None of these changes will affect pensioners
Play your part. Please complete this questionnaire by 17th October 2012.

Introduction
From 1 April 2013, the Government has decided to replace Council Tax Benefit with a new scheme called Council Tax Support which will be set by local Councils instead of the Government. This means that every Local Council in the Country has to design its own scheme. The money for running the new scheme has been cut by 10% which means a shortfall of an estimated £2.5 million to help low income households in Buckinghamshire.

Everyone needs to know and understand what these changes mean. The Council has worked out how the new scheme might work, but would like the views of its residents before putting this in place.

The council tax benefit/support schemes are quite complicated. To help you understand the terms mentioned in this survey a document called “Council Tax Support” has been written which explains the options in more detail. You might find it helpful to read this before completing this survey. You can access this document through the following link: Council Tax Support scheme

Principles
Our preferred option aims to limit the impact of the Government’s reduction on the most vulnerable households and keep the switch as simple as possible. The Council’s preference is to have a scheme where all claimants make a contribution towards their Council Tax. Those of pensionable age and vulnerable people are protected, and will receive the same amount of discount as they did under Council Tax Benefit. We aim to have a discretionary fund so that we can give extra benefit in exceptional circumstances.

There are three options which we are considering:

**Option 1** - With the exception of pensioners and vulnerable people all claimants of working age will have to make a contribution towards their Council Tax of about 20%.

**Option 2** - A combination of:
- All claimants of working age (excluding pensioners and vulnerable people) will have to make a contribution towards their Council Tax (20%); and
- Specific cuts in benefit for some groups.

**Option 3** - Don’t make any changes to the amount of benefits paid. Instead the loss of money from Central Government could be funded by cutting services and/or putting up Council Tax for all residents. As a guide this could put up Council Tax by around £13.00 per year, or 25p a week, for an average Band D property.
Wycombe DC’s preferred option

Wycombe’s preferred draft scheme is option 2, based on the principles below:

- Pensioners and vulnerable people will be protected from any change in their council tax benefit
- All non protected claimants will make a contribution (possibly 20%) towards their council tax.
- Anyone with savings over £6,000 will not qualify for Council Tax support
- Removal of the second adult rebate
- Removal of backdating
- Combatting fraud
- Retention of incentives to work

Support will be in the form of a discount to Council Tax bills, with entitlement assessed by a means test so that people with the least money will receive the most help. The means test will be based on income, savings and needs similar to how Council Tax Benefit is worked out now. Wycombe District Council is suggesting that a discretionary fund is set up to help the most vulnerable residents get extra support in exceptional circumstances. The scheme will support people moving into work, and on low pay.

Before a final decision is made we would like the views of our residents. Full details and impacts of all the options are set out in the accompanying leaflet "Council Tax Support". To help us make the final decision please complete this survey:

All working age people should pay something towards their Council Tax

Currently we are able to help people on the lowest incomes by paying all of their Council Tax (100%). Under the new Council Tax Support scheme, everyone of working age who now gets Council Tax Benefit would pay about an extra 20% of their full Council Tax. This would be on top of whatever level of Council Tax they are already paying.

Example - A couple with no children, who have an annual council tax of £1,438.35. The couple are both unemployed and are in receipt of Employment Support Allowance.

Under current arrangements this couple would receive £1,438.35 per year in Council Tax Benefit. They therefore have to pay nothing towards their council tax themselves.

These proposals would see the couple receiving £1,150.68 support per year, meaning they would have to now pay £287.67 per year towards their council tax themselves.

Q1. Do you agree with the principle that people of working age will have to make a contribution towards their Council Tax (approximately 20%)?

- Definitely agree
- Tend to agree
- Tend to disagree
- Definitely disagree
- Don't know / not sure
Reducing the savings limit to £6,000
At present, a person is not entitled to Council Tax Benefit if their savings and investments are £16,000 or above. This includes savings and investments of a partner. Under our proposals, working age people with savings and investments of £6,000 and above would not be entitled to any Council Tax Support.

Example - A single person lives in a band D property with an annual council tax of £1,438.35 per year. They have £8,000 savings in the bank.

Currently, this person would receive a single person discount of £359.59 per year and also £1,078.76 per year in Council Tax Benefit. They therefore have to pay nothing towards their Council Tax themselves.

Under these proposals this person would still receive a single person discount of £359.59 per year, but would not qualify for support as their savings were higher than the limit. They would therefore now have to pay £1,078.76 per year towards their council tax. They would however be able to claim support once their savings fell to less than £6,000.

Q2. Do you agree that the amount of savings a person has before they get benefit should be reduced from £16,000?

- Yes
- No

If "Yes", what should that limit be?

- £12,000
- £8,000
- £6,000
- £4,000
- £2,000 or less

Abolishing Second Adult Rebate
Currently, under the Council Tax Benefit scheme, Second Adult Rebate can be given when there is one person in a property who should pay Council Tax but they live with someone over the age of 18 on a low income (not a partner, lodger or tenant). Council Tax Benefit of up to 25 per cent can be given without the main person’s income being taken into account regardless of their income. Under our proposals, Second Adult Rebate would be abolished for working age people and Council Tax Support would only be considered by taking both incomes into account.

Example - A person earning £75,000 a year lives with their child over 18 years of age who is no longer in full time education and claiming job seekers allowance. They live in a band C property with an annual charge of £1,278.54.

Currently this person receives a second adult rebate of £319.63 per year, and therefore has to pay £958.91 per year towards their council tax.

If we withdraw second adult rebate this person would now be liable to pay the full charge of £1,278.54.

Q3. Do you agree with the principle that second adult rebates should no longer be given?

- Yes
- No
Work Incentives
The Government expects Councils to make sure that their Council Tax Support schemes ensure people get more income by working than they do on benefit. This is quite a complicated issue and more details can be found in the "Council Tax Support Scheme" leaflet. The current Council Tax Benefit scheme already makes an allowance for this by gradually reducing benefit as income increases. For this reason the Council plans to use the same rules for Council Tax support.

Q4. Do you agree that the Council should continue to use the work incentives in the current Council Tax Benefit scheme?
- Yes
- No

Payment of Council Tax Support will start from the date the claim is made
Currently, Council Tax Benefit rules allow for up to 26 weeks backdating if there is 'good cause' why the claim for benefit was not made sooner. The proposed scheme will not include an option to backdate claims before the date an application is made.

Example - A couple make a claim for benefit in May, but want their claim to be paid from April. They didn't apply in April because they had other things to do at the time.

Under this proposal their claim would commence from May. However if there were extreme circumstances as to why they could not make their claim earlier they could be awarded extra support from the discretionary fund (see section F below).

Q5. Do you agree that payment for Council Tax Support should only be made from the date that the claim form is received (this means no backdating)?
- Yes
- No

Extra support in exceptional cases
Under our draft Council Tax Support scheme, a new discretionary fund would enable Wycombe District Council to provide a 'safety net' to ensure that where there is exceptional need, support can still be given. We recognise that the circumstances of some of our working age customers mean that further help will be necessary and that is why we want to include this proposal.

Example - A single person has been in hospital since April following an accident and as a result was unable to apply for Council Tax Support on time. He cannot earn any money whilst in hospital. He makes a claim in June when he gets out of hospital. As he has been in hospital he could not be expected to make his claim on time and so he can apply for extra help for the period when he was in hospital.

Q6. Do you agree that there should be a discretionary fund to help the most vulnerable residents get extra support in exceptional circumstances?
- Yes
- No
Combatting Fraud
It will be part of the qualifying conditions of the new scheme that claimants will have a duty to report changes in their circumstances (such as starting work, a partner moving in or an increase in their income) within 1 month of the change occurring.

Where a claimant does not do this they may lose benefit as a result.

Q7. Do you agree that if claimants do not notify the Council of changes in income within 1 month, then they may lose benefit as a result?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

Vulnerable people
Vulnerable people will be protected from changes, but we have to define which groups of people are vulnerable. We think people who get the following awards should be treated as vulnerable.

Q8. Do you agree that people who get the following awards should be treated as vulnerable? Please see document Council Tax Support scheme (LINK) for more details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability Living Allowance lower rate mobility component</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Living Allowance higher rate mobility component</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disability Living Allowance low rate care component</td>
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<td>Disability Living Allowance medium rate care component</td>
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<td>Disability Living Allowance higher rate care component</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment Support Allowance support component</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>War disablement pension</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War widows pension</td>
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<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are there any other vulnerable groups that you consider should be treated as vulnerable?
Q9. Is there anything else you would like to say about the options in questions 1-8?

Potential alternatives (but not the Council’s preferred options)

The Council has also looked at other changes, but does not plan to make these. We would like to know if you agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Putting up Council Tax for ALL residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We are proposing a new scheme that aims to be fair to all residents in the current climate of reduced funding. We will need to make savings to make up for this shortfall. To do that we are proposing that if a household qualifies for Council Tax Support, the maximum benefit will be around 80% of the council tax bill. This does not apply to pensioners and vulnerable people who will be protected. If we do not do this it would mean less money for other services and/or an increase in the amount of council tax that everyone in the district pays.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q10. Do you think the Council should cut services and/or put up Council Tax for all residents instead of reducing the amount of support it gives to Claimants?

- Yes
- No

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capping Council Tax support at Band D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently there are no restrictions on the amount of Council Tax Benefit that can be paid. This means that a person on a low income could get all their Council Tax paid even if they live in a large house with a high Council Tax band. The lowest band is A, with the highest being H. This change would limit this to the band D charge, which is the average band. So, if you live in a band E, F, G or H property, your Council Tax Support would be reduced to that of a band D householder.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example** - A couple on Job Seekers Allowance with 4 children live in a band F property with an annual charge of £2,077.62. Currently they would receive £2,077.62 per year and would therefore have nothing to pay towards their council tax.

Under the proposed scheme they would have their entitlement restricted to a band D and would receive support of £1,438.35 towards their council tax charge, meaning they would have to pay £639.27 per year.

Q11. Do you believe there should be a benefit cap at band D?

- Yes
- No
Minimum Council Tax Support award of £5 per week
This means that small amounts of support of less than £5 per week would not be granted. The council does not currently intend to do this because, when combined with the proposal to limit benefit to 80%, it would mean that these customers will face a double cut in benefit. It is also likely that claimants with these small awards are likely to be those on a low wage, and to reduce benefit further would be contrary to the Council aim of encouraging people back into work.

Q12. Do you believe there should be a minimum payment of £5 per week?
- Yes
- No

Treat Child Benefit as income
Currently when benefit is calculated child benefit is not taken into account as income, it is ignored. This could be changed so that child benefit income is included in the assessment of Council Tax Support. The council does not currently intend to do this because, when combined with the proposal to limit benefit to 80%, it would mean that these customers will face a double cut in benefit.

Example - A couple working with 1 child, living in a band B property, with an annual council tax charge of £1,118.71.
Under the current scheme they receive £1,049.91 per year in Council Tax Benefit, meaning that they have to pay £68.80.
Under the proposed scheme they would see a reduction in their entitlement to £835.64 resulting in them now having to pay £283.07 per year.

Q13. Do you believe that child benefit should be treated as income?
- Yes
- No

Treat Disability Living Allowance as income
Currently Disability Living Allowance is not taken into account as income, it is ignored. This could be changed so that it is included in the assessment of Council Tax Support. The council does not currently intend to do this because, when combined with the proposal to limit benefit to 80%, it would mean that these customers will face a double cut in benefit.

Q14. Do you believe that Disability Living Allowance should be treated as income?
- Yes
- No
Q15. Is there anything we haven't considered or any further comments you’d like to make about how eligibility for Council Tax Support will be decided?
ABOUT YOU

We want to make sure that our services are available to everyone in the community and that everyone is treated fairly when they use, or attempt to use our service.

We will only use the information collected on this form to help us improve services and to identify gaps or barriers. You do not have to fill in this form and you can answer just some of the questions.

The answers you provide are anonymous and confidential.

Do you or someone in your household receive Council Tax Benefit?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know / not sure

Do you represent an organisation who supports or works with people who claim council tax benefit?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know / not sure

If so, please indicate which type of organisation you represent:

- Housing Association
- Advice agency
- Support organisation
- Other (please specify below)

How many children aged under 16 live in you home? If none please tick 0.

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

Including yourself how many adults aged sixteen or over live in your home?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more
Including yourself how many pensioners live in your home? If none please tick 0.
- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

What is your full postcode? (e.g. HP111BB)

What age are you?
- 16-24
- 25-64
- 65 or over
- Prefer not to say

What gender are you?
- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

How would you describe your ethnic origin?
- White
- Asian or Asian British
- Black or Black British
- Mixed
- Other Ethnic Group
- Prefer not to say

Are you, or is any member of your household currently registered as disabled?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say
Play your part. Please complete this questionnaire by 17th October 2012 and return to:

Processing & Admin for Council Tax
FREEPOST HY 120
Wycombe District Council
Queen Victoria Road
High Wycombe
Bucks HP11 1BR

Thank you for participating in this survey

Results are scheduled to be published in November’s edition of the District Times magazine, on www.wycombe.gov.uk and in the local media.