

Cheltenham Labour Party

Response to the Borough Council Consultation on changes to Council Tax exemptions

Cheltenham Labour Party is opposed to any changes to the current scheme of Council Tax exemptions operated by Cheltenham Borough Council as proposed in the consultation document.

We would support a scheme which reduced the administrative burden of the process providing it could be conclusively demonstrated that the poorest families in our town were not disadvantaged. The current proposals fail to demonstrate that, and the proposals would result in households in low income bands paying increased council tax. These proposals effectively redistribute the burden of local taxation from the most affluent to the least affluent in Cheltenham.

In making these proposals the Borough Council does not appear to have carried out an equalities impact assessment in line with the Public Sector Equalities Duty under Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010. Such an assessment is essential if the Borough Council is to meet its obligation to treat different groups in our town in an equitable and fair manner. There is no evidence that these proposals will meet that standard.

The current proposals fail to consider the imposition of the Government's Universal Credit scheme on households in Cheltenham. Any changes to the exemption scheme should assess households in line with Universal Credit assessments to prevent either unnecessary overpayment by families, or underpayment which would need to be reclaimed from families with no or little savings with which to meet a debt which is not of their own making.

Most households affected by the proposals in this consultation document live in a state of genuine poverty. Any increased council tax demand on their current low-income levels will have a very significant impact on their household budget. These families will prioritise feeding and clothing their families and heating their homes rather than paying increased council tax demands or be driven into debt. As a result, the administrative burden and cost to the Borough Council will be increased through having to take families to court to seek payment of Council Tax. Many of those families will not have the resources to meet the payments required. As a result, the Borough Council may find itself incurring additional expenditure in a needless pursuit of impoverished households through the courts.

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