

1. **Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme 2022-2023** (Pages 2 - 10)

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN AND WEST NORFOLK

RECORD OF DECISION TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

This is a record of a decision taken by the officers under delegated powers and where necessary taken in consultation with members and officers.

Delegated Power

Cabinet: 17 November 2020

Para 13:

That authority be delegated to the Revenues and Benefits Manager, in consultation with the s151 Officer and Council Leader, to decide the discretionary criteria for government Covid-19 support schemes and discounts where they:

- Are part of a central government Covid-19 support initiative,
- Are funded by central government, and
- Will be administered by the Revenues and Benefits section

Decision Taken

Agreement of the CTS Hardship Scheme policy for 2022/2023

Reasons for the Decision

To agree the policy for continuing the CTS Hardship Scheme for 2022/2023.

On 18 March 2020, as part of its Covid-19 response, the government announced it would fund local authorities to award additional relief to working age people receiving Council Tax Support (CTS) during 2020/2021. The scheme provided a further £150 reduction to a person's council tax bill through a discretionary CTS award.

The funding was calculated based on our share of the national caseload of working age people, and we were awarded £1,035,961. This funding is not ringfenced and does not have to be returned to central government if it is unspent. We awarded just under £480,000 in CTS Hardships for 2020/2021 and we were able to continue the scheme into 2021/2022 using the unspent funding, with a maximum award of £100.

Due to caseload decreases during 2021/2022 there is still approximately £185,000 of the original funding remaining, and the CTS Hardship scheme is recommended for extension into 2022/2023 with a maximum award of £75. All other eligibility criteria remain the same. This means that over three years we will have given in excess of £1m of support under this scheme to working age residents in our area on the lowest incomes.

The original funding was designed to help with the impact of Covid-19 and this scheme is designed to assist with any longer term impacts from the pandemic on working age people's income and earnings which may now be exacerbated by the impact of rising energy costs. 5,400 working age people currently claim CTS, of which 2,400 receive less than 100% support and contribute towards their council tax bill. This includes people who are not in a protected group, so are subject to the 84% maximum award, as well as those in a protected group who do not receive 100% CTS for other reasons, such as earnings.

Over 90% of working age households receiving CTS live in properties in council tax bands A or B. The borough council's share of the annual council tax bill, excluding the levy for the Internal Drainage Boards, is only £54.78 for a band A property, and £63.91 for a band B property – just 4% of the overall bill. A hardship award of £75 means we are able to fully

cover the cost of providing our local services to our residents in the lowest bands, and also contribute towards charges for the county, police and parish shares of the bill.

This award will reduce or remit the amount of council tax people have to pay and forms part of a wider package of targeted support for our local residents.

Options considered

Different levels of award over different timeframes and using different criteria have been considered. To get support out quickly to those who need it, stay within the available funding and allow for any future caseload increases the existing CTS Hardship scheme will be extended for 2022/2023 with a maximum award of £75.

The proposed policy is included with this report.

Any declarations of interest and details of any dispensations granted in respect of interests.

Not applicable

Recommended by

Signature



Jo Stanton, Revenues and Benefits Manager

Date 6 September 2022

Authorisation

Signature



Michelle Drewery, s151 Officer

Date 6 September 2022

Consultation with members/officers

If the decision is taken following consultation with the members/officers, please give details:

Consultation with the Council Leader, Councillor Stuart Dark

Signed by Member as consulted:



Councillor Stuart Dark

Date 6 September 2022

Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment



Name of policy/service/function	Discretionary Policy for CTS Hardship Awards 2022/2023				
Is this a new or existing policy/ service/function?	Continuation of an existing policy				
Brief summary/description of the main aims of the policy/service/function being screened. Please state if this policy/service rigidly constrained by statutory obligations	The policy continues the CTS Hardship Award scheme for working age people already receiving CTS for 2022/2023. The scheme will to help reduce the council tax bill for working age people on low incomes. Pension age people are not included as they are paid CTS under a national, more generous scheme.				
Question	Answer				
<p>1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups according to their different protected characteristic, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service?</p> <p>Please tick the relevant box for each group.</p> <p>NB. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group.</p>		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
	Age			✓	
	Disability			✓	
	Gender			✓	
	Gender Re-assignment			✓	
	Marriage/civil partnership			✓	
	Pregnancy & maternity			✓	
	Race			✓	
	Religion or belief			✓	
	Sexual orientation			✓	
Other (eg low income)	✓				
Question	Answer	Comments			
2. Is the proposed policy/service likely to affect relations between certain equality communities or to damage relations between the equality communities and the Council, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular community or denying opportunities to another?	No				
3. Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?	No				
4. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?	No				
<p>5. Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions? If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section</p>	N/A	<p>Actions: None required as the policy has an intended positive impact on low income groups</p>			
		<p>Actions agreed by EWG member:Jo Stanton.....</p>			
<p>If 'yes' to questions 2 - 4 a full impact assessment will be required unless comments are provided to explain why this is not felt necessary:</p>					

Assessment completed by: Name Joanne Stanton	
Job title Revenues and Benefits Manager	Date 1 September 2022

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT COVID-19 HARDSHIP GRANT: 2022/2023

Local Government Finance Act 1992 s13a(1)(c)

In March 2020 the government made available a £500m fund to local authorities so that each working age Council Tax Support claimant could receive a £150 credit on their council tax account. We implemented and administered this scheme during 2020/2021.

At the end of 2020/2021 we had a substantial amount of this government funding remaining. This was rolled forward into 2021/2022 and used to continue the scheme, with a maximum award of £100. The demand for the scheme was not as high as expected during 2021/2022 due to decreases in the Council Tax Support caseload, and funding of £189,000 is still available. This will be used to fund a further scheme for 2022/2023 with the same eligibility criteria and a maximum award of £75.

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT HARDSHIP GRANT POLICY

1. This policy applies for the financial year 2022/2023 to Working Age Council Tax Support claims only as defined in s1.6 of the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk's Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2022/2023
2. Subject to the policy below, a one-off lump sum Hardship Grant will be credited to the council tax account of any person, who for any day between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023:
 - a. Has a claim for Council Tax Support that is classed as a Working Age claim, and
 - b. Is entitled to, and awarded, Council Tax Support.
3. The maximum Hardship Grant payable under this Policy is £75
4. Only one Hardship Grant will be paid per Council Tax Support claim and per Council Tax account. If more than one Council Tax Support claim exists for the same Council Tax account (for example with joint liability), the maximum Hardship Grant is £75, or the amount subject to Paras 5 and 6 below.
5. If a Council Tax Support claim is in payment on 1 April 2022, the Hardship Grant payable is the lower of:
 - a. £75, or
 - b. The outstanding Council Tax liability for 2022/2023, excluding any amounts for Magistrates Court Costs and Penalties
6. If a Council Tax Support claim starts on a day after 1 April 2022 but before 1 April 2023, the Hardship Grant payable is the lower of:
 - a. £75, or
 - b. The outstanding council tax liability for 2022/2023, calculated from the start date of the Council Tax Support claim to 31 March 2023. Any council tax liability for days before the start date of the Council Tax Support claim is excluded.
7. Subject to Paragraphs 5 and 6 above and paragraph 8 below:

- a. If a Hardship Grant of less than £75 is awarded and the outstanding Council Tax Liability increases, additional grant will be awarded up to the £75 maximum.
 - b. If the Hardship Grant is awarded and the council tax liability is subsequently reduced the Hardship Grant will be reduced, as applicable, to the lower amount.
8. If a Council Tax Support claimant has a change of address within the borough council's area, and remains the claimant for benefit purposes, they do not qualify for a new Hardship Grant. A claimant can only receive one Hardship Grant up to the maximum amount during 2022/2023
9. The Hardship Grant is awarded as a credit to the council tax account and is not payable by any other method.
10. The Hardship Grant will not decrease the council tax liability on a council tax account to less than £0.
11. When a Hardship Grant is awarded to a council tax account, and there is still an outstanding balance, the council tax instalments will be recalculated to include the amount of the grant.
12. When a Hardship Grant is awarded to a council tax account, and a credit is created as the taxpayer has already paid more than the required amount after the Hardship Grant award, the credit will either be refunded or transferred to another outstanding balance.
13. Any excess Hardship Grant will be reversed from the council tax account and recovered in the normal way.
14. The council may, at its discretion, choose: not to reverse excess Hardship Grant; choose to write off any excess Hardship Grant; or choose not to recover any excess Hardship Grant.
15. The Hardship Grant is payable for any new Council Tax Support claim made on or after 1 April 2023 but backdated to a start date between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, provided the conditions of this Policy are also met.
16. Changes to a Council Tax Support claim or council tax liability made on or after 1 April 2022, but backdated to a date between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 will affect the Hardship Grant as detailed in this policy.
17. There is a right of appeal under Section 16(1)(b) of the Local Government Finance Act if a person is aggrieved by any calculation made by the council of the amount which they are liable to pay in respect of council tax. This includes a decision on the amount of council tax discretionary relief awarded.
18. In the first instance the customer must write to the Revenues Section stating the grounds for appeal against the decision. The Revenues Section will review the appeal and respond within two months. If the customer is still dissatisfied, or if the Revenues Section does not respond within two months, the customer may appeal to the Valuation Tribunal.

Notes:

Full council approval is not required for this policy however a Delegated Decision has been used to agree the policy details under the following powers:

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