

What happens now the changes have been made?

Council tax bills for the 2013-14 financial year will soon be sent out. The bill will tell those affected how the changes specifically affect them. Please check your bill carefully.

Will the local system stay like this?

No. In October, after the council's consultation, extra funding was announced by central government, enabling councils to receive transitional funding for one year if they agreed to limit cuts to working-age claimants to no more than an 8.5% reduction in the council tax support, but for the financial year 2013-14 only.

The council will review the progress and impacts of the scheme and the possible ways to compensate for the loss of the extra grant funding from 2014. Our default position from April 2014 is that the council's amended scheme before additional government funding (which would see a reduction of 17.5% for working-age claimants) will apply. There will be further consultation about this.

For more information visit www.ashford.gov.uk/counciltaxsupport

If you have any further questions please:

- Email counciltaxsupport@ashford.gov.uk
- Phone 01233 331111; or
- Visit Ashford Gateway Plus in Church Road, Ashford.

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.

Telephone: 01233 331111

Email: customer.care@ashford.gov.uk

Ashford Borough Council

Council tax benefit the changes

Council tax benefit is currently a national system and is paid to those households whose combined income, savings and investments are below a certain level.

We told you in August that the coalition government is abolishing the current system of council tax benefit on 31st March 2013.

The changes are being made to encourage people who are of working age to return to work, to show that work pays, and to reduce the level of national debt.

All local councils, including Ashford Borough Council, have had to set up a new, local system that will replace it from 1st April 2013.

The money the government is providing to pay for the new, local system is being reduced by 10%, so not everyone will receive the same level of support as they do now.

It is likely that some people will have to pay something for the first time, or something more than they do currently, towards their council tax.

This leaflet explains the changes and how they may affect you.



Will I be affected?

The government has said that pensioners will not be affected by the changes and will continue to receive a similar level of support. If you are not a pensioner claimant then you will be affected by the proposed changes and you need to read on.

How did the council determine its local system?

The council worked hard to introduce a new local system that is as fair as possible. A large number of options were considered and a preferred option was proposed. An eight-week period of public consultation was held between Monday 6th August and Monday 1st October 2012.

“*The council has worked hard to introduce a new local system that is as fair as possible*”

As a direct result of the constructive feedback we received from residents, landlords, charitable groups and parish councils, amendments were made and borough councillors approved the final changes.

You can see the results of the consultation and the feedback given to the council at www.ashford.gov.uk/counciltaxsupport

The council's consultation has been monitored by the Consultation Institute under its Consultation Compliance Assessment Scheme, and the Institute has confirmed that the exercise has fully met its requirements for best practice.

The council's new, localised system

The new system incentivises work, asks those people of working age who currently claim council tax benefit to contribute something towards the shortfall, and protects vulnerable groups. These are principles behind the government's changes and the council felt strongly it should preserve them.

The new system will be as detailed below:

- Pensioners are unaffected by the changes
- Disabled claimants will receive 95% protection in their level of council tax support for as long as they are entitled to disability living allowance/ personal independent payments
- Non-residential carers will also receive 95% protection
- War widows' pension will be fully disregarded
- Working-age claimants will see a reduction in their level of council tax support for the financial year 2013-14 of 8.5%. This is a transitional year as additional funding has been made available by central government
- After the transitional year, the amended scheme before additional government funding (which would see a reduction of 17.5% for working-age claimants) will apply

“*The council's new, localised system has been determined as a direct result of your feedback*”

The new, localised system will be funded by amendments to the following exemptions and discounts:

- The 10% discount on council tax for those who own second homes is being removed
- The council-tax exemption period for short-term empty properties will be reduced from six months to six weeks
- A further 50% council tax premium will be applied for properties that are empty for more than two years