

EQUALITY ANALYSIS (EA)

POLICY/PROPOSAL:	New Council Tax Support Scheme
DEPARTMENT:	Partnerships, Housing and Resident Services
TEAM:	Customer Services & Assessments
LEAD OFFICER:	Sunita Ghudial
DATE:	14 January 2025

NB: Please ensure you have read the accompanying EA guidance and instructions in full.

SECTION A – INITIAL SCREENING

1. Please provide a description of the policy, proposal, change or initiative, and a summary its objectives and the intended results.

The Council is obliged to set a local Council Tax Support Scheme every year following the abolition of the national Council Tax Benefit Scheme in 2013. The Council introduced a local Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme to provide financial assistance for working-age households in paying their Council Tax. Council Tax Support is awarded as a reduction on a council taxpayers' bills, like a discount, so the household pays less. The scheme has two parts a statutory scheme for pensioners and a non-statutory scheme that covers the working age population. These proposals impact only on the non-statutory elements of the scheme and do not affect the statutory scheme for pensioners.

Anyone who is liable for council tax (tenants and homeowners) can apply for council tax support.

The current local Council Tax Support scheme has been in place since April 2020. It is proposed to introduce a new scheme from 2025/26.

Council Tax Support (CTS) is a local scheme determined by the Council which provides assistance with Council Tax liabilities to households on low incomes. The objectives of the review are: -

- To maintain a scheme which is fair and simple to understand.
- To further align the scheme with Universal Credit and ensure the scheme is fit for future needs.
- To address any elements of the current scheme which are unsustainable or undesirable.
- To streamline administrative processes and reduce complexity for claimants.

Brent faces a significant challenge setting the budget for 2025/26 with a budget gap of c£16m. This is to be addressed through identifying further savings, efficiencies, and income generation options.

The changes being proposed will provide an option for Cabinet in addressing this budget gap. If the amendments to the Council Tax Support scheme are not approved by Full Council and no alternative savings can be identified, it is proposed to use £5m of reserves to cover the budget shortfall in 2025/26. As reserves can only be used once, £5m will have to be added to the budget gap in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and 2026/27 budget setting process.

Other reasons for the proposed changes to the scheme are:

- In the current scheme the income bands have remained static and not changed with CPI growth. The new proposed scheme will increase income bands and non-dependant income is in line with the increased CPI ensuring households do not fall out of support.
- The new proposed scheme ensures that households liable for Council tax and are on Universal Credit- the notification date from DWP is used to make the CTS award, ensuring households do not lose on entitlement. During 2025/26, additional working age households will be transferred to Universal Credit (UC). There is an opportunity to simplify the administration of the CTS scheme.

The costs of providing CTS under the current working age scheme is forecast to be £19.9m in 2024/25 rising to £21.2m in 2025/26. The proposed scheme options would be expected to reduce this by £8m, which would deliver savings of £5m. The remaining £3m will be utilised for a hardship fund of £1.5m and £1.5m to make a mandatory contribution to the Greater London Authority through the Mayor of London for their precept for 2025/26.

As well as proposals to make changes to the CTS scheme, the Council is also proposing to continue to use its policy under section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to further support households with their council tax bills. The Council will use its current mechanism of Households Support fund for households to apply for support with their council tax. Vulnerable groups will be identified using our data sets on Housing Benefits and Council tax support. The Council will work closely with external and internal stakeholders to provide holistic services with income maximisation and debt advice. The Council could further refine and promote available support options for residents struggling with council tax bills.

Pensioners will be unaffected by this change as their CTS will be calculated as prescribed by legislation. Pensioners will continue to receive full Council tax Support up to 100% of their council tax liability depending on their personal circumstances. Pension age is currently set at is 66 years.

The Council is considering changing the CTS scheme, for 'working age' claimants as the current scheme has become unaffordable in the current economic climate.

2025/26 proposal

The proposed changes to the CTS scheme, for 'working age' claimants is set out in option 2 below.

Option 1

No changes are made to the existing CTS scheme. If this is the preferred option, members will need to identify £5m of savings elsewhere within the Council's budget. This may have a detrimental impact on other services given the significant savings that are already planned.

If the amendments to the Council Tax Support scheme are not approved by Full Council, the budget for 2025/26 will not be a legally balanced budget and will therefore the proposal will be to use £5m of reserves to cover the budget shortfall in 2025/26. As reserves can only be used once, £5m will have to be added to the budget gap in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and 2026/27 budget setting process.

Option 2

- Introduce a standard 35% minimum payment for working age households and apply a percentage reduction to each of the income bands. This means all CTS claimants will be expected to contribute a minimum of 35% towards their Council Tax liability. Their CTS will then be calculated based on their income and this will determine which income band they fall into.
- Simplify the non-dependant charges and have just two flat rate non-dependant deductions for most households with other adults living in the property, £8 per week for non-dependants “out of work” and £20 per week for non-dependants “in work”. This would remove the need to verify income for non-dependants for CTS claims and reduce the administration burden.

Proposed Technical Administrative Changes

- Backdating will be restricted to 1 month.
- Accept Universal Credit notification from DWP as start date of claim for CTS.
- To increase/decrease the income bands in line with Consumer Pricing Index (CPI) from September of previous year.
- To increase/decrease the non-dependant charges in line with CPI from September of previous year.
- Review the section 13A policy for hardship fund for Council tax.

Other options that were taken into consideration that were not viable were:

- Minimum CTS award ranging from 20% to 65%.
- Maximum CTS to be capped to Band D
- Change the income bands.
- Apply a cap on a minimum award of CTS of £2/£5 per week.

The above options for various reasons were not viable as it would not give us the necessary savings needed, administratively would not be efficient and households impacted by the proposed changes would be significantly higher.

The proposals were subject to an 8-week public consultation which ran from 21 October to 15 December 2024, details around the findings are captured in section B and separately as part of the consultation findings that report that will accompany the new Council Tax Support Scheme proposal pack. Following public consultation, a decision on the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2025/26 will be made in March 2025 by Cabinet and Council.

2. Who may be affected by this policy or proposal?

Total population of Council Tax Support Scheme claimants

As of 2024/25 there were 135,000 properties within the borough with a Council Tax liability. At that time, Brent had 25,692 households receiving CTS, showing that 19.03% of total taxpayers receive Council Tax Support.

Of the 25,692 households receiving CTS, the breakdown of impacted groups is as follows: 8428 pensioners and 16,833 are working age. This information is provided in greater detail below:

Breakdown of current CTS scheme customer profile			
Type of customer	Number	Yearly (£)	% of Total
Pensioner Scheme			
Pensioner	8428	£12,901,452.70	39.29%
Working-Age Scheme (Employed)			
Single Person No Dependants	2996	£3,018,733.87	9.19%
Lone Parents	2472	£2,241,297.48	6.83%
Couples with no Dependants	488	£582,135.86	1.77%
Couples with Dependants	2039	£1,926,144.02	5.87%
Working-Age Scheme (Not employed)			
Single Person No Dependants	5413	£6,963,607.76	21.21%
Lone Parents	2308	£3,288,646.65	10.02%
Couples with no Dependants	436	£689,629.31	2.10%
Couples with Dependents	681	£1,222,023.06	3.72%
Total	25,692	£32,833,670.71	100%

Breakdown of working age CTS Scheme customer profile by age		
Age of Customer	Number	% of Total
18 to 25	490	2.91%
26 to 35	2531	15.04%
36 to 45	4144	24.62%
46 to 55	4701	27.93%
56+	4967	29.51%
Total	16833	100%

Breakdown of working age CTS scheme customer by gender		
Gender of Customer	Number	% of Total
Female	9416	55.94%
Male	7195	42.74%
Unknown	222	1.32%
Total	16833	100%

<u>Breakdown of working age CTS scheme customer by ethnicity</u>		
<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
White	2272	32.45%
Black or Black British	2067	29.52%
Asian or Asian British	1225	17.50%
Arab	762	10.88%
Mixed Background	430	6.14%
Any Other Ethnicity	205	2.92%
Prefer not to say	41	0.59%

Note: The ethnicity data above is based on 42% of the CTS application having provided their ethnicity data. 58% of the application was unknown.

Breakdown of working age CTS scheme customer by disability	Number	% of Total
Not in receipt of disability benefit	10056	59.74%
In receipt of disability benefit	6777	40.26%
Total	16833	100%

Pensioner Households

Pensioners (of state pensionable age 66 and above) will not be impacted by the proposed changes. Pensioners remain protected as CTS is still controlled nationally for this age group and can cover up to 100% of their CTS bill depending on the circumstances of the household. Therefore, there will be no impact on pensioners, or their council tax support awards and this group has not been considered as part of this equality impact assessment.

3. Is there relevance to equality and the Council's public sector equality duty? Please explain why. If your answer is no, you must still provide an explanation.

Yes. This proposal will have a negative impact on all groups with protected characteristics and a disproportionate impact cannot be ruled out completely. Most CTS claimants are female, indicating a potential disproportionate effect by gender. People between the ages of 46 and 66 make up most claimants, indicating this age group are also more likely to experience a disproportionate impact. Several mitigation actions have been addressed below as part of the consultation feedback.

Although socio-economic status is not a protected characteristic, most claimants in receipt of working-age council tax support under the current scheme fall into the lowest income category and receive the highest level of support. As a result, lower income households are likely to be more negatively impacted by the change, and there may be a disproportionate socioeconomic implication to consider.

4. Please indicate with an "X" the potential impact of the policy or proposal on groups with each protected characteristic. Carefully consider if the proposal will impact on people in different ways as a result of their characteristics.

Characteristic	Impact Positive	Impact Neutral/None	Impact Negative
Age			X
Sex			X
Race			X
Disability			X
Sexual orientation			X
Gender reassignment			X
Religion or belief			X
Pregnancy or maternity			X
Marriage			X

5. Please complete **each row** of the checklist with an “X.”

Screening Checklist

	YES	NO
Have you established that the policy or proposal <i>is</i> relevant to the Council’s public sector equality duty?	X	
Does the policy or proposal relate to an area with known inequalities?	X	
Would the policy or proposal change or remove services used by vulnerable groups of people?	X	
Has the potential for negative or positive equality impacts been identified with this policy or proposal?	X	

If you have answered YES to ANY of the above, then proceed to section B.

If you have answered NO to ALL of the above, then proceed straight to section D.

SECTION B – IMPACTS ANALYSIS

1. Outline what information and evidence have you gathered and considered for this analysis. If there is little, then explain your judgements in detail and your plans to validate them with evidence. If you have monitoring information available, include it here.

The current scheme pays CTS entitlement based on income brackets & non-dependant deductions. Under the current scheme, claimants; in some circumstances, can receive up to a 100% reduction on their Council Tax bill. Detailed equalities analyses have been made for the current scheme and found that the scheme impacts are in general spread evenly across protected and non-protected groups.

Currently, claimants must provide information around their age, gender, and disability status as this is a requirement for processing claims. There are also optional fields for claimants to share their ethnicity/race. Hence, we have robust quantitative insights around these characteristics and not others.

To ensure we capture all characteristics, we will be changing our application form to ensure these are included.

Under the scheme’s current design, a large number of claimants in receipt of working-age council tax support fall under the lowest income category and receive the highest amounts of support. Consequently, this is the group or income bracket where a significant proportion of the savings are required to be derived from. Therefore, whilst the intention remains that the impacts of this change are not disproportionately felt by any particular group there may be a disproportionate socioeconomic implication to consider due to lower income households being more negatively impacted by the change.

It is worth noting that there are also several statutory requirements that all local CTS schemes must be able to demonstrate (e.g. that they “incentivise work”).

Once again, the intention is that impacts are not disproportionately felt by any group. This analysis considers the impacts of the proposed new scheme on groups of claimants with protected characteristics and discusses the policy intentions behind the scheme design which may have resulted in these impacts, within the main part of the report and in its Conclusion.

There are two key changes as part of the proposed new scheme: -

1. All CTS claimants will be expected to contribute a minimum of 35% towards their Council Tax liability. Their Council Tax Support award will then be calculated based on their income and which band they fall into. All income band award percentages would be reduced as per table below:

Income per week between	Current Scheme	Proposed
£0-£80	100%	65%
£80-£110	80%	50%
£110-£150	50%	30%
£150-£250	30%	20%
£250+	0%	0%

2. A non-dependant deduction is an amount of money taken from Council Tax Support entitlement because there is a non-dependant adult living in the household. A non-dependant is someone aged 18 and over who normally lives within the household such as an adult daughter, son, relative or friend.

Non-dependant charges would be simplified to have either an £8 or £20 non-dependant charge based on whether non-dependant is in work or out of work as per the tables below.

These charges reflect the expectation that non-dependants contribute to the household expenses, including council tax.

Current Scheme

Non-dependant's income	Deduction per week
Not working	£5
Working (includes Carer's Allowance income) - income up to £150 per week	£10
Working - income between £150 and £200 per week	£15
Working - income over £200 per week	£20

Proposed Scheme

Explanation	Proposed Non-Dependant Charge
Not In Work	£8
In Work	£20

Our current non dependant breakdown shows 2806 non dependants are not working and 1328 non dependants are working.

Consultation

The consultation outcome report has been published separately comprised of a more comprehensive set of findings. Key components emerging from the report are captured below.

A wide variety of methods were used as part of the consultation process with the aim of ensuring the approach was inclusive of all groups including those claimants and non-claimants of CTS.

Overall, there were 397 responses to the consultation of which 176 were currently in receipt of CTS. Although the number of responses was low in comparison with the volume of communications that were issued, this appears to be above the national response level experienced by the majority of Councils who have consulted since the introduction of CTS and is also a higher level than when the last CTS consultation was undertaken in 2019 when only 194 were received.

In relation to high level information around the characteristics of the respondents (see more detail in the full report):

- Age: most respondents were aged 31-40 (24.9%), 41-50 (24.9%), 51-60 (22.6%), 60+ (14.2%).
- Sex: Female (50.4%); Male (38.3%).
- Ethnicity: White British (23.2%), prefer not to say (20.3%), Asian / Asian British / Indian (12.3%), White European (9.2%), Black / Black British / African (7.7%), Black / Black British / Caribbean (7.5%).
- Religion: Christian (25.9%), prefer not to say (25.2%), no religion (23.7%), Muslim (13.1%), Hindu (7.4%).
- Sexual orientation: Heterosexual / straight (67.9%), prefer not to say (24.5%).

The Council followed best practice guidelines by undertaking an 8-week public and stakeholder consultation, between 21 October 2024 and 15 December 2024. Consultation activities included: -

- Questionnaire on Council website promoted via email and letter to all claimants, and all other households.
- Direct engagement by email and letter with Brent Hub partners and CAB with offer to attend dedicated meetings with each organisation.
- Direct engagement by email and letter with partners with offer to attend dedicated meetings with each organisation.
- Direct engagement with the Greater London Authority, Citizens Advice, Disability Forum, and Community event with Adult Social Care

- Drop-in sessions (in all 6 Libraries across the borough)
- Banners in Customer Service Centre, Libraries and at all events.
- Leaflets with consultation link and barcode to respond to consultation.
- Help to complete consultation available at all public buildings e.g. Customer Service Centre, Hubs, Turning point.
- Stakeholder forums to obtain feedback and input from voluntary sector and community organisations.
- Mailbox set up for CTS-related comments and queries.
- Promoting consultation via auto reply message for Council Tax & CTS emails
- Direct engagement by attend Brent Connect meetings.
- Consultation published in the voluntary sector newsletter.
- Face to face engagement in the Customer Service Centre
- Staff engagement

Appendix A captures the impact of the proposed scheme changes by equality characteristics. This has been further broken down into households with and without a non-dependant. This is to demonstrate the varying impact on those households affected by one or both of the proposed scheme changes.

Socio-economic deprivation

As socio-economic deprivation is not captured in section B.2 this provides a brief outline of implications around this characteristic.

The Equality Act 2010 includes a socio-economic duty (section 1) which states that certain public bodies, when making strategic decisions, must consider how their decisions might help to reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage. However, the UK Government has not implemented Section 1 in England and the duty remains non-binding in England.

Council Tax Support in the main is targeted at households that are financially disadvantaged to support the payment of Council Tax and therefore any change to this scheme is expected to have a negative impact on households that are socio-economically disadvantaged.

In relation to the consultation, respondents who claim benefits were significantly less likely to agree with the proposals than respondents who do not claim benefits. Across all six proposals, respondents who claim benefits were more likely to disagree (than agree) that the Council should implement the change.

When asked to identify the potential negative impact on their households, respondents raised concerns that increases in the amount of council tax due would exacerbate existing financial strains, result in heightened debt, increased poverty, and compromises in meeting essential needs, and negatively impact on overall quality of life and mental health. Respondents also raised concerns about the inability to pay council tax without sacrificing other necessities such as food and heating.

There is also a discretionary element to the proposed scheme, whereby the Council Taxpayer's liability may be reduced further if they are experiencing exceptional hardship or are impacted by extraordinary circumstances.

These reductions are made under Section 13A(1)(a) and (2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (the 1992 Act) to:

- a) A person whom the authority considers to be in financial need,
 b) Or persons in classes consisting of persons whom the authority considers to be, in general, in financial need.

2. For each “protected characteristic” provide details of all the potential or known impacts identified, both positive and negative, and explain how you have reached these conclusions based on the information and evidence listed above. Where appropriate state “not applicable.”

AGE

Details of impacts identified	
	<p>The proposed change will impact negatively on working age CTS claimants. However, based on the findings from other London authorities who have implemented the same or higher reductions, we do not anticipate the impact to be significant.</p> <p>This proposal would mean working age claimants would have an estimated additional £9.15 on average per week to pay in Council tax.</p> <p>However, within the scope of the 2025/26 scheme, there is a Council Tax Discretionary policy to enable the Council to consider cases of hardship which will help mitigate any negative impacts. The assessment will be similar to the Resident Support Fund discretionary award looking at households’ circumstances e.g. flood, fire, terminal illness, financial support through Credit Union, debt advice and income maximisation.</p> <p>Evidence: At present approximately 66.64% of Council Tax Support claimants are working age and 33.36% are pension age.</p> <p>For comparison, the working age population (18 – 66 years) in Brent is approximately 86.83% and the pension age population (67 and over) is 13.17%.</p> <p>The proposed changes mean that all working age CTS claimants for the purposes of the scheme will have to pay at least 35% towards their Council Tax.</p> <p><u>Pensioners</u> (those at state pension age)</p> <p>Pensioners are a protected group (prescribed by central government) for the purposes of the council tax support scheme so will not be financially affected; all changes in CTS entitlement affect only working age claimants.</p> <p><u>Working age</u></p> <p>The data shows that those claimants aged 56 or above (29.51%) are more likely to be affected by the proposals compared to those aged 18 to 25 and 26 to 35 (2.91% and 15.04% respectively).</p>

When compared to the total borough working age population aged 56 or above (14.49%), the number is almost double for those in receipt of CTS (29.51%). This proposal is therefore more likely to have an impact on this group.

DISABILITY

Details of impacts identified

If the proposals are approved, disabled people who are of working age will also be negatively affected. This is because they are disproportionately represented amongst working age claimants who receive a reduction in Council Tax support.

Support is also in place through the Council Tax Discretionary policy for those who suffer hardship because of these proposals in order to mitigate any negative impacts.

Pension age Council Tax Support claimants are not affected by these proposals.

It is worth noting that 774 households who have adaptations made to their property receive disabled relief for their Council tax. This means their Council tax band is reduced by a band e.g. someone is Band D, who receives a disabled relief has their liability reduced to Band C.

Evidence:

In terms of Council Tax Support, disabled claimants are defined as people who receive Personal Independence Payment, Disability living allowance, Attendance Allowance or Universal Credit- Health allowance.

The data shows that 44.96% of CTS scheme working age claimants are in receipt of disability related benefits and will be directly affected by the proposals.

The Council recognises the barriers disabled people face and seek to address them by disregarding Disability Living Allowance, Universal Credit Health allowance awards, and Attendance Allowance in the calculation of Council Tax Support. This often increases the amount of Council Tax Support a disabled person is entitled to.

Currently, there are premiums for severe disability, enhanced disability, and a disabled child rate. Such premiums are granted when Housing Benefits applicants receive a relevant disability related benefit granted and administered by the Department for Work & Pensions.

Disabled people who are unable to work receive higher levels of state benefits and while based on the proposals they will be subject to the 35% liability reduction, disabled working age claimants are likely to have a higher income than other unemployed, working age claimants whose council tax support will also be reduced.

RACE

<p>Details of impacts identified</p>	<p>Our data shows that BAME claimants are slightly over-represented amongst working age claimants receiving Council Tax Support. There could be a negative impact of the proposals on people from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups.</p> <p>Support is in place through the Council Tax Discretionary policy for those who suffer hardship because of these proposals in order to mitigate any negative impacts.</p> <p>Evidence: The table above (see point 2) shows the figures for the breakdown of Brent by ethnicity/race and for Benefits claimants where they have supplied this information.</p> <p>The data indicates that the largest ethnic group of claimants for CTS are White at 25.07% which is below the total White borough working age population of 34.6%. BME people make up 51.75% of claimants which is below the total BME borough working age population of 65.4%.</p> <p>As data is unavailable for 58% of claimants and the race breakdown is not provided, it is not possible to analyse the impact with any statistical significance.</p>
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SEX

<p>Details of impacts identified</p>	<p>Due to the fact that only one claim is submitted per household, it is difficult to fully consider the implications the proposals will have on this protected characteristic.</p> <p>However, equalities monitoring indicates that a higher percentage of claims (55.94%) are made by females (married and single titles) compared with males. We also know that lone parents, part-time workers, and carers are more likely to be women. According to our working-age Council Tax Support data women make up 94.33% of lone parents in receipt of Council Tax Support.</p> <p>The proposals are therefore considered to have a disproportionate impact on women.</p> <p>Support is in place through the Council Tax Discretionary policy for those who suffer hardship because of these proposals in order to mitigate any negative impacts.</p> <p>Evidence: The table above (see point 2) shows the figures for the breakdown of Brent by gender where they have supplied this information.</p>
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SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Details of impacts identified	<p>We do not collect regular information on this characteristic, and it is not required to process, administer, and monitor the Local Council Tax Support Scheme. Therefore, there is less information available to detail the impacts on this characteristic when compared to age, disability, race, and sex.</p> <p>That said, the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support scheme are not expected to have a differential impact on the grounds of sexual orientation.</p> <p>As the updated scheme is implemented, we will continue to monitor any implications for specific characteristics and will adapt accordingly.</p>
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PREGANCY AND MATERNITY

Details of impacts identified	<p>We do not collect regular information on this characteristic, and it is not required to process, administer, and monitor the Local Council Tax Support Scheme. Therefore, there is less information available to detail the impacts on this characteristic when compared to age, disability, race, and sex.</p> <p>The proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme may negatively impact people who are pregnant or who have recently had a baby. In particular, the proposal to increase the minimum payment. This group may have less ability to increase their income, for example by increasing hours at work due to childcare responsibilities.</p> <p>As the updated scheme is implemented, we will continue to monitor any implications for specific characteristics and will adapt accordingly.</p>
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RELIGION OR BELIEF

Details of impacts identified	<p>We do not collect regular information on this characteristic, and it is not required to process, administer, and monitor the Local Council Tax Support Scheme. Therefore, there is less information available to detail the impacts on this characteristic when compared to age, disability, race, and sex.</p> <p>That said, the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support scheme are not expected to have a differential impact on the grounds of religion.</p> <p>As the updated scheme is implemented, we will continue to monitor any implications for specific characteristics and will adapt accordingly.</p>
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GENDER REASSIGNMENT

Details of impacts identified	<p>We do not collect regular information on this characteristic, and it is not required to process, administer, and monitor the Local Council Tax Support Scheme. Therefore, there is less information available to detail the impacts on this characteristic when compared to age, disability, race, and sex.</p> <p>That said, the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support scheme are not expected to have a differential impact on the grounds of gender reassignment.</p> <p>As the updated scheme is implemented, we will continue to monitor any implications for specific characteristics and will adapt accordingly.</p>
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MARRIAGE & CIVIL PARTNERSHIP

Details of impacts identified	<p>We do not collect regular information on this characteristic, and it is not required to process, administer, and monitor the Local Council Tax Support Scheme. Therefore, there is less information available to detail the impacts on this characteristic when compared to age, disability, race, and sex.</p> <p>That said, the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support scheme are not expected to have a differential impact on the grounds of marriage and civil partnership.</p> <p>As the updated scheme is implemented, we will continue to monitor any implications for specific characteristics and will adapt accordingly.</p>
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3. Could any of the impacts you have identified be unlawful under the Equality Act 2010?

The impacts identified in this EIA are not unlawful under the Equality Act, as the changes to the Council Tax Support scheme apply universally and are not explicitly targeted at any specific group.

The Act requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different groups. Disproportionate impacts on protected groups must be justified to show they are a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. As such, this EIA includes:

1. A justification for the changes, showing that they are necessary and proportionate.
2. An explanation of measures available to minimise or address the disproportionate impacts, including the Council Tax Discretionary policy to enable the Council to consider cases of hardship.
3. A commitment to ongoing monitoring and engagement with affected groups to ensure compliance with equality obligations.

The proposed changes to the council tax support scheme are expected to have a disproportionate negative impact on working age adults, people with a disability, women, people who are pregnant or in the maternity period, people from an ethnic minority group and people who are socio-economically disadvantaged, and any particular disadvantage is justified for the reasons set out above in this report. The Council is pursuing the legitimate aim of balancing the Council's budget in the context of the anticipated required savings, so that the Council can continue to deliver statutory services. With uncertain Government funding, economic conditions, increasing demand for services and a forecast significant reduction in reserves the Council has had to consider a range of options to bridge the funding gap and enable us to set a balanced budget and continue to deliver statutory services. The proposals are proportionate in light of those budgetary pressures, given the steps taken to limit council tax payments for these groups, and the mitigating measures set out below. This proposal asks all residents to contribute towards Council services that they benefit from. For the same reasons, the Council considers that reasonable adjustments have been made in the revised scheme and mitigating measures to limit any disadvantage suffered by disabled persons. Given the need to make savings and balance the budget, it is not reasonable to go further and reduce still further the council tax that should be paid by this cohort.

The need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic.

As highlighted above, most working-age claimants will be required to contribute more towards their council tax. Claimants would therefore be expected to have reduced disposable income which may mean they are less able to participate in public life and community activities, for example leisure activities, groups, clubs, and organisations.

The need to foster good relations between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic.

We do not anticipate that the proposals will have any impact on the Council's ability to foster good relations.

4. Were the participants in any engagement initiatives representative of the people who will be affected by your proposal and is further engagement required?

Yes, directly as part of the overall consultation exercise on the council's budget proposals. Secondly as part of an 8-week public consultation which includes contact with all current benefit claimants as well as other households, voluntary groups, and stakeholders.

Stakeholders in this assessment and what is their interest in it?

Stakeholders	Interest
Council Tax Support Claimants	To ensure any changes to the scheme are applied in a fair and transparent manner following a full consultation process.
Local interest groups have been contacted and drop-in sessions arranged/offered e.g. HUB partners, Brent Connect, Voluntary Organisations, Members of Disability forum etc.	<p>These groups may work with the affected claimants and will need to have the right information to provide support and advice.</p> <p>Drop-in sessions across all Brent Libraries were publicised on our website and correspondence to claimants.</p>
Brent households	Not implementing the scheme may put increased financial pressures on other Council services which may have an impact on some Brent households.
Heads of Revenues and Benefits	To ensure any changes to the scheme are applied in a fair and transparent manner following a full consultation process.
Corporate Director of Finance	To ensure any changes to the scheme are applied in a fair and transparent manner following a full consultation process and that the administration of the scheme is providing value for money to the Council and Brent households.
Chief Executive	To ensure any changes to the scheme are applied in a fair and transparent manner following a full consultation process and that the administration of the scheme is providing value for money to the Council and Brent households.
Cabinet Member for Finance	To ensure any changes to the scheme are applied in a fair and transparent manner following a full consultation process and that the administration of the scheme is providing value for money to the Council and Brent households.
Council Cabinet	To ensure any changes to the scheme are applied in a fair and transparent manner following a full consultation process and that the administration of the scheme is providing value for money to the Council and Brent households.
Leader of the Council	To ensure any changes to the scheme are applied in a fair and transparent manner following a full consultation process and that the administration of

	the scheme is providing value for money to the Council and Brent households.
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The feedback and findings from the consultation exercise will be published in a report to Full Council in February 2025.

5. Please detail any areas identified as requiring further data or detailed analysis.

Prior to Full Council determining the final scheme design in February 2025, the EIA will be reviewed and updated if appropriate.

6. If, following your action plan, negative impacts will or may remain, please explain how these can be justified?

The proposed changes to the current CTS scheme will have a disproportionate impact on low income working age households because CTS support is designed for low income working age households.

Any disadvantage is justified for the reasons set out in the consultation paper. The Council is pursuing the aim of reducing the Council's budget gap of £16m for 2025/26 so that the Council can continue to deliver key statutory services. With uncertain funding from central Government, high inflation over the past 2 years, increasing demand for services and a forecast reduction in reserves, the Council has had to consider a range of options to bridge the funding gap and enable us to set a balanced budget and continue to deliver statutory services. The proposals are considered proportionate considering the budgetary pressures being faced by the Council. Working-age claimants will be required to contribute towards their Council Tax. The increased cost may mean claimants are less able to participate in public life and community activities.

The consultation collective comments and suggestions to the proposal are listed below:

- Lower the Minimum Payment: Reducing the current 35% minimum council tax payment, one of the highest in the UK, would help alleviate financial pressure on residents.
- Recognise Financial Vulnerability: Eligibility for CTS already indicates financial hardship and should be considered before enforcement actions are taken.
- Expand Discretionary Support: Making greater use of the Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy could offer critical relief to those most in need.
- Enhance Awareness of Support: The Council could further refine and promote available support options for residents struggling with council tax bills.

Maintain Flexible Backdating Rules: Retaining the current backdating policy, which allows claims to be backdated to the start of the financial year for valid reasons, would ensure continued support for vulnerable residents. Having considered all above, in terms of mitigations, if anyone affected by the changes is struggling to afford the increase in their

Council Tax charge, they would be able to approach the Council for financial assistance. The Council proposes to set aside £1.5m to further support households under the Section 13A Discretionary Policy, where justified this will mean reducing households' council tax charge.

The Council operates through its Community Hubs, Libraries and Family Well-being Centres a holistic approach to welfare, financial support, and income maximisation for its households. This includes debt and budgeting advice. It will ensure that households who approach our services are advised appropriately and provided the correct financial support to avoid further debt.

The Council through its referral routes with voluntary partners and external organisations will proactively reach out to them providing additional support and signposting appropriately. Our strong relationship with the Health and Wellbeing teams, social prescribers and Adult Social Care teams will allow the Council to provide support for households struggling to pay and need financial aid.

Maintaining the Cost-of-Living information on the Council website to provide residents with information on help with housing costs, debts and bills, extra income, saving energy and help with food.

Working with voluntary and community sector organisations to promote the Hardship Fund. Supporting residents to maximise the application of council tax regulations, where reductions are based on circumstances that are not financial but based on non-financial circumstances e.g., disabled relief (based on adaptations to the property that can reduce the council tax liability to the equivalent to one band lower) and severely mentally impaired exemptions (based on doctor's certification and the award of appropriate disability benefits).

These are sometimes not claimed where Council Tax Support based on financial circumstances are claimed so these options may now become more beneficial to mitigate the impact in the reduced support. The Council will work with relevant voluntary groups and the Learning Disability Partnership Board to improve awareness and take up of these provisions.

Maintaining the principle that the Council Tax Support financial assessment for those with disabilities is based on higher applicable amounts and premiums (the Government assessment of need). This results in a higher award of Council Tax Support when compared with a household with no disability. Similarly, if in receipt of Universal Credit or legacy passported benefits such as Income Support, Income based

There is also a discretionary element to the proposed scheme, whereby the Council Taxpayer's liability may be reduced further if they are experiencing exceptional hardship or are impacted by extraordinary circumstances.

These reductions are made under Section 13A(1)(a) and (2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (the 1992 Act) to:

- a) A person whom the authority considers to be in financial need,

- b) Or persons in classes consisting of persons whom the authority considers to be, in general, in financial need.

The proposed Council Tax Support scheme has been reviewed for its effect on groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act, and a detailed Equalities Assessment has been prepared and is included in Appendix C

7. Outline how you will monitor the actual, ongoing impact of the policy or proposal?

CTS caseload and expenditure will be monitored monthly during 2025/26.

Impacts on groups with protected characteristics will be monitored, through Council Tax Collection rates, Section 13A Discretionary applications and issues raised by households.

The Council is required to review its CTS scheme each year and to agree its scheme for the following year by 11 March of the preceding financial year. The scheme review for 2025/26 will include a full refresh of the EIA to establish whether there have been any unforeseen impacts which require addressing for 2026/27.

SECTION C - CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis above, please detail your overall conclusions. State if any mitigating actions are required to alleviate negative impacts, what these are and what the desired outcomes will be. If positive equality impacts have been identified, consider what actions you can take to enhance them. If you have decided to justify and continue with the policy despite negative equality impacts, provide your justification. If you are to stop the policy, explain why.

The Council has taken care to review and update the CTS Scheme and to ensure that it is simple, efficient and has regards to the requirements made under the Government's statement of intent.

The proposal to introduce a minimum award amount has been developed to deliver a simpler, less administratively burdensome CTS scheme while reducing the overall cost of the scheme.

The proposal to have two flat rate non-dependant deduction is to reduce the administrative burden, however this will have an indirect impact on the applicant as it is assumed that the non-dependant will increase their contribution towards the Council Tax bill.

If anyone affected by the changes is struggling to afford the increase in their Council Tax charge, they would be able to approach the Council for financial assistance. The Council proposes to set aside £1.5m to further support households under the Section 13A Discretionary Policy, where justified this will mean reducing households' council tax liability to zero.

The proposed changes will not affect pensioners. This is mandatory as legislation prescribes that CTS schemes in respect of pensioners must adhere to one national scheme.

This proposal will deliver £5m of savings to the Council's budget from 2025/26, which will help to protect front line services such as adult social care and children's services from further significant reductions.

The Council is proposing to make these changes which will be adopted 1 April 2025 and will be in place for the duration of 2025/26, during which time its impact will be monitored.

SECTION D – RESULT

Please select one of the following options. Mark with an "X."

A	CONTINUE WITH THE POLICY/PROPOSAL UNCHANGED	
B	JUSTIFY AND CONTINUE THE POLICY/PROPOSAL	X
C	CHANGE / ADJUST THE POLICY/PROPOSAL	
D	STOP OR ABANDON THE POLICY/PROPOSAL	

SECTION E - ACTION PLAN

This will help you monitor the steps you have identified to reduce the negative impacts (or increase the positive); monitor actual or ongoing impacts; plan reviews and any further engagement or analysis required.

Action	Expected outcome	Officer	Completion Date
Public and stakeholder consultation	Better understand potential impacts and incorporate mitigating actions for negative impacts.	Peter Cosgrove/ Asha Vyas/Sunita Ghudial	15 December 2024
Ensuring that changes to the scheme are communicated in an accessible way to claimants with an information or communication need e.g. caused by a disability or language barrier.	That claimants with information or communication needs are assisted where necessary so that they fully understand the change and any potentially potential impacts; and that they are less likely	Peter Cosgrove/ Asha Vyas/ Sunita Ghudial	January – March 2025

	to fall into Council Tax arrears as a result.		
Ensure that the discretionary aspect of the new scheme is utilised where appropriate to prevent hardship. This includes ensuring that staff training equips officers with the awareness to identify where a discretionary payment may be appropriate, and how such requests should be assessed.	<p>Officers identify and promote the discretionary aspect where appropriate.</p> <p>Claimants in hardship are given additional assistance where appropriate.</p> <p>Claimants are less likely to fall into Council Tax arrears and have action taken against them through no fault of their own.</p> <p>Claimants do not suffer from unforeseen consequences arising from the change to the new scheme.</p>	Peter Cosgrove / Asha Vyas/ Sunita Ghudial	April 2025 – March 2026
To investigate opportunities to improve equality monitoring data in the future and to use this to inform decisions about scheme design in future years	To further improve the design of any future scheme based on additional data and impact analysis	Sunita Ghudial / Asha Vyas	April 2025 ongoing
To closely monitor the impacts of the new scheme on claimants; expenditure; Council Tax collection and age debt analysis and complaints and other indicators, particularly during the first year of operation	To further improve the design of the scheme in future years based on additional data and impact analysis.	Sunita Ghudial / Peter Cosgrove/Asha Vyas	April 2025 – March 2026 and ongoing

SECTION F – SIGN OFF

Please ensure this section is signed and dated.

OFFICER:	Sunita Ghudial
REVIEWING OFFICER: <i>* The manager with oversight of the</i>	Tom Pickup/Asha Vyas



**Operational
Director:**

Thomas Cattermole