Council tax support was set up when council tax benefit was abolished in 2013. It supports individuals and families who need financial help most and encourages people to get back into work.

It is a localised system that reduces the amount of council tax charged for those whose combined income, savings and investments fall below a certain level. Our existing scheme is as fair as possible, upholding the principles of the government’s welfare reforms while offering greater support to those who will find that returning to work is more challenging (such as disabled claimants).

The existing scheme has been in place, with some minor changes, for four years. Now Ashford Borough Council and all other local authorities in Kent have been asked to undertake a comprehensive review of their scheme and ask claimants and other interested organisations for their views on a revised version of the scheme.

With public serving organisations facing shortfalls in funding from central government, the council has been asked to consider revising its scheme so that the money available to fund the services that are provided to you stretches further.
Will everyone who currently receives council tax support be affected?
No. The government has said that pensioners will not be affected by the changes and will continue to receive similar support. The government has also said that if you live in your property alone then you will still receive your single person discount of 25%. However, if you are a claimant of working age then you will be affected by the proposed changes and you need to read on.

What will the revised scheme look like?
The council has been working hard to make revisions that are as fair as possible. It encourages people to return to work and asks those people of working age who currently receive council tax support to contribute an additional sum towards their council tax. This will help all the organisations that provide public services to you to bridge the shortfall in funding from central government, while still protecting the most vulnerable groups in our communities.

What influence do I have over the revised scheme?
A number of options have been considered by the council’s officers and councillors already. Some have been adopted – e.g. when calculating entitlement to council tax support we have already said we will use the rules of the housing benefit scheme that apply to it. Others have been discounted – e.g. significantly increasing our element of council tax. Other options are proposed.

We are asking all directly affected claimants, some residents not in receipt of council tax support, public-serving organisations and charities affected by the proposed changes for their views as part of an eight-week period of consultation. We have clearly set out what can and cannot be influenced by the feedback provided in this consultation. Once the consultation period has ended we will feed back a summary of the views that have been expressed.

What else are we proposing?
In summary, the main points about the council’s preferred option for a new local council tax support system:

- Our proposed scheme will continue to work in a very similar way to how it currently does – i.e. those working-age claimants who receive council tax support will be asked to contribute something towards their council tax bill
- Pensioners will continue to receive similar support to that which they currently do and are not affected by the proposals
- If the government determines that you are eligible to receive disability allowances you will only be asked to pay a 5% contribution towards your council tax bill
- The changes made to exemptions on short and long-term empty homes and the removal of the discount on second homes will remain in place
- Neither Ashford Borough Council nor parish councils will directly fund the scheme, in order to preserve other council services that residents have told us they want us to provide
The specific changes

Currently, the minimum level that anyone in receipt of council tax support was asked to pay towards their council tax was 10% – under the revised scheme they will be asked to contribute a minimum of between 10% and 20%.

Those claimants who live in a property that is classified for council tax as being in Band E, F, G or H will be treated as if they are living in (and will receive the level of support that they would be entitled to) a Band D property.

Those claimants who state they are self-employed will be presumed to be earning the statutory national living wage (NLW) – so their minimum income will be deemed to be the NLW x 35 hours (for full-time self-employed claimants) and the NLW x16 hours (for part-time self-employed claimants). New self-employed businesses, set up from 1 April 2017, will be exempt from this condition for their first year of trading.

Previously, claimants with savings up to £16,000 were eligible for council tax support – the revised scheme states that the maximum amount of savings claimants can have is £6,000.

Those claimants with non-dependant adults (such as an adult son/daughter) living at home will receive a deduction of £10 per week per non-dependant.

The revised scheme intends to remove eligibility to what is known as the second adult rebate.

A hardship fund could form part of the revised scheme in order to provide additional support to those who are facing severe financial hardship. Each case will be considered on its own specific circumstances.
We want your views

Between 6 June – 29 August Ashford Borough Council is asking residents, public-serving organisations and charities who will have an interest in the proposed changes what they think.

The revised scheme is discussed in greater detail in the online document Changing our council tax support scheme – the details. The document has case studies to show how you could be affected.

To take part in the consultation you need to complete our council tax support questionnaire. This, and the more detailed document, is available at: www.ashford.gov.uk/counciltaxsupport

If you have any further questions please:

- Email counciltaxsupport@ashford.gov.uk
- Phone 01233 331111
- Visit the Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL

Difficulty in understanding this leaflet?
Need it in braille, large print or on audio tape?
For translations or interpretations please contact us and we will do our best to help.

Email customer.care@ashford.gov.uk
Phone 01233 331111