Council Tax benefit survey 2012
Summary of results

1. METHODOLOGY

Oxfordshire’s local authorities each asked residents for their views about how Council Tax benefit is provided by district councils next financial year (2013/4). Whilst the questionnaire and background materials were agreed jointly, each district carried out its own exercise. This document outlines the results for South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

A postal and online survey was carried out between 24 August and 5 October 2012. The survey was promoted to a sample of residents in both South Oxfordshire and the Vale currently receiving Council Tax benefit, to the general public through press releases and the Council’s web site and to organisations with an interest in the topic.

In total, 234 survey responses were received. Of these, 165 were paper responses and 69 were made online. Around half of the responses related to South Oxfordshire (116) and half to the Vale (114).

2. PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The profile of those responding was as expected with high levels of older people (47 per cent aged 65+), women (59 per cent), people with disabilities (46 per cent) and White British residents (91 per cent) taking part.

The majority of responses were from people currently in receipt of Council Tax benefit (84 per cent). This can be explained by the fact that in each authority area 500 residents currently receiving benefits were invited by post to take part. People currently receiving the benefit were also more likely to be interested in this topic and therefore take part.

A small number of responses were from other interested parties such as landlords, voluntary organisations and housing associations.

3. KEY FINDINGS

Two thirds of those responding (64 per cent) agreed with proposals to maintain the scheme, 44 per cent strongly agreeing. Just under 1 in 10 people
disagreed whilst higher proportions (16 and 11 per cent) neither agreed or disagreed or replied 'don't know'.

Q5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with proposals to maintain a scheme?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tend to agree</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither/nor</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tend to disagree</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All respondents (225)

When comparing results between districts, whether someone received Council Tax benefit and characteristics such as age, gender and disability there were few differences between sub groups. The following differences are based on small sample sizes so should be treated with caution:

- Those who do not receive Council Tax benefit (34 people) may be more likely to agree (71 compared to 63 per cent), more likely to disagree (17 compared to 18 per cent) and less likely to say 'don't know' than those receiving the benefit
- Under 45s (41 people) may be more likely to disagree (17 per cent compared to 7 per cent of over 45s)

Reasons for agreeing with the proposal included the following views:

- Need to support vulnerable people (such as disabled, pensioners and people on low incomes)
- Positive personal experience/impact of receiving Council Tax benefit
- Council is protecting local people from national cuts
- People should pay Council Tax in proportion to their ability to pay
- Council Tax is too expensive so people on lower incomes need support

Reasons for disagreeing included:

- Not the Council's role to reduce the impact of national cuts
- State support should be reduced to encourage people to work/contribute more
- The cost of Council Tax benefit will have to be met by working people
Those taking part were asked to what extent they agreed with options to reduce the cost of the scheme.

Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following ways in which the cost of the scheme could be reduced?

Further reduce the amount of Council Tax Reduction someone gets if there are other adults of working age in the household

![Bar chart: Agree 52%, Neither/nor 15%, Disagree 21%, Don't know 12%]

Reduce the maximum Council Tax reduction award for properties in higher Council Tax bands

![Bar chart: Agree 47%, Neither/nor 12%, Disagree 27%, Don't know 14%]

Reduce the amount of savings someone can have and claim Council Tax reduction

![Bar chart: Agree 45%, Neither/nor 16%, Disagree 30%, Don't know 9%]

Reduce the amount of Council Tax reduction that everyone receives by a fixed percentage

![Bar chart: Agree 25%, Neither/nor 19%, Disagree 42%, Don't know 14%]

Agreement was lowest with the option of reducing Council Tax support for everyone by a fixed percentage.

Other views expressed in the survey include:
- Council Tax should be proportional to income not property
- Council Tax paid should reflect the amount of services used, particularly for single-occupants
- Support should be targeted at those who need it based on prior contributions to reduce misuse
- People who have worked hard to save shouldn't be penalised
- Concern about the impact of charging more for properties empty for less than a month on landlords/tenants
- Query whether it is practical to get information about other adults in a household
- Where a young person in a household finishes full time education but cannot get work this will already add pressure to household income
- How the Council will fund maintaining the scheme is not clear

A number of comments and the high proportions of people responding 'don't know' indicate many residents found it difficult to understand the issues or felt they didn't have enough information to comment.