

**Wiltshire Council
Helping you cope with the changes to Council Tax Benefit
Response from Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)**

October 30th 2012

1. About us

As the largest organisation of blind and partially sighted people in the UK, RNIB is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

We are a membership organisation with over 10,000 members who are blind, partially sighted or the friends and family of people with sight loss. 80 per cent of our Trustees and Assembly Members are blind or partially sighted. We encourage members to be involved in our work and regularly consult with them on government policy and their ideas for change.

As a campaigning organisation of blind and partially sighted people, we fight for the rights of people with sight loss in each of the UK's countries. Our priorities are to:

- Stop people losing their sight unnecessarily
- Support independent living for blind and partially sighted people
- Create a society that is inclusive of blind and partially sighted people's interests and needs.

We also provide expert knowledge to business and the public sector through consultancy on improving the accessibility of the built environment, technology, products and services.

2. Consultation Response:

RNIB are responding to this consultation because of our presence in the South West, representing our members and supporters who live in Wiltshire

It is not appropriate to respond to each of the proposed schemes presented by Wiltshire Council but to rather provide overall comments and observations.

Council Tax is a crucial benefit for people in work who are struggling to pay rising bills for food and fuel, and contributes hugely to making low-paid work pay.

Any scheme introduced by Wiltshire Council should support the aims of the Universal Credit, which are to incentivise work for those on low incomes, simplify the benefits system and make it clearer what amount of income claimants in work will be left with after tax.

The changes to council tax benefits are focused on those of working age. However, disabled people of working age remain far less likely to be in employment. In 2011, the employment rate of disabled people was 48.8 per cent, compared with 77.5 per cent of non-disabled people. The figure is even lower at 33 per cent for blind and partially sighted people. Even then people with sight loss in employment are restricted in being able to access and fully participate in the labour market so a reduction in support with council tax would see blind and partially sighted people struggle with their finances. 45 per cent of blind and partially sighted people describe their financial situation as "just getting by" or worse.

We welcome the inclusion of disabled people, including people with visual impairments as part of the discretionary payment scheme.

We also welcome Wiltshire Councils proposal to change the rate at which council tax benefit is withdrawn where a person has more income than the law says they need to live on and to encourage people to earn more income before it affects their benefit by reducing this amount.

The qualification of entitlement for council tax benefit for people with savings under £6000. This may appear to be a large amount to have in savings. A disabled person may have this much in savings to support their needs and to pay for any expensive adaptation or aids. Aids and adaptations for a person can be costly and we would recommend raising the threshold above £6000

The promotion and take-up of a new local scheme will be more important than ever, to cushion the impact of the Council Tax Benefit (and other) cuts on household budgets. It is important that this scheme is seen

within a wider context, not least because of cuts to Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Housing Benefit (HB) cuts and the one-year time limit of contributory Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

For further information please contact

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