

REPORT TO: EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 6 DECEMBER 2016

REPORT TO: COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 13 DECEMBER 2016

Report of: Assistant Director Customer Access

Title: Amendment to the Pension Age local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017-18

Is this a Key Decision? No

Is this an Executive or Council Function? - Council

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report is presented to seek members' approval for an enhancement to the local Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme for pension age residents for 2017-18, in order to ensure parity with the Scheme for working aged residents.
- 1.2 It follows Executive recommending to Council the amendment of one of the recommendations for the working age scheme for 2017-18 at their meeting on 8th November 2016.

2. Recommendations:

That Council be RECOMMENDED to amend the claim date rules in the pension age Council Tax Support scheme from 1st April 2017 in line with the change for working age claimants.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- 3.1 The report on the Council's local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017-18 to Scrutiny on 3 November 2016 and Executive on 8 November 2016 includes a recommendation from Executive to introduce a change to the claim date rules in the working age CTS scheme. If this is adopted, the working age scheme will have more generous claim date rules than the national scheme for pensioners.
- 3.2 Aligning the rules between working age and pension age schemes will result in easier administration of the local CTS scheme and ensure equal treatment of customers who experience a delay in receiving their Council Tax bill.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources.

Adopting this change is unlikely to have a significant impact on the cost of the Council Tax Support scheme as the numbers of cases affected are likely to be very minimal. The cost to the Council in each case would be 8.75% as the overall cost is shared between the preceptors. The majority of our CTS claims are in Band A and Band B properties. Even at Band B with a full award for a 6 month period, the additional CTS would cost the Council £54 out of a total cost of £662. It should be noted however that prior to adopting this change, the Council would probably have paid Exceptional Hardship Funding to cover the shortfall in such circumstances, and therefore this proposed change is cost neutral.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

The Council's medium term financial plan has not taken into account any potential savings from Local Council tax Support, therefore this will not have any detrimental impact on the Council's overall financial position.

6. What are the legal aspects?

There is no legal requirement to align rules in the pension age scheme with the local rules decided for working age customers.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

This report raises no concerns for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 Exeter City Council's local Council Tax Support scheme has been in place since national Council Tax Benefit was abolished in April 2013. Rules for pensioners are set nationally, leaving discretion for local rules for working age customers. The national rules for pension age claims ensure that older claimants cannot be awarded less support than Central Government decide, however the Council can choose to have more generous rules where that is considered to be appropriate.

8.2 A number of changes to the working age scheme are proposed for 2017. These are detailed in the Exeter City Council's Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017-18 report. This report was considered by Executive on 8 November, and with regard to the proposal to reduce 'good cause' backdating to one month, Executive recommended also introducing a link between the date a Council Tax liability is first billed and the date an award of CTS can start.

8.3 The intention of this recommendation is to protect low income households from being disadvantaged where the delay in issuing a bill is not caused by the claimant. For example, where the Council is notified by the Valuation Office Agency that a property should be treated as consisting of several dwellings instead of one dwelling, and has to backdate bills to those dwellings accordingly. Currently such customers might not be able to get help from CTS for these past periods.

8.4 With this recommendation, if a customer of pension age did find themselves in a situation where they receive a large backdated bill, this proposal would allow CTS to be awarded to help for the earlier period.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

The Council Tax Support scheme supports Exeter's residents by assisting low income households to meet their Council Tax liability.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

There are no risks to the Council resulting from adopting this proposal.

11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

The proposal will ensure that older residents cannot be considered to be being treated less favourably than other households.

12. Are there any other options?

Council can choose not to adopt this proposal which will leave pension age claimants at a relative disadvantage to working age claimants in identical circumstances.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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