

Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2019/20 Consultation

Results Report

1. Introduction

This report sets out the key findings from the Council Tax Reduction Scheme consultation which was conducted from 29 October 2018 to 10 December 2018.

2. Background

Since the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme, the Council has made changes which have limited the amount that applicants can receive under the scheme. In 2016/17, the Council introduced a 5% minimum contribution towards Council Tax, meaning that some residents who had never had to pay Council Tax before received bills. In 2017/18, the minimum contribution was increased to 15%. The Council also froze the limits for assessing eligibility for CTR, which meant that the threshold for qualifying for it has reduced in real terms.

Council Tax collection data and feedback from local organizations and politicians has indicated that the minimum charge is causing hardship for a number of residents. The new administration committed to removing the minimum charge in its election manifesto. The Council's preferred option at this point is to remove the 85% limit on Council Tax Reduction, which means that the poorest claimants will not have to make the minimum contribution. In addition, other residents who receive partial Council Tax Reduction will have their bills reduced. Removing the minimum charge means that qualifying residents will once again be able to have all of their Council Tax paid for by the Council.

The purpose of this consultation was to set out the Council's proposals for changes to the scheme for 2019/20, and to gather views on these to help the Council make final decisions.

3. Methodology

Data was gathered using an online survey hosted on the Richmond Council website. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

The Council wrote directly to those households currently receiving a Council Tax Reduction, to invite them to take part in the consultation. Local organisations were notified through the Welfare Reform Stakeholder Group meetings. The consultation was also promoted via a press release and on social media, and through the Council's Community Links Officers and the Council e-newsletter.

The responses were analysed and reported by the Council's Consultation Team on an anonymous basis under the guidelines of the Data Protection Act.

Please note that percentages in this report may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

4. Response

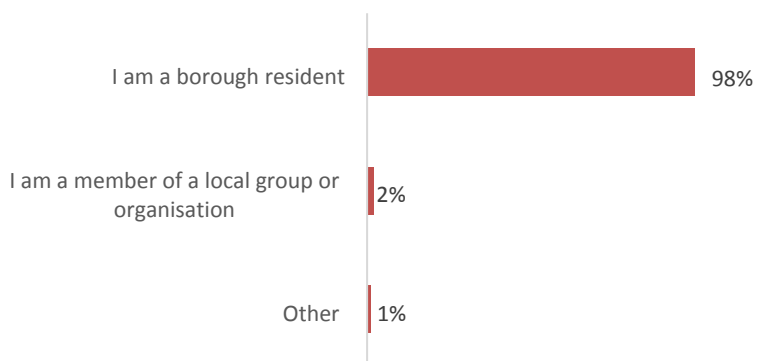
In total, the Council received 379 responses to this consultation.

A demographic profile of respondents can be found in Section 6.

5. Results

Question 1: In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

There were 379 responses to this question.



As illustrated in the table below, 366 respondents (98%) indicated that they are borough residents.

Response	Number of respondents selecting this option	Percentage of respondents to this question
I am a borough resident	366	98.4%
I am a member of a local group or organisation (please specify below)	8	2.2%
Other (please specify below)	5	1.3%

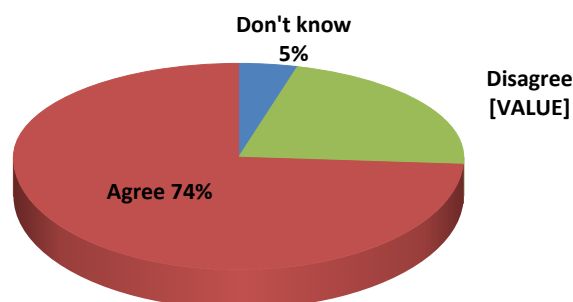
NB Respondents were able to select more than one option, so percentages add up to more than 100.

Those who selected 'Member of a local group or organisation' or 'Other' in response to this question were provided with a free-text box to specify. 11 people responded and their answers include the following categories:

- Labour Party member
- The Shed Community Group
- Housing benefit claimant
- Carer or representative of a claimant
- Local councillor

Question 2: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to remove the 85% limit on Council Tax Reduction?

There were 370 responses to this question.



As illustrated in the table below, 275 respondents (74%) indicated that they agree with the proposal.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Agree with the proposal	275	74.3%
Disagree with the proposal	78	21.1%
Don't know	17	4.6%

Question 3: Please tell us if you have any other comments about the proposed change:

This was an open question that allowed respondents to provide further comments. 163 respondents provided an answer.

When the comments were analysed, nine key themes were identified. These are illustrated in the table below.

Themes	No of comments
1 Need to relieve pressure/reduce hardship for low income/ vulnerable residents	43
2 General positive comment / proposal will be a positive change	34
3 Concern about the effects of the proposed extra spend on other services/other residents	24
4 Those who are ill / disabled / elderly can't afford Council Tax / should pay less	19
5 The previous changes have affected me or others / made things difficult / should not have been introduced	18
6 Concern about fraudulent claims / measures of hardship / residents who can't afford it shouldn't live in the borough	12
7 All residents should contribute something in terms of Council Tax	11
8 Not in favour of the proposal / keep minimum charge as it is	7
9 It's a wealthy borough / the wealthier in the borough should support those less able to contribute	5

NB Respondents may make several comments, so the number of comments may add up to more than the total number of respondents to this question.

Question 4: In relation to this consultation, is there anything we have not considered that may have a negative impact on you or the local community?

There were 341 responses to this question.

As illustrated in the table below, 70 respondents said they believed there were further considerations that may have a negative impact on them or the local community.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	70	20.5%
No	271	79.5%

Those who selected 'Yes' in response to this question were provided with a free-text box to expand on their answer. 74 people responded and when their comments were analysed, four key themes were identified. These are illustrated in the table below.

Themes	Number of comments
1 Concern about the effects of the proposed extra spend on other services/other residents	31
2 Need to relieve pressure/reduce hardship for low income/ vulnerable residents	16
3 Specific comments around respondent's circumstances	8
4 All residents should contribute something in terms of Council Tax	5

NB Respondents may make several comments, so the number of comments may add up to more than the total number of respondents to this question.

Question 5: Do you receive a Council Tax Reduction?

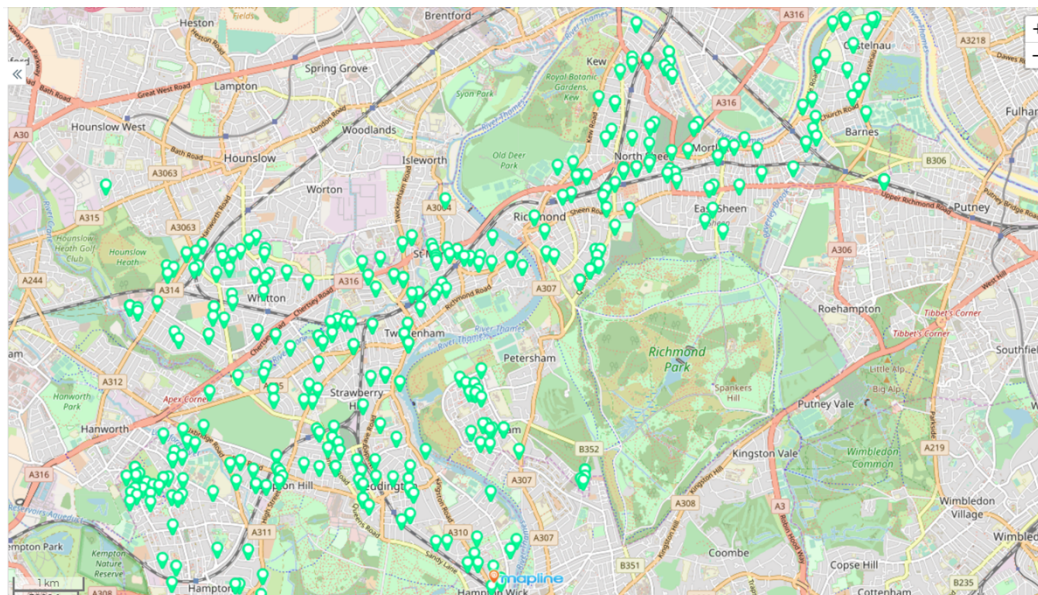
There were 372 responses to this question.

As illustrated in the table below, 252 of respondents (68%) indicated that they receive a Council Tax Reduction.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	252	67.7%
No	120	32.3%

Question 6: What is your postcode?

The postcodes provided were used to create a map illustrating where people were responding from. The map below shows an even spread of respondents from across the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.



6. Demographic Profile

The table below shows the composition of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2019/20 Consultation sample.

Demographic	Sample base (Unweighted)	Proportion (Unweighted %)
Gender		
Male	127	34.7%
Female	204	55.7%
Prefer not to say	35	9.6%
<i>Base: 366 respondents</i>		
What was your age last birthday?		
19 and under	1	0.3%
20-24	4	1.1%
25-34	36	9.8%
35-44	71	19.4%
45-54	75	20.5%
55-64	101	27.6%
65-74	32	8.7%
75+	9	2.5%
Prefer not to say	37	10.1%
<i>Base: 366 respondents</i>		

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?		
Yes	113	30.9%
No	215	58.7%
Prefer not to say	38	10.4%
<i>Base: 366 respondents</i>		
How would you describe your ethnic group?		
White	243	68.6%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	16	4.5%
Asian or Asian British	20	5.6%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	15	4.2%
Prefer not to say	52	14.7%
Any other ethnic group	8	2.3%
<i>Base: 354 respondents</i>		
Please indicate your sexual orientation:		
Heterosexual / straight	272	76.4%
Gay man	4	1.1%
Gay woman / lesbian	5	1.4%
Bisexual	2	0.6%
Prefer not to say	61	17.1%
Prefer to self-describe	12	3.4%
<i>Base: 356 respondents</i>		
Do you belong to a religion or faith group?		
No	153	42.5%
Yes, Christian	115	31.9%
Yes, Buddhist	2	0.6%
Yes, Hindu	1	0.3%
Yes, Jewish	2	0.6%
Yes, Muslim	19	5.3%
Yes, Sikh	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	59	16.4%
Yes, other	9	2.5%
<i>Base: 360 respondents</i>		

Appendix A - Questionnaire



Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2019/20

Since the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme, the Council has made a number of changes which have limited the amount that applicants can receive under the scheme.

In particular, in 2016/17, the Council introduced a 5% minimum contribution towards Council Tax, meaning that some residents who had never had to pay Council Tax before received bills. In 2017/18, the minimum contribution was increased to 15%.

The Council also froze the limits for assessing eligibility for CTR, which has meant that the threshold for qualifying for it has reduced in real terms.

Why are we consulting?

Council Tax collection data and feedback from local organisations and politicians has indicated that the minimum charge is causing hardship for a number of residents. The new administration committed to removing the minimum charge in its election manifesto.

Our preferred option is to remove the 85% limit on Council Tax Reduction, which means that the poorest claimants will not have to make the minimum contribution. In addition, other residents who receive partial Council Tax Reduction will have their bills reduced.

Removing the minimum charge means that qualifying residents will once again be able to have all of their Council Tax paid for by the Council.

The benefits of this are:

- It will ease the financial pressure on the borough's most financially hard-pressed residents. We estimate that about 2,500 of the borough's hard-pressed households will benefit

The drawbacks of this are:

- The change will cost the Council money by increasing the reductions available to some residents. We estimate that the cost will be about £400,000 per year

Have your say

This consultation is about our proposals for changes to the scheme for 2019/20 and we want your views on these to help us make final decisions.

Please ensure you have read the consultation document before you complete the survey.

Please be advised that the consultation closes on **10 December 2018**.

Confidentiality

All the information you provide will be treated in strict confidence and will not be used to identify you personally. It will not be passed on to anyone else and will only be used for the purposes of this consultation. The analysis is done on an anonymous basis under the guidelines of the Data Protection Act. Anonymised data may be published, including publishing comments on the Council’s website.

Your response

1. In what capacity are you responding to this consultation? (Please tick all that apply)

- I am a borough resident
- I am a member of a local group or organisation (please specify below)
- Other (please specify below)

2. Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to remove the 85% limit on Council Tax Reduction?

- Agree with the proposal
- Disagree with the proposal
- Don't know

3. Please tell us if you have any other comments about the proposed change:

4. In relation to this consultation, is there anything we have not considered that may have a negative impact on you or the local community?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please tell us by using the space below:

About you

The Council will use the information provided below to develop services that meet the needs of all the community. Please provide as much information as possible, but do not feel obliged to answer every question.

5. Do you receive a Council Tax Reduction?

- Yes No

6. What is your postcode?

This information will not be used to identify you personally but to ensure we are consulting widely across the area.

7. Are you:

- Male Female Prefer not to say

8. What was your age last birthday?

- 19 and under 20-24 25-34
 35-44 45-54 55-64
 65-74 75+ Prefer not to say

9. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- Yes No Prefer not to say

10. How would you describe your ethnic group?

- White Mixed/multiple ethnic groups Asian or Asian British
 Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British Prefer not to say Other ethnic group, please specify:

11. Please indicate your sexual orientation:

- Heterosexual / straight Gay man Gay woman / lesbian

- Bisexual Prefer not to say Prefer to self-describe:

12. Do you belong to a religion or faith group?

- No Yes, Christian Yes, Buddhist
 Yes, Hindu Yes, Jewish Yes, Muslim
 Yes, Sikh Prefer not to say Yes, other (please specify):

Please return completed paper copies to:

Consultation Team
Ground Floor, Civic Centre
44 York Street
Twickenham
TW1 3BZ

Please be advised that this consultation closes on **10 December 2018**.