



HILLINGDON
LONDON

Appendix C

Impact Assessment

STEP A) Description of what is to be assessed and its relevance to equality

What is being assessed? Please tick ✓

Review of a service Staff restructure Decommissioning a service

Changing a policy ✓ Tendering for a new service A strategy or plan

The London Borough of Hillingdon has reviewed the different options available in developing a local Council Tax support scheme, as it is required to do under the changes introduced as part of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, and the subsequent Welfare Reform Act, Local Government Finance Bill and Local Government Resource Review.

The proposed scheme for 2012/13 is set out below, alongside the alternative options which were considered and subsequently discounted, due to adverse impacts involved in their implementation.

Who is accountable? E.g. Head of Service or Corporate Director

Paul Whaymand, Deputy Director, Finance

Date assessment completed and approved by accountable person

July 2012

Names and job titles of people carrying out the assessment

Nancy Le Roux, Senior Finance Manager - Corporate Finance

A.1) What are the main aims and intended benefits of what you are assessing?

Aims of proposed local Council Tax support scheme for 2012/13

The key aim for the local Council Tax Scheme (CTS) is to deliver a scheme affordable to the Council, which is simple and easy to understand for residents, and which is efficient to deliver and administer. This aligns with the Government's intentions for new schemes of this type.

National principles

The Statement of Intent published by CLG sets out the guidelines and constraints in designing a new local scheme. These include:

- No change in the current level of award for existing pensioners and an intention to provide similar protection for future pensioners;
- Consideration of continuing support for other vulnerable groups; and
- Local schemes should support work incentives, and in particular avoid disincentives to move into work.

Underpinning principles

The proposed principles of a local Hillingdon scheme include:-

- Everyone will be liable to pay something (excluding protected groups)
- Making work pay
- Restrictions on maximum support
- Simplified backdating arrangements
- Expectation that other adult occupiers within the household will contribute
- Residents will not receive assistance if they are found to commit a criminal offence
- Simplified administration arrangements

Scheme design

Pensioners and vulnerable groups (see table 6) will be unaffected by this change as their CTS will be calculated on the same basis as their Council Tax Benefit (CTB).

The initial scheme, for 'working age' customers on the current CTB scheme is set out below with the following modifications:

- Maximum Support will be capped at 80%;
- Removal of Second Adult Rebate
- Backdating will be restricted to 3 months, to align to the pensioner arrangement; and
- Capital restrictions will be aligned to the pensioner arrangements, i.e. the capital limit will be £16k over which no support would be granted

and between £10k and £16k, support will be reduced by £1 for every £500 of capital savings.

A.2) Who are the service users or staff affected by what you are assessing? What is their equality profile?

Total population of CTB claimants

In total, there are 105,631 properties within the Borough with a Council Tax liability (December 2011 figures).

Hillingdon has 21,478 households receiving Council Tax Benefit (April 2012 figures). Consequently, 20.3% of the Borough receive Council Tax Benefit.

Of a total 21,478 households receiving CTB, the breakdown of affected groups is as follows: 7,304 are pensioners, 821 are classed as vulnerable and 13,353 are working age (other). This information is provided in greater detail below:

Table 1 - Breakdown of current council tax benefit customer profile			
Type of Customer	Number	Yearly (£)	% of Total
Pensioners	7,304	£7,425,929	34%
Passported (IS, JSA, ESA)	8,531	£9,359,918	43%
Single workers	514	£324,168	1%
Single parents working	1,364	£1,025,388	5%
Families - workers	2,121	£2,282,280	10%
Single workers disabled	83	£68,432	0%
Families - workers with a disabled member	152	£157,300	1%
Single non workers	464	£409,032	2%
Single parents not working	263	£279,604	1%
Non working families	98	£94,692	0%
Single disabled non workers	512	£477,620	2%
Disabled non working families	72	£91,624	0%
Total		£21,995,987	100%

Age of claimants

Table 3- Breakdown of working age council tax benefit customer profile by age		
Age of Customer	Number	% of Total
18 to 21	227	1.7%
22 to 30	2393	17.9%
31 to 40	3935	29.5%

41 to 50	4150	31%
51 to 61	2648	19.9%
Total	13353	100%

The above table shows the breakdown of age ranges for CTB claimants who are of working age. The provisions of the proposed scheme for Hillingdon mean that pensioners continue to receive the same support as they have under CTB. As they are not affected by the proposed changes, they have been excluded from the table above.

Gender

Table 4- Breakdown of working age council tax benefit customer by gender		
Gender of Customer	Number	% of Total
Male	4,522	33.9%
Female	8,831	66.1%
Total	13353	100%

The data indicates that the largest group of claimants for CTB are women. As a result, any change to the support provided through this benefit is likely to impact women twice as greatly as men.

Ethnicity

Table 5 - Breakdown of working age council tax benefit customer by gender		
31	White - English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	4434
32	White - Irish	168
33	White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0
34	White - Any Other White background	179
35	Mixed / Multiple ethnic group - White and Black Caribbean	46
36	Mixed / Multiple ethnic group - White and Black African	25
37	Mixed / Multiple ethnic group - White and Asian	36
38	Mixed / Multiple ethnic group - Any Other Mixed / multiple ethnic background	36
39	Asian / Asian British – Indian	550
40	Asian / Asian British – Pakistani	433
41	Asian / Asian British – Bangladeshi	160
42	Asian / Asian British – Chinese	41
43	Asian / Asian British - Any other Asian background	353
44	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British – African	1321
45	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British – Caribbean	288
46	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British – Any other Black / African / Caribbean background	114
47	Other ethnic group – Arab	0

48	Other ethnic group – Any other ethnic group	1544
98	Any other	0
99	Not known/not provided	3626
Total		13353

The table above indicates CTB claimants by ethnicity. 2,583 households did not complete this information, amounting to the shortfall in working age households accessing CTB at the point of data collection (13,353).

Vulnerability

The classification of a vulnerable person for the purposes of Council Tax Scheme covers anybody in receipt of one or more or of the following premiums:

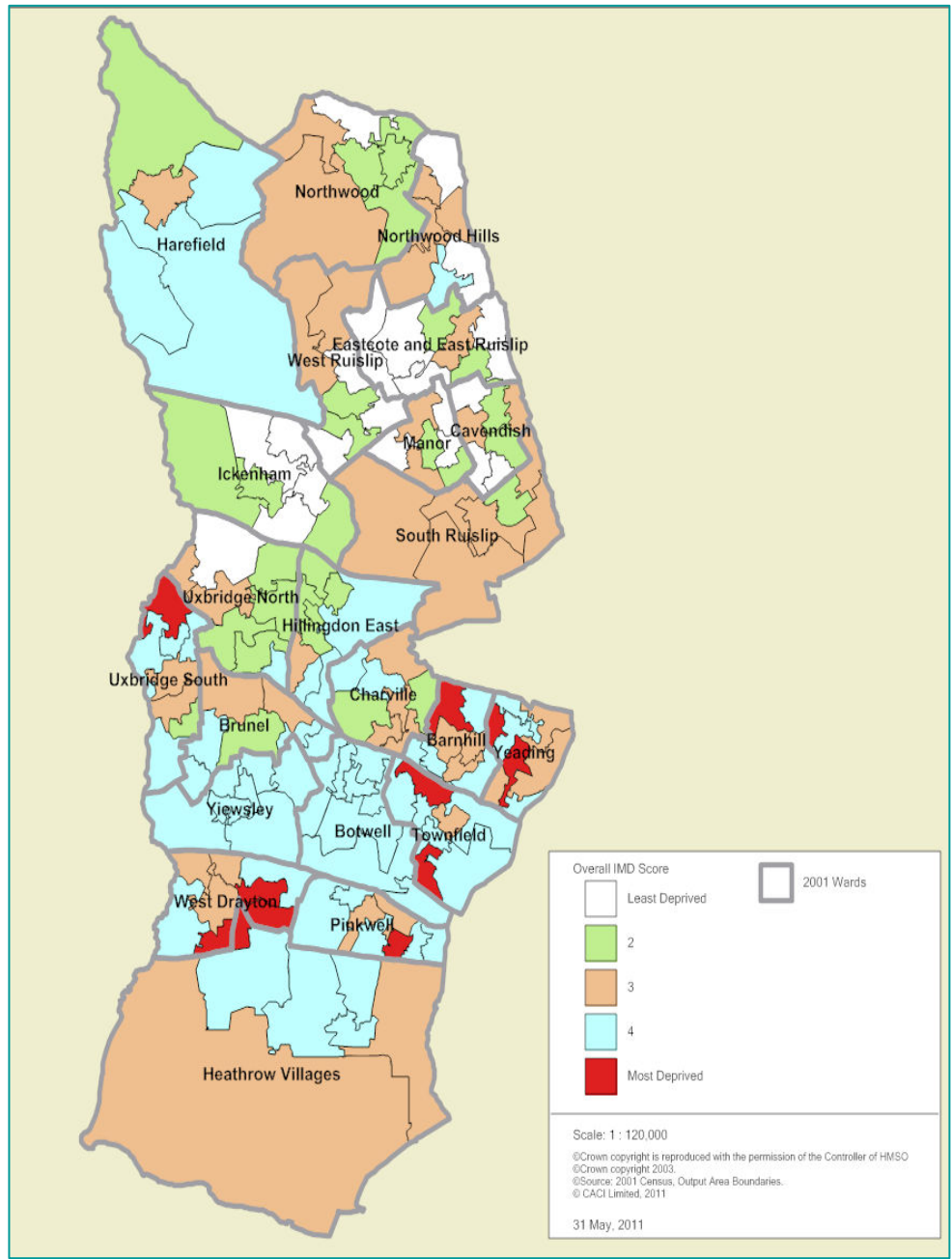
Table 6 – Classification of a vulnerable person
Disability Premium
Enhanced Disability Premium
Severe Disability Premium
Disability Premium for Dependents
Enhanced Disability Premium for Dependents
Disabled Earned Disregard
CT Disability Reduction
War Widows Pension
War Disablement Pension

As part of the design of the Council Tax Support scheme for Hillingdon, vulnerable persons will continue to receive the same level of support as under CTB. These individuals are not affected by the changes being introduced under the new scheme.

Deprivation

Council Tax Benefit is a means tested benefit; therefore, the group of claimants has a clear correlation to the 20.3% of the Borough.

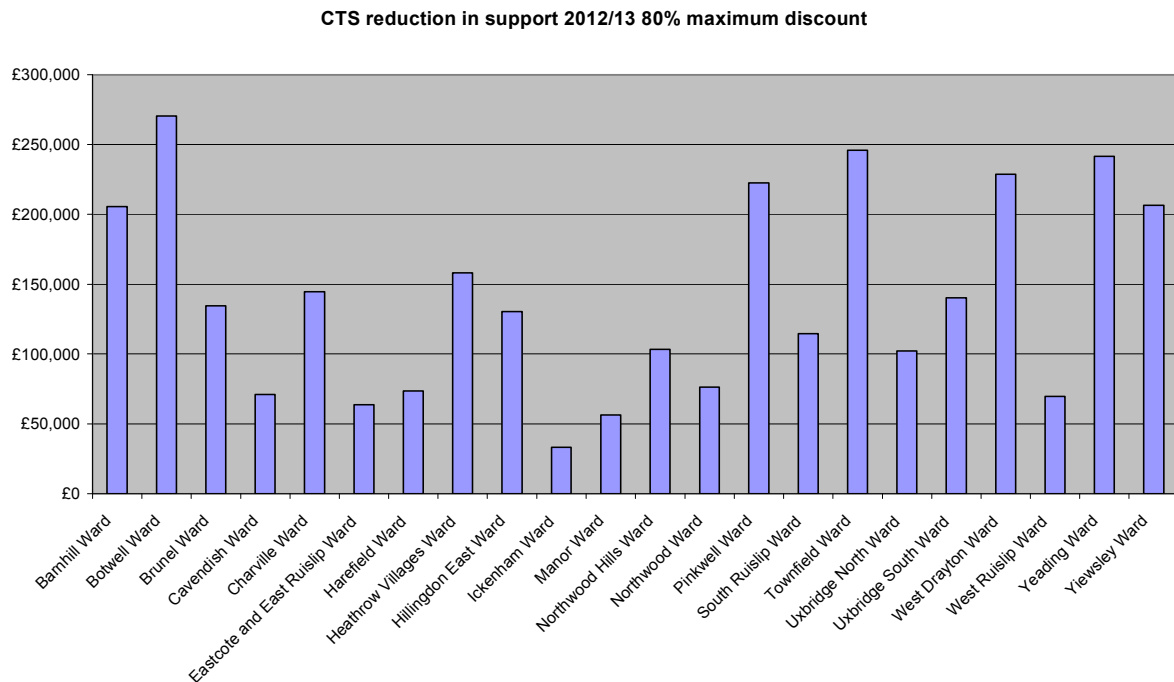
As such, it is likely the impact of the Council Tax Support scheme will align with the Borough-wide map of deprivation, below.



This analysis is supported by the ward-level analysis of the impact of introducing the scheme, overleaf.

Impact by geographical area

Table 6 – Loss of financial support by geographical area



The wards most affected by the changes are Barnhill, Botwell, Heathrow Villages, Pinkwell, Townfield, West Drayton, Yeading and Yiewsley. This aligns with the Index of Multiple Deprivation map above.

A.3) Who are the stakeholders in this assessment and what is their interest in it?

Stakeholders	Interest
<p>Council Tax Benefit claimants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working Age - Pensioners - Vulnerable Groups - Men - Women <p>Local Interest Groups</p> <p>LB Hillingdon</p> <p>LB Hillingdon Housing Benefit and</p>	<p>Council Tax Benefit working age claimants will be the customers directly affected by the change in support.</p> <p>Voluntary and community groups who may work with the affected claimants.</p> <p>Overall impact on council budget</p> <p>The services and staff who will</p>

Council Tax services	administer the future scheme.
Precepting authorities	Collection and overall reduction in funding
Central government (Department of Work and Pensions, Communities and Local Government)	DWP and CLG have made requirements of councils to deliver this scheme for the financial year starting from April 2013.
Council tax payers	Financial pressure on other services from the council if the scheme is not delivered within budget..

A.4) Which protected characteristics or community issues are relevant to the assessment? ✓ in the box.

Age	✓	Religion or belief	
Disability	✓	Sex	
Gender reassignment		Sexual Orientation	
Marriage or civil partnership		Community Cohesion	
Pregnancy or maternity		Community Safety	
Race/Ethnicity		Other – please state: Working age residents	✓

STEP B) Consideration of information; data, research, consultation, engagement

B.1) Consideration of information and data - what have you got and what is it telling you?

Impact of specific Council Tax Support scheme proposals for customers

1. Overall impact of the scheme

In developing a local Council Tax support scheme, it has been a key principle to consider the impact on residents affected by the changes proposed. Many of the recipients of Council Tax support will also be affected by the wider benefit reforms.

The Council Tax Support scheme for Hillingdon will protect pensioners and vulnerable groups, including anybody in receipt of a disability-based benefit or war widows pension. These groups will continue to receive support at the same level as they have done under CTB.

In addition, the London Borough of Hillingdon will continue to monitor the impact of Welfare Reform changes taking place from April 2013, as it is recognised that these will put an additional financial burden on households reliant on Housing Benefit.

All working age CTB claimants will see their level of support reduce under the new CTS. Individuals receiving under approximately £3.50 in support per week will receive no support under the new system.

The London Borough of Hillingdon, therefore, proposes an initial scheme which will be adopted for the 2 years, during which time its impact alongside the broader sweep of Welfare Reforms will be monitored. At the end of this 2 year period, and depending on the impact on equalities and stakeholders, the current Council Tax Scheme will either be extended for another year, or the next phase of the Council Tax Scheme will be designed, consulted upon and introduced.

2. Restriction of Maximum Support to 80%

This will restrict the maximum amount of Council Tax reduction that the majority of working age residents claiming a reduction can receive.

Currently residents on either Income Support (IS), income based Job Seekers Allowance and income based Employment Support Allowance with no non-dependants receive Council Tax Benefit equal to 100% of their Council Tax liability.

CTB is currently received by 14,154 working age households of which 30% are low paid working households.

The proposed scheme is the most equitable in that it will equally affect all working age households not deemed vulnerable, irrespective of income. By applying a standard reduction to all working age claimants, the impact is spread across the widest possible group, thereby minimising the impact on each individual affected claimant

The proposed Council Tax support scheme will be the most efficient to deliver and the easiest to communicate to residents, as the main elements of the scheme will mirror the current Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit Schemes. In this way, residents can continue to claim for both schemes on one application form.

3. Removing second adult rebate

Second adult rebate (SAR) is a scheme that is not means tested on the householder. The scheme was introduced to compensate single Council Tax payers who do not qualify for Council Tax Benefit in their own right, and do not qualify for Single Persons Discount because they have a low income second adult(s) living with them. The second adult(s) is means-tested and depending on their income a reduction

between 7.5% and 25% is granted.

Removing second adult rebate would still afford protection for customers on low income through the means tested process as the majority receive SAR through a 'better buy' calculation. This change might have a minimal effect on collection as most of these customers are already paying up to 75% of their liability. There are currently 155 households in Hillingdon receiving second adult rebate, of which 30 are pensioners.

4. Alignment of working age backdating limits with those of pensioners

This proposal will limit backdating to three months for working age customers. The current Council Tax Benefit Regulations allow six months backdating providing applicants can show continuous good cause for not applying earlier. Many claims are received but do not meet the legal conditions to allow back date. In 2011/12 1396 applications were received of which 40% were awarded.

5. Realignment of working age capital restrictions

Under the proposed Council Tax Scheme, the capital limit over which no support would be granted will be £16k. Between £10k and £16k, support will be reduced by a tariff income of £1 for every £500 of capital savings. This is an increase on the current level of £6k, before a tariff income is applied and will be an additional incentive to work and save and the cost impact is immaterial.

Impact of alternative options for Council Tax support on stakeholder groups

1. Capping payments by band

Capping payment by band could predominantly affect families in need of larger accommodation or (for homeowners) affect the asset rich on a low income. It could make people move to smaller more affordable accommodation. There might be a need to increase bad debt provision as these debts may be difficult to collect. The 'capping' would also affect families in private rented accommodation who will have limited income to pay the difference. This option goes against the premise that CTS is based on income and ability to pay.

By capping the discount at Band D properties, the maximum support available to residents would be £1,419.65, if the scheme started in 2012/13.

There are currently 1,252 working age households in borough receiving Council Tax Benefit above Band D broken down as follows:

Band E - 1014
Band F - 197
Band G - 39
Band H - 2

54% of these households are currently receiving maximum Council Tax Benefit.

In addition, 936 (75%) of households are also receiving Housing Benefit and as such could also be subject to the Housing Benefit cuts introduced in April 2012 that imposed a cap on rent levels, and from April 2013 when the overall Benefit caps previously mentioned are introduced. In particular it could disproportionately impact on people who have larger families with 4 children or more affects 13%.

2. Applying a minimum award for working claimants

Applying a minimum award removes entitlement from those with an ability to pay (from those at the upper end of the low income bracket). These customers are already paying the majority of their council tax bill; however, this change would remove any entitlement to support. It does not remove the assessment burden as a full assessment would be required to determine the level of award and then advise the customer they have 'no entitlement'. The change would deliver minimal savings and would affect the 80 households in Hillingdon that receive less than £2 per week.

3. Increasing the excess income withdrawal rate

Increasing the current excess income withdrawal rate from 20% to 25% reduces entitlement in proportion to the customer's ability to pay. These customers already have income above their needs (the living allowance the Department for Work and Pensions assesses they need to live on) and currently pay something towards their council tax liability. Although, it may seem in conflict with Universal Credit (UC) and increasing incentives to work the government has stated in its response to the consultation to minimise the effect of UC and CTS being withdrawn simultaneously it has proposed higher earnings disregards; these are in addition to their original proposed disregards and are as follows;

- An additional earnings disregard to couples with children of £250;
- Increasing the child element in the earnings disregard from £2,700 to £4,000
- An increase in the minimum disregard per adult of £700, including for single claimants

However, UC will not be introduced for new claims until October 2013 for 'out of work' claims and April 2014 for 'in work' claims. Existing cases will migrate to UC between 2014 and 2017. Increasing the withdrawal rate to 30% will affect 2542 claimants, the majority of whom are working, and of this some 469 will lose all existing entitlement to support.

4. Reducing or removing working tax credit disregards

Removing or reducing the working tax credit disregard affects households that currently have either the claimant or the partner working in excess of 30 hours weekly. Customers that are working less than 30 hours each week do not receive this income disregard. Working tax credit is being subsumed within UC, therefore, this option would need to be reviewed when the UC regulations are published and possibly amended for April 2014.

5. Removing child benefit disregard

Child benefit was fully included in the assessment of Housing Benefit and

Council Tax Benefit prior to November 2009 it then became fully disregarded. The Government policy aim at the time was to help meet national child poverty targets. The Council could consider removing the disregard, or allowing a % of the child benefit paid to be disregarded, as child benefit will be fully included in the assessment when the benefit cap is introduced in April

There are currently 3485 working households with children receiving Council Tax Benefit in Hillingdon, 39% of which are lone parents. This proposal would disproportionately affect low-income working households, and as a result is a disincentive to work. It also goes against the principles of Universal Credit of 'making work pay' as in-work households will not be subject to the overall Benefit cap from April 2013. Therefore, this is not being proposed as part of the Scheme.

6. All claimants with non-dependents

Restricting the increased non-dependent contributions to the working non-dependent could be a fair way of ensuring those non-dependants that are able to pay do so. It may be unreasonable for out of work non-dependants to pay an increased deduction as they are already on a very low-income. If they were forced to leave the family home this may lead to an increase in shared accommodation increasing pressure on the supply of housing for this group.

Consultation

B.2) Did you carry out any consultation or engagement as part of this assessment?

Please tick ✓

NO

YES ✓

If yes, what did you do or are planning to do? What were the outcomes?

A full consultation with the public and special interest groups will be undertaken on the scheme design. In addition, local landlords and interested groups will be consulted on the proposed technical changes to exemptions and discounts. Finally, consultation will take place with precepting authorities.

B.3) Provide any other information to consider as part of the assessment

Legal context

The council has a public duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations (Equality Act 2010)

Financial context

It is predicted that public sector funding will reduce by about 28% over the life of the current, with Hillingdon Council having to achieve over £60m savings over the four year period.

National policy context

As part of the Spending Review 2010, the Government announced that it intended to localise council tax benefit (CTB) from 1 April 2013 with a 10% reduction in expenditure. These plans were included as part of the terms of reference for the Local Government Resource Review and the Welfare Reform Bill contains provisions to abolish CTB.

On 17 May, CLG published a consultation on funding arrangements for the new scheme with responses due by 12 July 2012. On the same date a Statement of Intent was published detailing the proposed methodology for the design and operation of a local scheme for council tax support.

National impact assessments

This document has been developed in line with the impact assessments published at the national level by Communities and Local Government. These are listed below:

- *Local Government Finance Bill: Localising support for council tax – Impact assessment* (Communities and Local Government)
- *Local Government Finance Bill: Localising support for council tax – Updated impact assessment* (Communities and Local Government)
- *Localising support for council tax: Vulnerable people – Key local authority duties* (Communities and Local Government)

C) Assessment

What did you find in B1? Who is affected? Is there, or likely to be, an impact on certain groups?

C.1) Describe any **NEGATIVE** impacts (actual or potential):

Equality Group	Impact on this group and actions you need to take
Claimants in deprivation	<p>Council Tax Benefit is a means-tested benefit. As a result, any changes to its provision will affect the most deprived claimants in the borough.</p> <p>Additionally, CTB claimants are more likely to receive Housing Benefit (HB), which is also being reduced as part of the broader Welfare Reform agenda. In Hillingdon, 20,709 households receive HB. 4,560 of these are council tenants; 4,755 live with Registered Social Landlords, and 8,394 are private tenants (March 2012 figures)</p> <p>The scheme has been designed to protect vulnerable groups, and to avoid the creation of disincentives for claimants to work.</p>

	<p>Key provisions which would disproportionately affect low income households have been excluded from Hillingdon's scheme. These include capping support by band of property (75% of households at Band D and above receive Housing Benefit).</p> <p>The London Borough of Hillingdon will continue to monitor the impact of Welfare Reform changes taking place from April 2013, as it is recognised that these will put an additional financial burden on the most deprived households, or those reliant on Housing Benefit.</p>
Women	<p>Nearly two-thirds of Council Tax Benefit claimants are women. Therefore, any change to the provision of support through this scheme will by definition be twice as likely to affect women.</p> <p>Options which disproportionately affect lone parent households, such as removing Child Tax Credit disregard, have been excluded from the borough's new scheme.</p> <p>The London Borough of Hillingdon will continue to monitor the impact of Welfare Reform changes taking place from April 2013, as it is recognised that these will put an additional financial burden on the most deprived households, or those reliant on Housing Benefit.</p>

C.2) Describe any **POSITIVE** impacts

Equality Group	Impact on this group and actions you need to take
Working age	<p>The Council Tax Support scheme has been designed in such a way as to avoid the creation of disincentives to finding work.</p> <p>Options such as increasing the excess income withdrawal rate would serve as a disincentive to work. These have been excluded from the new scheme.</p>
Pensioners	<p>Pensioners are protected from changes in support introduced as part of the Council Tax Support scheme.</p>
Vulnerable groups	<p>Vulnerable groups (including individuals receiving disability benefits) are protected from changes in support introduced as part of the Council Tax Support scheme.</p>

D) Conclusions

Reducing spending on support for council tax is an important contribution to Government's programme of deficit reduction, saving £470 million a year in Great Britain from 2013-14 which, based on previous shares of expenditure equates to

£420 million a year in England. The London Borough of Hillingdon has taken care to design a scheme that is simple, efficient and meets the requirements made of it under the Government's statement of intent.

This is an important agenda, which also supports greater localisation. Vulnerable groups such as pensioners and those with disabilities will be protected from the changes.

Nonetheless, it is inevitable that some groups will be affected by the localisation of council tax, in addition to the broader changes under Welfare Reform.

The London Borough of Hillingdon, therefore, proposes an initial scheme which will be adopted for the 2 years, during which time its impact alongside the broader sweep of Welfare Reforms will be monitored. At the end of this 2 year period, and depending on the impact on equalities and stakeholders, the current Council Tax Scheme will either be extended for another year, or the next phase of the Council Tax Scheme will be designed, consulted upon and introduced.

Signed and dated:.....

Name and position:.....