

Appendix 2 – OSC recommendations and responses

OSC Recommendation	Response Agreed, In progress, Not agreed	Details and reasons
1) Absorbing £1million of the £2.5million cost of the council tax support changes is welcomed; consideration should be given to funding the additional £1.5 million required from savings elsewhere in the council's budget.	in progress	Finance officers have provided members with the information about the financial implications of meeting the cost of the scheme in full and the cost of reduced support at partially supported levels as in the main proposal. The revised scheme is planned to meet the transitional grant conditions and therefore reduce the impact on claimants. Any further funding to cover the loss of government support will increase the requirement for savings for the City Council as well as Sussex Police Authority and East Sussex Fire Authority. The Budget Update and Savings report elsewhere on this agenda provides further financial context and the challenging savings requirements the council is already facing.
2) Within the budget and time constraints, the 'Draft Council Tax Low Income Discount Scheme' cannot be significantly improved. The Panel acknowledges however that the scheme will impact negatively on some residents including vulnerable groups.	agreed	The project is now starting to work with vulnerable households to prepare them for this change. As a part of this work officers are contacting households where there is long term unemployment to help them understand the changes and their new need to make a contribution.
3) The Panel supports the £3 per week maximum detriment and £5 per week increase in earnings disregard; both elements should be reviewed prior to any removal after the transition year.	agreed	The scheme will be reviewed in full before its second year of operation; this review will include the £3 cap and increase in earnings disregards.
4) Further representations should be made to government to allow councils to alter all elements of the council tax system, such as single person discounts, and the current exclusion of full time students, within their new council tax arrangements.	Not agreed	Further local discretion over flexibility of discounts and exemptions has been lobbied for by the Local Government Association but rejected by Parliament.
5) The scheme and specific amounts payable need to be communicated as early as possible to affected residents. This should be carried out in person, through community & voluntary sector organisations and all available media and marketing channels.	agreed	Direct communication will be undertaken as soon as practicable once a decision on a final scheme has been made. Colleagues in the communications team will undertake work on non-direct communications, the community and voluntary sector forum is hosting an event specifically about communicating this change to its members and the council's welfare rights team will provide training to colleagues in the city on the detail of the change

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<p>6) To inform the annual review of the scheme the Panel recommends that a robust mechanism be established, utilising community & voluntary sector organisations and employment agencies, to closely monitor the impact of the changes.</p>	<p>agreed</p>	<p>Officers have worked closely with the community and voluntary sector forum in the development of this scheme and have an agreement in place that they and their members will record and feedback the impact of the changes. Job Centre Plus sit on the wider welfare reform project board and will be asked for input into the affect of these changes from an employment perspective</p>
<p>7) Monitoring arrangements should be reported alongside the proposed scheme including timescales and names of those responsible.</p>	<p>agreed</p>	<p>The monitoring arrangements have been included in the main report under section 3.14</p>
<p>8) Administration of the scheme should seek to support residents with wider financial inclusion issues. Work on financial inclusion being developed by the council should progressed as a matter of urgency.</p>	<p>agreed</p>	<p>As part of the implementation of the change to Council Tax Support advice provision (as set out in para 3.11 of the main report) will be commissioned specifically to address the needs of people affected by the changes. In addition the council is establishing new Financial Inclusion Board and a comprehensive project plan to take forward financial inclusion activity, including a targeted financial inclusion commission supporting the implementation of a Community Banking Partnership approach. This programme will be operational in spring 2013 and is being led by Richard Butcher-Tuset and a dedicated project team to ensure the delivery of both urgent and longer term tasks.</p>
<p>9) Administration and monitoring of the scheme should seek to identify any areas where digital inclusion becomes a barrier to residents engaging with welfare changes and the jobs market. This should also be considered as part of the wider scrutiny review into welfare reform.</p>	<p>agreed</p>	<p>The Public Service Board (PSB) has tasked Simon Newell to undertake an evidence gathering exercise to understand the scope and impact of digital inclusion and exclusion in the city. This is due to be reported back to PSB by the end of 2012. The findings will then be used to develop an appropriate approach to the issues found.</p>
<p>10) The City Overview Group- Welfare Reform should be expanded to include landlord representatives.</p>	<p>agreed</p>	<p>A landlords representative and social housing representative have been invited to this group as well as communicating through housing consultative structures.</p>
<p>11) The Panel recommends a further scrutiny review of the impact of wider welfare reforms once implemented.</p>	<p>agreed</p>	<p>OSC agreed that a scrutiny review on the wider welfare reforms would be useful, to include issues of financial and digital inclusion, and added it to their long-term work programme'</p>