

Barnsley Council

Communications Plan

Council Tax Support consultation

Date: August 2019



Background

In April 2013 Council Tax Benefit was replaced by Council Tax Support. Council Tax Benefit was funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and supported people on low incomes by reducing the amount of Council Tax they have to pay. Council Tax Support schemes are now funded by Councils.

A separate Central Government scheme is retained for people of pension age and Councils are only able to vary their schemes for people of working age.

In Barnsley over 21,000 people currently receive Council Tax Support. The gross cost of the scheme is currently £16.1m.

People can claim Council Tax Support if they are on certain benefits. The current scheme requires all working age applicants to pay a minimum of 30% of their Council Tax (a maximum level of support of 70%). Applicants in receipt of Income Based Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support and Income Related Employment and Support Allowance receive the maximum level of support. Others receive a level of Council Tax Support based on their income and other factors.

Each Council is required to review their schemes each year and decide if they want to make any changes. Before any changes can be implemented, they must carry out public consultation.

The Council is consulting on whether we should change the Council Tax Support scheme from 1 April 2020 and in line with legislation, we have a duty to consult and provide the opportunity for comments to be made on our proposals.

We are proposing to change the current Council Tax Support scheme to better target support to those most in need.

In order for the consultation to be meaningful and for residents to take part in the consultation, it's important that the consultation is promoted through a variety channels so that it is readily accessible and to make sure that residents are given a fair opportunity to have their say and an impact on the decision made.

Aim and objectives

Our overall aim is to inform residents and supporting agencies about the proposed changes to Council Tax Support, how they can influence this by contributing towards a consultation and how they can access it.

Communications activity will:

1. Inform residents what the proposed changes are
2. Inform residents why these proposals are being made
3. Inform residents how the changes could impact them – now or in the future
4. Inform residents how to access and complete the consultation

5. Inform residents who may be eligible to support but not already doing so, how to access help

Key messages

- We're considering making changes to our current Council Tax Support scheme. It's proposed that these changes will come into effect 1 April 2020
- We want to know what you think of these proposed changes, so we're carrying out a consultation
- The consultation will provide you with the chance to shape the future of Council Tax Support in Barnsley
- You can access the consultation here [Barnsley.gov.uk/council-tax-support-survey](https://barnsley.gov.uk/council-tax-support-survey) or obtain a paper copy by calling 01226 787376
- The consultation will only take around ten minutes to complete
- The consultation is open to anyone that would like to have their say
- The consultation will be open from 09/09/19 and close on 27/10/19
- We'll share the outcome on barnsley.gov.uk/consultation
- For more information about the consultation, visit: barnsley.gov.uk/council-tax-support-survey
- If you currently don't receive support but think you might be eligible, visit: barnsley.gov.uk/cts

Key audiences and stakeholders

The consultation will be accessible for anyone to complete. It will be important to make sure that the consultation is accessible to everyone by promoting it and making it accessible via a variety of channels. The key audiences identified include:

1. Residents/public
 - Any resident in the Barnsley charging area
 - Receiving Council Tax Support
 - May potentially require CTS in future
 - Indirect impact e.g. relatives
 - BMBC Service areas working with families e.g. children's services, 0-19 service, BC helps
2. Staff – as resident or in work capacity
3. Local Partner organisations e.g. NHS, Barnsley CCG, Berneslai Homes
4. The voluntary and community sector including Barnsley CVS (previously VAB) and Action for children.
5. Advice organisations e.g. CAB, DIAL
6. Equality forums.

Channels

Channels to promote the consultation:

External

1. Social media campaign with link directly to the consultation/website page/details of drop in sessions
2. For partners and services to share on their accounts – 0-19, breast feeding team, area teams, early help, clinics, Barnsley Council Helps
3. Strong website presence including:
 - Banner
 - CTS page set up to with link to consultation and relevant info e.g. FAQs
 - FAQs
 - Town Spirit Change It page
 - Consultations page
4. Media release
5. Face to face – libraries/family centres, at family events, Jobcentres, community groups, etc.
 - Use of business cards at events
 - Screens in libraries to promote drop in sessions
6. Flyers to be included in some Council Tax and Council Tax Support letters.

Internal

1. Staff news
2. Straight Talk articles
3. Intranet banner and direct link
4. Inform relevant services via email

Methods of completing/accessing the consultation:

- Via survey portal on line (via channels above)

- Digital copies made available in libraries
- Paper copy of survey will be made available on request.

Activity and implementation

Activity	Date	Channel	Progress	Responsibilities
Prepare consultation questions	August		Completed	KD/LD
Prepare background info and FAQs	August		Completed	KD/LD
Communications entering consultation questions in Smart Survey and obtain web link	Early September		Complete	CS
Plan website page layout and links etc. for when live	Early September		Completed	KD/LD
Draft media release	Early September		Completed	CS
Prepare social media Canvas, posts and schedule	Early September		Completed	CS
Prepare staff news article Prepare updated versions	Early September		Completed	CS
Email library staff re. survey and access at libraries	Early September		Completed	KD/LD
Arrange drop in sessions with libraries/family centres	Early September		Completed	KD/LD
Consultation goes live – early September				
Upload FAQs and supporting info to website		Website	Completed	CS/Digital team

Survey link and banner on website		Website	Completed	CS
Launch on social media - begin social media schedule. Prompt shares and retweets		Facebook Twitter	Completed	CS
Release media release 1		All media	Completed	CS
Launch via Staff news		Intranet	Completed	CS
Commence regular straight talk articles/reminders		Straight Talk	Completed	CS
Media release 2 – final reminder			Completed	CS
Library screen			Completed	CS
Consultation closes				
Consultation results	Early November		Completed	CS/KD

Evaluation

Link aims and objectives - evaluate measures

Participation

Social media analytics

Returns – portal/post