
35 to 44	48	34
45 to 54	34	24
55 to 60	10	7
61+	20	14
Prefer not to say	4	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>100</b>

The overall response rate to this question was 77.17% of the total of 184 respondents.

There were 42 respondents that did not give an answer to this question representing 22.83% of the total of 184 respondents.

5.14 It is not possible to draw any specific conclusions from the above age data obtained from the consultation as not all of the respondents answered this question.

5.15 It is also important to note that as Council Tax is not payable by residents aged under 18 years old, there will not be any data for this age range in respect of Council Tax Benefit. It is also likely that as persons of pensionable

age will be protected from the proposed changes to Council Tax Benefit, they were less likely to respond to the consultation proposals.

5.16 There does appear however to be a close correlation between the age analysis of consultation respondents and Council Tax Benefit data that may be partially explained by the fact that 60% of respondents were in receipt of Council Tax Benefit and consequently the age data for these persons should be consistent with Benefit data held.

5.17 Table 8 - Gender Status

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Borough Average from Census</b>	<b>Council Tax Benefit Data</b>
Male	48.6%	45.8%
Female	51.4%	54.2%

The profile of gender within the Borough and the existing Benefits caseload is shown in Table 8 above and appears to be broadly comparable. It is important to note that a claimant for Council Tax Benefit can be either partner in the case of a couple.

Table 9 - Consultation Responses

<b>Gender of Respondent</b>	<b>Total of Responses</b>	<b>Responses as Proportion of Total (%)</b>
Male	58	41.43
Female	78	55.71
Prefer not to say	4	2.86
<b>Totals</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100</b>

The overall response rate to this question was 76.09% of the total of 184 respondents.

There were 44 respondents that did not give an answer to this question representing 23.91% of the total of 184 respondents.

5.18 It is not possible to draw any specific conclusions from the above results of the consultation as not all respondents answered this question and some that did, preferred not to state their gender. However, of those that did, there was a 4.3% variance for male responses and a 2.7% variance for female responses in comparison to the existing Benefits caseload data.

5.19 **Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?**

It is not possible to compare the data from the consultation responses with the Borough average as this information was not previously collated from the 2001 census.

Table 10 – Gender Assignment

<b>Gender Assignment - Status of Respondent</b>	<b>Total of Responses</b>	<b>Responses as Proportion of Total (%)</b>
Yes	116	91.34
No	4	3.15
Prefer not to say	7	5.51
<b>Totals</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>100</b>

The overall response rate to this question was 69.02% of the total of 184 respondents.

There were 57 respondents that did not give an answer to this question representing 30.98% of the total of 184 respondents.

**5.20 Do you have Parenting Responsibilities?**

It is not possible to compare the data from the consultation responses with the Borough average as this information was not previously collated from the 2001 census.

Table 11 – Parenting Responsibilities

<b>Status of Respondent</b>	<b>Total of Responses</b>	<b>Responses as Proportion of Total (%)</b>
Yes	62	45.93
No	67	49.63
Prefer not to say	6	4.44
<b>Totals</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100</b>

The overall response rate to this question was 73.37% of the total of 184 respondents.

There were 49 respondents that did not give an answer to this question representing 26.63% of the total of 184 respondents.

**5.21 What is your Sexual Orientation?**

It is not possible to compare the data from the consultation responses with the Borough average as this information was not previously collated from the 2001 census.

Table 12 – Sexual Orientation

<b>Status of Respondent</b>	<b>Total of Responses</b>	<b>Responses as Proportion of Total (%)</b>
Heterosexual / Straight	99	77.95
Gay Woman / Lesbian	1	0.79
Bisexual	4	3.15
Gay Man	3	2.36
Other	1	0.79
Prefer not to say	19	14.96
<b>Totals</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>100</b>

The overall response rate to this question was 69.02% of the total of 184 respondents.

There were 57 respondents that did not give an answer to this question representing 30.98% of the total of 184 respondents.

#### 5.22 **What is your religion?**

The profile of religion within the Borough is shown in Table 13 below. It is not possible to compare this with the existing Benefits caseload as this data is not currently held.

Table 13 – Religion

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Borough Average</b>
Christian	47.7%
Buddhist	1.0%
Hindu	17.2%
Jewish	2.5%
Muslim	12.3%
Sikh	0.7%
Any other religion	1.1%
No religion	10.0%
Religion not stated	7.7%

Table 14 - Consultation Response

<b>Religion of Respondent</b>	<b>Total of Responses</b>	<b>Responses as Proportion of Total (%)</b>
Baha'i	1	0.75
Buddhism	0	0.00
Christianity	41	30.83
Hinduism	10	7.52
Jainism	0	0.00
Judaism	3	2.26
Islam	45	33.83

Sikhism	1	0.75
Taoism	0	0.00
Agnostic	2	1.50
Humanist	1	0.75
No Religious belief	18	13.53
Other	4	3.01
Prefer not to say	7	5.26
<b>Totals</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100</b>

The overall response rate to this question was 72.28% of the total of 184 respondents.

There were 51 respondents that did not give an answer to this question representing 27.72% of the total of 184 respondents.

5.23 It is not possible to draw any specific conclusions from the consultation response as not all respondents answered this question. However, from the responses received, there appears to be an over representation in comparison with census data from respondents whose religion was Islam and an under representation of responses from respondents whose religion was Christianity. There also appears to be an under representation of Hindu respondents.

5.24 **Are you responding in your capacity as a representative of any of the following?**

Table 15 – Consultation responses

Status of Respondent	Total of “Yes” Responses	“Yes” responses as proportion of Total (%)	Total of “No” responses	“No” Responses as Proportion of Total (%)
Voluntary Organisation	1	3.85	20	76.92
Housing Association	3	11.54	19	73.08
Landlord	1	3.85	19	73.08
Other	6	23.08	15	57.69

The overall response rate to this question was 26 (i.e. 14.13%) of the total of 184 respondents.

There were 158 respondents that did not give an answer to this question representing 85.87% of the total of 184 respondents.

It is not possible to draw any specific conclusions from the consultation response as not all of the respondents answered this question.

It should also be noted that only 3 respondents claimed they were representing organisations in question 7 of the consultation questionnaire whereas for this question, there appears to be 11 organisational representatives based upon a “yes” response.

## 5.25 Responses to Consultation Questions concerning Scheme Design

**Question 1: Please indicate how important each of the six key principles are to you with 1 being the most important and 6 the least important.**

The results shown below indicate the number of respondents that ranked each of the 6 key principles. The final column “Ranking Average” shows the average ranking of importance for each of the 6 key principles concerned based upon responses received and indicates based upon the proportions of responses that principle 2 was most important to respondents (i.e. protecting vulnerable claimants). The principle that “everyone should contribute” was least important to respondents.

It should be noted that whilst there were 161 responses to principle 2, there were only 151 for principle 4 and differing numbers of responses for the other principles. This prevents a direct comparison of results for each principle although the variance between the responses to each principle is no more than 10.

Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	Ranking Average
Principle 1: Everyone should pay something	51	24	12	13	19	39	158	3.27
Principle 2: The most vulnerable claimants should be protected (from the minimum contribution)	72	32	24	12	7	14	161	2.33
Principle 3: The scheme should incentivise work	19	24	36	30	26	18	153	3.48
Principle 4: Everyone in the household should contribute	13	17	20	40	32	29	151	3.98
Principle 5: Better off claimants should pay relatively more so that the least well off receive greater protection	26	30	28	22	34	14	154	3.32
Principle 6: Benefit should not be paid to those with relatively large capital or savings	32	26	30	19	17	31	155	3.36

5.26 Based upon the analysis shown above, the following results can be determined:

<b>Key Principle</b>	<b>Overall Priority</b>
Principle 1: Everyone should pay something:	Second
Principle 2: The most vulnerable claimants should be protected (from the minimum contribution):	First
Principle 3: The scheme should incentivise work:	Fifth
Principle 4: Everyone in the household should contribute:	Sixth
Principle 5: Better off claimants should pay relatively more so that the least well off receive greater protection:	Third
Principle 6: Benefit should not be paid to those with relatively large capital or savings:	Fourth

<b>Total that responded to question:</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>Total that skipped this question:</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>184</b>

5.27 As all of the principles are ranked within a central band (i.e. between 2.33 and 3.98), in general terms there is no single principle that is ranked either particularly high or low. This may suggest in general terms that all principles were of similar importance to the respondents concerned.

5.27.1 Council officers attended a meeting with Mencap facilitated by two representatives and 10 members of Mencap. Each of the principles proposed for the draft scheme was presented in picture and word format and members were asked to use each of the pictures once based upon the importance of each of the principles to them.

5.27.2 At the meeting, each attendee was asked to rank how important the Council's proposed changes were to them in order of "most important" to "least important" and the results of this are set out in the table below. There are a couple of observations to note concerning this data as set out below although this does not appear on face value to affect the general trends arising:

- One of the persons was not present for this part of the session due to a pre-arranged appointment,
- One of the persons present abstained from ranking their final two choices,



- One of the choices ranked by members present received more votes than persons present meaning that it was used more than once by some.

	1st Priority	2nd Priority	3rd Priority	4th Priority	5th Priority	6th Priority	Totals
The most vulnerable should be protected from the 20% minimum charge	7	1	1				9
Everyone in the household should contribute	1			3	1	3	8
Every adult to pay at least 20%			2	1	2	3	8
Better off customers should pay relatively more Council Tax	1	1	4		4	1	11
The scheme should incentivise work		6		1	0	1	8
Savings limit reduced from £16,000 to £6,000		1	2	3	1	1	8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>52</b>

5.27.3 Two meetings were held with Advocacy Project members with the meetings facilitated by a representative of that organisation. There were 16 attendees at the meetings for which one person attended both sessions. An easy read leaflet of the proposals was produced by the Advocacy project representative from the Council documentation and the principles of the proposed Council scheme were presented in a picture and word format to enable members to rank their preferences.

5.27.4 It is important to note that some attendees did not rank their preference for each principle and some attendees used an “agree” “disagree” or “neither agree nor disagree” ranking more than once for the 6 principles concerned.

The overall results from the meetings are set out in the table below.

5.27.5 These appear to show that the principle that everyone in the claimant’s household should contribute was the one that received the most responses with 5 attendees in agreement with the principle and 4 neither agreeing nor disagreeing. The principle that every adult in receipt of Benefit should pay 20% was least popular although only 2 attendees responded on this principle. Protection for the most vulnerable was agreed by 75% of the attendees although only 3 attendees ranked their preference for this principle.

<u>Advocacy Project Responses</u>							
	Agreed	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totals	Proportion of agreed	Proportion neither	Proportion disagree
The most vulnerable should be protected from the 20% minimum charge	3	1	0	4	75	25	0
Everyone in the household should contribute	5	4	0	9	56	44	0
Every adult to pay at least 20%	0	1	1	2	0	50	50
Better off customers should pay relatively more Council Tax	4	0	0	4	100	0	0
The scheme should incentivise work	3	0	4	7	43	0	57
Savings limit reduced from £16,000 to £6,000	2	3	0	5	40	60	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>16</b>

**5.28 Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following proposals are fair?**

In analysing the results from the responses received, it is important to note that 16 of the 184 respondents did not answer this question. Additionally, some of the respondents did not rank each of the 6 key principles and 2 features. The proportions shown in the table below therefore are based upon respondents that did answer the question or part of the question concerned.

5.29 The results are shown in Tables 16 and 17 below and show the number of respondents that answered this question in relation to each of the 6 key principles and the 2 main features. They can be summarised as follows:

**Principle 1 – Every claimant of working age should pay 20% Council Tax**

41.07% agreed that principle 1 was fair, 13.69% neither agreed nor disagreed and 45.24% considered the principle to be unfair. Each of the 168 respondents to this question answered this part. The results for this principle indicate that slightly more respondents disagreed that the minimum contribution of 20% was fair compared with those that agreed it was fair although this should be considered in the context that a greater proportion of the respondents to the consultation were in receipt of Council tax Benefit and the responses from these differed to those of non Council Tax Benefit respondents as outlined later in this section.

**Principle 2 – Protect disabled claimants from the 20% minimum contribution**

75% agreed that the principle was fair, 10.12% neither agreed nor disagreed and 11.9% considered the principle to be unfair. There were five respondents that answered the question for principle 1 but did not answer this part of the question and which account for 2.98%. The results for this principle indicate a majority of respondents considered the protection for disabled persons to be fair although not all of the respondents for principle 1 answered this part of the question.

### Principle 3 – Increase earnings disregards by £10 per week

60.12% agreed that the principle was fair, 22.02% neither agreed nor disagreed and 13.69% considered the principle to be unfair. There were seven respondents that answered the question for principle 1 but did not answer this part of the question and which account for 4.17%. The results for this principle indicate a majority of respondents considered the increase in earnings disregards to be fair although not all of the respondents for principle 1 answered this part of the question.

### Principle 4 – Double non-dependant deductions and introduce charge for job seekers

38.09% agreed that the principle was fair, 23.21% neither agreed nor disagreed and 34.52% considered the principle to be unfair. There were seven respondents that answered the question for principle 1 but did not answer this part of the question and which account for 4.17%. The results for this principle suggest a small majority of the respondents considered this principle to be fair although not all of the respondents for principle 1 answered this part of the question.

### Principle 5 – Increase taper to 30%

27.98% agreed that the principle was fair, 32.14% neither agreed nor disagreed and 31.55% considered the principle to be unfair. There were fourteen respondents that answered the question for principle 1 but did not answer this part of the question and which account for 8.33%. The results for this principle suggest a small majority of the respondents considered this principle to be unfair although not all of the respondents for principle 1 answered this part of the question.

### Principle 6 – Reduce savings limit

42.26% agreed that the principle was fair, 17.86% neither agreed nor disagreed and 37.5% considered the principle to be unfair. There were four respondents that answered the question for principle 1 but did not answer this part of the question and which account for 2.38%. The results for this principle suggest a small majority of the respondents considered this principle to be fair although not all of the respondents for principle 1 answered this part of the question.

### Feature 1 – Abolish second adult rebate

33.34% agreed that the principle was fair, 25.6% neither agreed nor disagreed and 32.15% considered the principle to be unfair. There were fifteen respondents that answered the question for principle 1 but did not answer this part of the question and which account for 8.92%. The results for this feature suggest a small majority of the respondents considered this feature to be fair although not all of the respondents for principle 1 answered this part of the question.

### Feature 2 – Freeze premiums and allowances

37.5% agreed that the principle was fair, 25% neither agreed nor disagreed and 29.17% considered the principle to be unfair. There were fourteen respondents that answered the question for principle 1 but did not answer this

part of the question and which account for 8.33%. The results for this principle suggest a small majority of the respondents considered this principle to be fair although not all of the respondents for principle 1 answered this part of the question.

- 5.30 A sub-analysis has been undertaken of responses to this question to determine how the results obtained may have been affected by a respondent being in receipt of Council Tax Benefit. The outcomes from this analysis are set out below in Table 16 and can be summarised as follows:

In relation to principle 1 that proposes all working age claimants pay a minimum 20% contribution towards their Council Tax, 24.85% of Benefit claimants agreed that this principle was fair compared to 62.71% of non Benefit claimants, 55.7% of Benefit claimants considered this principle to be unfair compared to 27.12% of non Benefit claimants and 46.84% of Benefit claimants did not consider this principle to be either fair or unfair compared to 10.17% of non Benefit claimants.

In relation to principle 2 that proposes disabled claimants should be protected from the 20% minimum contribution, 85.72% of Benefit claimants agreed that this principle was fair compared to 65.52% of non Benefit claimants, 6.5% of Benefit claimants considered this principle to be unfair compared to 22.41% of non Benefit claimants and 7.79% of Benefit claimants did not consider this principle to be either fair or unfair compared to 12.07% of non Benefit claimants.

In relation to principle 3 that proposes the earnings disregard be increased by £10 per week, 63.16% of Benefit claimants agreed that this principle was fair compared to 62.5% of non Benefit claimants, 13.16% of Benefit claimants considered this principle to be unfair compared to 17.86% of non Benefit claimants and 23.68% of Benefit claimants did not consider this principle to be either fair or unfair compared to 19.64% of non Benefit claimants.

In relation to principle 4 that proposes to double the range of deductions for other adults living with a claimant and introduce a deduction for adults in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based), 33.78% of Benefit claimants agreed that this principle was fair compared to 47.46% of non Benefit claimants, 37.83% of Benefit claimants considered this principle to be unfair compared to 32.2% of non Benefit claimants and 28.38% of Benefit claimants did not consider this principle to be either fair or unfair compared to 20.34% of non Benefit claimants.

In relation to principle 5 that proposes to increase the taper from 20% to 30%, 26.08% of Benefit claimants agreed that this principle was fair compared to 33.33% of non Benefit claimants, 34.78% of Benefit claimants considered this principle to be unfair compared to 33.33% of non Benefit claimants and 39.13% of Benefit claimants did not consider this principle to be either fair or unfair compared to 33.33% of non Benefit claimants.

In relation to principle 6 that proposes a reduction in the capital cut off limit to £6,000, 35.89% of Benefit claimants agreed that this principle was fair compared to 35.59% of non Benefit claimants, 42.3% of Benefit claimants considered this principle to be unfair compared to 35.59% of non Benefit claimants and 21.79% of Benefit claimants did not consider this principle to be either fair or unfair compared to 13.56% of non Benefit claimants.

In relation to Feature 1 proposes the abolition of second adult rebate for working age claimants, 19.11% of Benefit claimants agreed that this principle was fair compared to 50% of non Benefit claimants, 42.65% of Benefit claimants considered this principle to be unfair compared to 31.04% of non Benefit claimants and 38.24% of Benefit claimants did not consider this principle to be either fair or unfair compared to 18.97% of non Benefit claimants.

In relation to Feature 2 that proposes freezing personal allowances and premiums at 2012/13 rates, 36.62% of Benefit claimants agreed that this principle was fair compared to 44.65% of non Benefit claimants, 29.58% of Benefit claimants considered this principle to be unfair compared to 37.5% of non Benefit claimants and 33.8% of Benefit claimants did not consider this principle to be either fair or unfair compared to 17.86% of non Benefit claimants.

- 5.31 In summary, there appears to be a clear distinction as to whether principle 1 is fair based upon whether the respondent is in receipt of Council Tax Benefit or not, principle 2 was agreed as being fair by the majority of both sets of respondents, principle 3 was agreed as being fair by the greater majority of both sets of respondents, principle 4 was agreed as being fair by the greater majority of non Benefit respondents than in the case of Benefit respondents, principle 5 was not agreed as fair by Benefit respondents but had an equal split of non Benefit respondents considering it unfair and principle 6 was considered unfair by a greater majority of Benefit respondents than non Benefit respondents.
- 5.32 Features 1 and 2 were agreed as being fair by the greater majority of non Benefit respondents compared to Council Tax Benefit respondents although in the latter case, there were also a significant proportion of respondents that did not consider the proposals to be fair or unfair.
- 5.33 The overall results for all responses received are shown in Table 17.

Table 16

<b>2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following proposals are fair?</b>						
<b>Receipt of Council Tax Benefit - Yes</b>						
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Principle 1: All working age claimants to pay a minimum of 20 per cent of their council tax:	3(3.80%)	19(24.05%)	13(16.46%)	24(30.38%)	20(25.32%)	79
Principle 2: Protect disabled claimants from the 20% minimum contribution:	40(51.95%)	26(33.77%)	6(7.79%)	2(2.60%)	3(3.90%)	77
Principle 3: Increase the earnings disregard by £10 per week:	17(22.37%)	31(40.79%)	18(23.68%)	8(10.53%)	2(2.63%)	76
Principle 4: Double the current range of deductions charged for other adults living with a claimant from the 2012/13 charges, and introduce a charge for other adults on job seekers allowance (income based):	8(10.81%)	17(22.97%)	21(28.38%)	18(24.32%)	10(13.51%)	74
Principle 5: Increase the taper from 20 per cent to 30 per cent:	7(10.14%)	11(15.94%)	27(39.13%)	13(18.84%)	11(15.94%)	69
Principle 6: Reduce the savings cut-off limit to £6,000 from the current £16,000:	16(20.51%)	12(15.38%)	17(21.79%)	21(26.92%)	12(15.38%)	78
Feature 1: Abolish the second adult rebate for working age claimants:	8(11.76%)	5(7.35%)	26(38.24%)	18(26.47%)	11(16.18%)	68
Feature 2: Premiums and personal allowances to be frozen at 2012/2013 rates:	7(9.86%)	19(26.76%)	24(33.80%)	9(12.68%)	12(16.90%)	71
<b>Receipt of Council Tax Benefit - No</b>						
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Principle 1: All working age claimants to pay a minimum of 20 per cent of their council tax:	26(44.07%)	11(18.64%)	6(10.17%)	6(10.17%)	10(16.95%)	59
Principle 2: Protect disabled claimants from the 20% minimum contribution:	22(37.93%)	16(27.59%)	7(12.07%)	7(12.07%)	6(10.34%)	58
Principle 3: Increase the earnings disregard by £10 per week:	20(35.71%)	15(26.79%)	11(19.64%)	5(8.93%)	5(8.93%)	56
Principle 4: Double the current range of deductions charged for other adults living with a claimant from the 2012/13 charges, and introduce a charge for other adults on job seekers allowance (income based):	15(25.43%)	13(22.03%)	12(20.34%)	10(16.95%)	9(15.25%)	59
Principle 5: Increase the taper from 20 per cent to 30 per cent:	9(15.79%)	10(17.54%)	19(33.33%)	8(14.04%)	11(19.30%)	57
Principle 6: Reduce the savings cut-off limit to £6,000 from the current £16,000:	21(35.59%)	9(15.25%)	8(13.56%)	9(15.25%)	12(20.34%)	59
Feature 1: Abolish the second adult rebate for working age claimants:	16(27.59%)	13(22.41%)	11(18.97%)	9(15.52%)	9(15.52%)	58
Feature 2: Premiums and personal allowances to be frozen at 2012/2013 rates:	15(26.79%)	10(17.86%)	10(17.86%)	13(23.21%)	8(14.29%)	56

**Table 17**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No response to question part	Total
Principle 1: All working age claimants to pay a minimum of 20 per cent of their council tax:	36(21.43%)	33(19.64%)	23(13.69%)	36(21.43%)	40(23.81%)	0 (0%)	168
Principle 2: Protect disabled claimants from the 20% minimum contribution:	75(44.64%)	51(30.36%)	17(10.12%)	10(5.95%)	10(5.95%)	5 (2.98%)	163
Principle 3: Increase the earnings disregard by £10 per week:	43(25.60%)	58(34.52%)	37(22.02%)	14(8.33%)	9(5.36%)	7 (4.17%)	161
Principle 4: Double the current range of deductions charged for other adults living with a claimant from the 2012/13 charges, and introduce a charge for other adults on job seekers allowance (income based):	29(17.26%)	35(20.83%)	39(23.21%)	33(19.64%)	25(14.88%)	7 (4.17%)	161
Principle 5: Increase the taper from 20 per cent to 30 per cent:	22(13.10%)	25(14.88%)	54(32.14%)	26(15.48%)	27(16.07%)	14 (8.33%)	154
Principle 6: Reduce the savings cut-off limit to £6,000 from the current £16,000:	44(26.19%)	27(16.07%)	30(17.86%)	36(21.43%)	27(16.07%)	4 (2.38%)	164
Feature 1: Abolish the second adult rebate for working age claimants:	28(16.67%)	28(16.67%)	43(25.60%)	30(17.86%)	24(14.29%)	15 (8.92%)	153
Feature 2: Premiums and personal allowances to be frozen at 2012/2013 rates:	31(18.45%)	32(19.05%)	42(25%)	25(14.88%)	24(14.29%)	14 (8.33%)	154

## **6.0 Additional Comments**

A narrative field for comments was included in questions asked within the questionnaire, and a range of responses were given for the questions concerned. It should be noted that whilst officers have tried to make this representative, inevitably there is the possibility of duplication and in some instances, comments that were not appropriate to the consultation. Furthermore, some comments appear to be based on a misapprehension either of the facts or of the proposals. It should also be noted that some respondents provided multiple answers to questions with others giving no responses and in some instances it was unclear as to the nature of the point or comment being made by the respondent. Each of the comments submitted by respondents has been included within this report together with a commentary.

## **7.0 Public Meetings**

7.1 Two public meetings were held during the consultation period at Willesden Green Mosque and Brent Town Hall. These were held in addition to the Area Consultative Forums as detailed below. Public meetings took place on the 6<sup>th</sup> July at Willesden Green Mosque and 27<sup>th</sup> July at Brent Council Town Hall.

There were 17 attendees for these 2 events.

The 6<sup>th</sup> July meeting was advertised in local libraries, on the Brent Council website and via Brent's BME forum contacts. Members of the Brent Multi-Faith forum were invited directly. Of those attending and who completed monitoring forms, 80% were Islamic and 20% preferred not to say.

In terms of ethnicity, 60% were Asian: Pakistani, 20% were Asian: British and 20% were Black: Caribbean

The 27<sup>th</sup> July meeting was targeted towards BME and Faith communities and was advertised in Brent Council Libraries, Customer Service Local Offices and on the Brent Council Website.

Invites were also emailed directly to BME forum contacts and multi-faith forum contacts. Posters, leaflets and briefings were also distributed through the multi faith forum and Council Tax Support consultation has been an agenda item discussed at their last 2 meetings held on 16<sup>th</sup> June and 17<sup>th</sup> July respectively.

Members were also requested to specifically promote the 27<sup>th</sup> July meeting with their contacts in the BME community.

There were approximately 50 community leaders that were contacted by email and by phone and there were 15 Multi Faith forum Faith leaders contacted from the major faiths within Brent.

## **7.2 Area Consultative Forums**

7.2.1 There are five Area Consultative Forums which offer residents the opportunity to have their say about issues which matter to them. At each meeting, residents, businesses and community representatives are able to raise questions about services provided by the council and other agencies in Brent.



Chaired by a Councillor, each area forum meeting is open to the public and is held during a weekday evening in an accessible venue.

There were an estimated 267 residents that attended the forums during the consultation to hear further details of the proposals and to provide feedback to officers and members.

Similarly to the public meetings and Service User Consultative Forums there were a range of questions / issues raised as set in Appendix A4 of this report.

Frequently asked questions were included on the Council website for reference together with the appropriate responses.

### **7.3 Service User Consultative Forums**

7.3.1 Service User Consultative Forums are held to encourage the users of specific services to have a say about the service they receive. The forum for the voluntary sector focuses on specific groups in that sector of the community.

Comments received from the meeting of this forum on 21<sup>st</sup> June are set out in Appendix A5 of this report.

### **7.4 Meetings with groups and individuals**

Meetings were arranged and held with a number of key groups and their representatives / members within the Borough. These included Mencap, the Advocacy Project, Citizens Advice Bureau, Brent Private Tenants Rights User Group, Brent Housing Partnership, Brent Mental Health User Group, Older Persons Partnership Board, Help Somalia Foundation and Lynton Close Travellers Site.

7.5 In the case of the Help Somalia Foundation, three meetings were held. The first meeting held was an initial meeting with representatives from the organisation and the second and third meetings were held with members of the Somali community with the organisation arranging attendance and the Council reserving a hall at the Town Hall.

7.6 Consultation questionnaires were issued to attendees of meetings as appropriate.

7.7 Comments received and responses obtained from the consultation have been included within this report as Appendix A6 together with any appropriate commentary.

### **8.0 Correspondence**

8.1 A specific mailbox was established and used, with 11 responses received from 11 separate email addresses. The themes for the emails concerned are set out below:

#### Comment / Theme Summary

- Not happy with the current scheme and wants a better one – 1
- Request for paper copy of scheme – 2

- Will it affect my 25% Single Person Discount? – 2
- Who are you consulting with? – 1
- How will the new scheme affect me personally? – 1
- How will the scheme affect pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit? – 1
- Do you have an equalities impact assessment and how can I contribute? – 1
- How can I access and complete the online questionnaire? – 2

## **9.0 Summary of findings**

- 9.1 Details about the consultation on the local Council Tax Support proposals reached a significant number of residents and stakeholders via a range of consultation formats as set out earlier in this report.
- 9.2 The overall response to the consultation was lower than had been anticipated despite the efforts that were made to ensure that residents and stakeholders were aware of the proposals and had an opportunity to comment.
- 9.3 However, it can be seen from the views expressed in the consultation that there was a polarisation of views for principle 1, strong agreement for principles 2 and 3, mixed views on principles 4, 5 and 6 possibly stemming in the case of principles 4 and 5 to an absence of understanding concerning the technical details of the proposal concerned.
- 9.4 There also appears to be a clear distinction as to whether principle 1 is fair based upon whether the respondent is in receipt of Council Tax Benefit or not, principle 2 was agreed as being fair by the majority of both sets of respondents, principle 3 was agreed as being fair by the greater majority of both sets of respondents, principle 4 was agreed as being fair by the greater majority of non Benefit respondents than in the case of Benefit respondents, principle 5 was not agreed as fair by Benefit respondents but had an equal split of non Benefit respondents considering it unfair and principle 6 was considered unfair by a greater majority of Benefit respondents than non Benefit respondents.
- 9.5 Features 1 and 2 were agreed as being fair by the greater majority of non Benefit respondents compared to Benefit respondents although in the latter case, there was also a significant proportion of respondents that considered the proposals to be neither fair nor unfair.
- 9.6 From the above results, it would appear that the circumstances of a respondent particularly in terms of entitlement to Council Tax Benefit, influences their perception particularly as to whether the minimum 20% contribution towards Council Tax is fair. The protection proposed for certain claimants such as disabled persons was considered to be fair by the majority of all respondents as was the work incentive of an additional £10 per week earnings disregard. There were generally differing degrees of opinion expressed by Benefit and non Benefit respondents in relation to the other principles and features.

9.7 The consultation report is a significant part of the information underpinning the proposals, but it does not stand alone. In particular, in formulating the recommendations, officers have had regard to:

- The Policy Statements of Intent issued by the CLG,
- The resources available to the Council and potential alternative ways to operate the local Council Tax Support scheme within the funds available.
- The Equalities Impact Assessment which explicitly addresses many of the issues raised in this consultation
- The technical constraints that are currently understood to exist in relation to the proposed technology for administration of the scheme.