

Appendix 1 – Summary of Benchmarking and conclusions.

Key Design Element	Benchmarking - Summary	Conclusion
Maximum Award Levels	<p>The benchmarking shows that all Essex authorities require working age claimants to make a contribution towards their council tax. This is achieved by setting a maximum percentage a council tax bill can be reduced by within the LCTS scheme.</p> <p>Under Thurrock’s current LCTS scheme, the maximum award level working age claimants can receive is 75% of their Council Tax . Comparing this against the average maximum award level percentages of other Essex authorities of 77%, Thurrock’s scheme is slightly less generous.</p> <p>In terms of comparison to the other thirteen individual Essex authorities, only one authority operates a less generous scheme than Thurrock with a maximum award level of 70%, six authorities match Thurrock at 75%, and six offer more generous schemes with maximum award levels rates ranging from 76% to 87%</p>	<p>The current level of support provided by the existing Thurrock scheme is in line with that provided by other Essex authorities drives high collection rates and low complaints.</p> <p>Whilst lowering this level of support would in theory reduce the cost of the scheme, as the resulting increase would be in addition to any agreed annual percentage increase in Council Tax this would disproportionately increase the financial burden of council tax on Thurrock’s poorest households, and as such carries a significant risk that any reduction in award levels could be countered by a reduction in collection rates and have wider consequences on the households in question.</p> <p>As a result, this was not prioritised for further consideration within the current years review.</p>
Maximum Permitted Savings	<p>All Essex authorities set a maximum level of savings a claimant can have to be eligible for support. Within Thurrock, the maximum savings a claimant can have is £6,000.</p> <p>This level is in line with all other Essex authorities except for two authorities, who allow savings up to £16,000.</p>	<p>Thurrock’s savings threshold is in line with the majority of other Essex authorities. In addition, considering that only a very small percentage of benefits claimants have any savings, reducing this further is unlikely to deliver any significant reduction in scheme costs.</p> <p>As a result, this was not prioritised for further consideration within the current years review.</p>
Back Dating	<p>All Essex authorities set a maximum level of savings a claimant can have to be eligible for support. Within Thurrock, the maximum savings a claimant can have is £6,000.</p> <p>This level is in line with all other Essex authorities except for two authorities, who allow savings up to £16,000.</p>	<p>Thurrock already shares the strictest backdating rules in the benchmark group. In addition, removing backdating completely would not deliver any significant reduction in scheme costs and could penalise households who may experience difficulties in making an immediate claim.</p>

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Band Restriction	The existing Thurrock scheme does not cap awards to a Council Tax band. However, authorities can consider capping awards to a specific band level - for example imposing a cap at Band D, would restrict awards for those in higher banded properties (E-H) to the level they would receive if they lived in a band D property.	<p>98% of Thurrock's working age claimants occupy properties in Bands A-D, therefore a restriction of this type would not offer a significant financial benefit. In addition it is considered highly likely that introducing a banding cap would place additional pressures on larger households.</p> <p>As a result, this was not prioritised for further consideration within the current years review.</p>