

WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: RESOURCES SUB-COMMITTEE 7 FEBRUARY 2000

SUBJECT: COUNCIL TAX DISABLED REDUCTION - TAKE UP CAMPAIGN

FROM: COUNCIL TAX AND RATING

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 In the Finance Service Plan, it was agreed that a take up campaign would be undertaken detailing the relief available to Council Tax payers who are or who live with disabled persons. As this relief is being extended to taxpayers of properties in Band A from April 2000, the campaign would incorporate publicity about extending the relief.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Under Council Tax legislation, relief can be awarded to taxpayers where there is a disabled person (adult or child) resident and the property has either a room; second bathroom; second kitchen or wheelchair used indoors that is required for the needs of the disabled person.

2.2 Relief is awarded by basing the charges on a band lower than normal. This did mean that those properties in the lowest Band, A, could not qualify however from April 2000 a change in the regulations means that these properties too can now be considered for relief. For properties in Band A a reduction equal to one ninth of the Band D amount (typically just over £80 a year) can be given. Larger properties would receive greater reductions with those in Band H, the highest band, receiving a reduction of over £250.

3. THE CAMPAIGN

3.1 At the start of the campaign, 357 taxpayers qualified for this relief and the amount awarded totalled £55,117. In view of this the likely numbers of new claimants would not warrant a full canvass of all taxpayers. We therefore decided to target three specific areas in order to reach likely taxpayers:

- local organisations that interact and / or provide services to disabled persons
- a poster campaign, not just in Council Offices, but in doctors surgeries and other community areas
- advertisements in the local newspapers.

The organisations contacted are listed in Appendix 1. A sample of the poster (also used for the newspaper advertisements) is shown in Appendix 2.

4. THE COST

4.1 The cost of this campaign was as follows:
Drafting and distributing Posters to organisations listed in Appendix1 £1006
Advertisements in the local newspapers

£2271

4.2 The only 'external' costs were the press advertisements, all other costs being internal recharges mainly reflecting staff time in carrying out the campaign.

5. OUTCOME

5.1 So far, almost 50 forms have been returned. In some we have been able to backdate relief, others are still awaiting a visit. Two cases will qualify from April 2000 as these property are in Band A. As at 24 January the number of qualifying properties stands at 375 and the total relief granted has increased from £55,117 at the start of the campaign to £63,894 - an increase in excess of £8,700.

5.2 These results are pleasing and reflect not just the usefulness of posters and advertisements, but also the awareness of staff working for related bodies that have been reminded of this relief and who have been able to advise potential claimants.

6 THE FUTURE

6.1 The campaign has not of course finished. Posters are still displayed and new applications are received every week.

6.2 The availability of this relief has always been mentioned on the reverse of the Council Tax bill and staff working at the Kenilworth Connection as well as those in the Benefits section and Council Tax Unit are aware and can advise customers when appropriate.

6.3 Later this month a colour leaflet entitled "Reductions for Disabled Persons" will be published and displayed in Council locations. It is one of 8 colour leaflets being launched to provide details and offer help in areas of Council Tax administration.

7. KEY ISSUES

7.1 This initiative did not form part of any specific Key Issue, but clearly there is an important obligation on the part of the Council to ensure that reliefs are made available to qualifying taxpayers.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

8.1 None.

9. RECOMMENDATION

9.1 That Members receive and note the report.

Background Papers: Nil

Areas in the District affected: All

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Organisations sent applications forms and a poster detailing the Disabled Relief scheme

Action Research for the Crippled Child
Castel Froma
Council of Disabled People
Crossroads Care Attendant Scheme
Disability (West Midlands)
Disabled Drivers' Association
Dogs for the Disabled
Family Link
Helen Ley House
Helping Hands Club (Kenilworth)
Leonard Cheshire Foundation
Myasthenia Gravis Association
Multiple Sclerosis Society (Warwick & Kenilworth)
PHAB (Leamington & Warwick)
PHAB Wave
Red Cross Society (Warwickshire)
Remap (Technical Help for Disabled People)
Riding for the Disabled Association
Rowan Organistaion
Scope (Coventry & Warwickshire)
Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association
Spinal Injuries Association
Warwick University Community Volunteers
Young Adults Physically Handicapped Club

In addition we visited the following to leave posters:

- Doctors' Surgeries
- Post Offices
- Libraries
- Swimming Pools
- Warwickshire Welfare Rights
- CAB
- SSAFA
- Salvation Army
- Sheltered Accomodation (Acorn Court, Chandos Court, Park Court, Tannery Court)
- Alzheimers Disease Society
- Age Concern
- GAP (Spinney Hill)
- Chain Advice Point (Crown Way)