

6th January 2025

Dear Mr. Houlton,

We the undersigned submit this letter as part of the London Borough of Barnet council's (LBB) consultation to the proposed reduction in the Council Tax Support Scheme (CTSS).

While we understand LBB's need to make savings, the proposed reduction to the CTSS constitutes a serious concern to those of us who work with vulnerable residents and know the impact this is likely to have.

Council Tax remains by far the most common debt issue presented to Citizens Advice Barnet (CAB) in the borough and the debt that most commonly initiates anxiety and frustration in Chipping Barnet Foodbank. Colindale Communities Trust sees around eight people a week about Council Tax debt, many of whom are working, have other debts and rely on foodbanks.

While the proposed changes appear to save LBB money, it is extremely likely than many of those affected will be unable to pay the difference in Council Tax and will be forced into debt, and the council will waste money attempting to enforce unaffordable payments. As LBB is unaware of the current costs of Council Tax debt collection, the additional cost this will incur is unknowable, but the effect on vulnerable residents, and other council services, is not: being in debt increases the risk of children going into care, physical and mental health problems, unemployment and homelessness. Of CAB's clients with Council Tax debt, 39% were at risk of eviction and likely to need support from Barnet Homes, a service that is already overwhelmed.

LBB's current CTSS is already among the least generous in London. These proposed changes will make it the joint-second least generous scheme, after Enfield, which, while only offering a maximum of 50% support to most residents, includes all single adults under 25 years in its protected groups eligible for 100% support.

We strongly suggest a reconsideration of the proposed scheme in-line with the recommendations made by CAB (see attached report) and through a proactive discussion with those who work with vulnerable families. Providing adequate support for vulnerable residents through a focused CTSS will prevent Barnet Council from wasting resources attempting to enforce payments residents are unable to make, support their mental wellbeing as a result, and reduce future demand on council services.

We look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

Bob Bevil – Chipping Barnet Foodbank
Bina Omare – Colindale Communities Trust
Tammie Comey – Barchester
Trustees - Finchley Foodbank
Pat Caplan - Emeritus Professor at Goldsmiths and
concerned resident

Louise Broadbent – Citizens Advice Barnet
Bianca Illi – Barnet Social Prescribing Service
Hope Yoloye - Living Way Ministries
Wendy Alcock - Incredible Edible Barnet
Dorina Poenaru - RCCT