



COUNCIL – 22ND JANUARY 2019

SUBJECT: COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2019/20

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To seek Council approval of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the 2019/20 financial year.

2. SUMMARY

2.1 The report recommends continuing to operate a Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the 2019/20 financial year on the same basis as the scheme used in 2018/19.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

3.1 The payment of Council Tax Reduction is a key element of the Council's anti-poverty strategy and a significant source of funding.

3.2 The revenue raised through Council Tax is a key element in setting a balanced budget which in turn supports the following Well-being Goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015: -

- A prosperous Wales.
- A resilient Wales.
- A healthier Wales.
- A more equal Wales.
- A Wales of cohesive communities.
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language.
- A globally responsible Wales.

4. THE REPORT

4.1 Members will recall that Council Tax Benefit was abolished in April 2013 and replaced by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

4.2 On the 29th January 2013, Council adopted the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2013/14 in accordance with the Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2012. The Welsh Government put a sunset clause in those regulations which meant that they became invalid after the 31st March 2014.

- 4.3 On the 28th January 2014, Council adopted a Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2014/15 (its local scheme) in accordance with the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements and Default Scheme) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2014. These regulations prescribe the main features of the scheme to be adopted by all Councils in Wales and allow for some limited local discretions. The scheme provides for claimants to receive a reduction of up to 100% of their Council Tax bill in certain circumstances. The same arrangements were adopted for 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19.
- 4.4 The Council is required to formally approve a Council Tax Reduction Scheme on an annual basis. The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements and Default Scheme) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2019 have now been agreed and these apply in relation to a Council Tax Reduction Scheme made for a financial year beginning on or after the 1st April 2019. The regulations uprate certain figures used to calculate an applicant's entitlement to a reduction under a Council Tax Reduction Scheme, and the subsequent level of reduction. It also makes consequential amendments as a result of changes to the wider welfare system.
- 4.5 As the 2019 regulations do not contain any significant changes for claimants, it is proposed that the Council continues its local scheme in line with the regulations as recently amended for the financial year 2019/20, effective from the 1st April 2019, and continues to exercise the previously approved local discretions as provided for within Part 5 of the Prescribed Requirements Regulations: -

Discretion	Discretion to be adopted by CCBC
The ability to increase the standard extended reduction period of 4 weeks given to persons who have ceased to receive qualifying benefits after they return to work, where they have previously been receiving a Council Tax reduction that is to end as a result of their return to work.	<p><u>Pensioners</u> The standard period of 4 weeks specified in paragraph (33) Schedule 1 will apply, and</p> <p><u>Non-Pensioners</u> The standard period of 4 weeks specified in paragraphs (35) and (40) Schedule 6 will apply.</p>
The ability to backdate the application of Council Tax reduction for periods longer than the new standard period of 3 months before the claim is made.	<p><u>Pensioners</u> The standard period of 3 months specified in paragraph (3) Schedule 13 will apply, and</p> <p><u>Non-Pensioners</u> The standard period of 3 months specified in paragraph (4) Schedule 13 will apply.</p>
Discretion to disregard more than the statutory weekly amount of £10 of income received in respect of War Disablement Pensions and War Widow's Pensions (disregarded when calculating the income of the applicant).	<p><u>Pensioners</u> The total value of any pension specified in paragraphs 1(a) and 1(b) Schedule 4 will be disregarded, and</p> <p><u>Non-Pensioners</u> The total value of any pension specified in paragraphs 20(a) and 20(b) Schedule 9 will be disregarded.</p>
Discretion to provide more than the minimum information prescribed in the Prescribed Requirements Regulations when issuing notification of decisions of an award of Council Tax Reduction.	To supplement the minimum requirements specified in the Prescribed Requirements Regulations, where appropriate.

- 4.6 The provisional 2019/20 budget for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme totals £13,788,308.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 5.1 The revenue raised through Council Tax supports effective financial planning which is a key element in ensuring that the Well-being Goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 are met.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has previously been carried out for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. As the proposed Scheme for 2018/19 has no significant changes from previous years, a further impact assessment will not be required at this time.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Funding for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was transferred into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) in the 2013/14 financial year.
- 7.2 The Welsh Government has confirmed its commitment to a fully funded Council Tax Reduction Scheme to the 31st March 2020. There is currently no firm commitment beyond this date.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct personnel implications arising from this report.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 It is recommended that the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme should continue for the 2018/20 financial year along with the previously agreed local discretions.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 Council is required annually to adopt a Council Tax Reduction Scheme and local discretions.

12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 Local Government Finance Act 1992 and regulations made under the Act.
- 12.2 Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Prescribed Requirements (Wales) Regulations 2012 and the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements and Default Scheme) (Wales) Regulations 2014 (as amended).

Author: Nicole Scammell, Head of Corporate Finance & Section 151 Officer
Consultees: Amanda Main, Housing & Council Tax Benefits Manager
Rob Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Richard (Ed) Edmunds, Corporate Director for Education & Corporate Services
Cllr. Barbara Jones, County Councillor (St. James) Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Governance

Background Papers:

- Council Report 29th January 2013 – Adoption of a Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Council Report 28th January 2014 – Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2014/15
- Special Council Report 25th February 2015 – Council Tax Resolution 2015/16 and Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Special Council Report 24th February 2016 – Council Tax Resolution 2016/17 and Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Council Report 24th January 2017 – Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2017/18