

**Title:** Discretionary Council Tax Support Fund Policy

**Report authorised by:** Jess Crowe, Director Culture, Strategy and Engagement

**Lead Officer:** David Graaff, Head of Service Delivery  
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**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Report for Key/Non-Key Decision:** Key

## **1. Describe the issue under consideration**

- 1.1 The Government issued the guidance for the delivery of the Council Tax Support Scheme on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2022.
- 1.2 Recognising the impact of rising bills, the government is distributing £100 million of grant funding in 2023-24 for local authorities to support economically vulnerable households with council tax payments.
- 1.3 Funding is allocated to councils based on their share of local council tax support claimants. Local authorities are expected to use the majority of their funding allocations to reduce bills for current working age and pension age Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) claimants by up to £25.
- 1.4 Councils can use their remaining allocation as they see fit to support vulnerable households with council tax bills.
- 1.5 This report sets out the proposed discretionary scheme in Appendix 1.

## **2. Cabinet Member Introduction**

- 2.1 The Council is seeking to maximise the distribution of funding to provide the best outcomes, and minimise hardship, for the most disadvantaged residents within the limited funding provided by the Government.

## **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 To approve Haringey's Discretionary Council Tax Support Fund Scheme (see Appendix 1) as the methodology to use the remaining allocation of funding in accordance with the guidance issued by Government.
- 3.2 To authorise the Director Culture, Strategy and Engagement, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Tackling Inequality and Resident Services, to make appropriate amendments to the Discretionary Council Tax Support Scheme as necessary.

#### **4. Reasons for Decision**

- 4.1 The Council is required to develop a Discretionary scheme in accordance with the requirements set out in the Guidance issued by the Government on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2022.
- 4.2 The Council has developed a distribution methodology that complies with the requirements of Guidance as set out in paragraphs 19 and 20 in the Guidance

#### **5. Alternative Options Considered**

- 5.1 Various options for distribution were considered including awarding a fixed sum to all CTRS recipients, restricting the award to certain categories or groups of claimants, for example working age disabled. These options were rejected because the chosen option maximises the award of reduction to all the worst-off eligible CTRS claimants.
- 5.2 The option of awarding reductions to new claimants as set out in paragraph 16 of the guidance has been considered and rejected as it precludes making speedy awards of discount at the start of the year.
- 5.3 The Council recognises the limitations of the CTSF scheme to help residents, and the importance of getting support to residents early in the Financial year and therefore will award discounts to qualifying residents at the start of the year in order to allow them to budget effectively.

#### **6. Background Information**

- 6.1 The Government issued the guidance for the delivery of the Council Tax Support Scheme on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2022.
- 6.2 The funding is for the 2023-24 financial year. Allocations for each local authority are set out at Annex A of the Guidance, as confirmed at the final local government finance settlement (8 February 2023). Haringey's allocation is £719,854.
- 6.3 The discount should apply to current LCTS claimants that have an outstanding council tax liability for the 2023-24 financial year. The Government expects councils to deliver this using their discretionary powers under s13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- 6.4 The requirements for a discretionary scheme are set out in the Government guidance to local authorities published on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2022.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/council-tax-support-fund-guidance/council-tax-support-fund-guidance>

- 6.5 These requirements include the following:

- 6.5.1 The government recognises that existing support mechanisms vary locally, including LCTS schemes, discretionary council tax discount/hardship schemes and local welfare schemes. Councils will want to consider using a proportion of their allocation to establish their own local approach to helping economically vulnerable households with council tax bills.
- 6.5.2 Local authorities should revisit their discretionary approach at intervals during the financial year, in order to ensure expenditure for 2023-24 remains within their allocation.

## **7. Contribution to Strategic Outcomes**

- 7.1 The policy supports delivery of Theme 4 Adults, Health & Welfare from the new Corporate Delivery Plan 2022-24. The policy supports our corporate priorities, including:
- Sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness
  - Supporting the vulnerable and elderly to live independent lives
  - Creating a fair and equal borough by tackling the underlying factors of poverty and disadvantage
  - Early help and intervention

## **8. Statutory Officers Comments**

### **8.1 Legal**

- 8.1.1 Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires the Council to have a Local Council Tax Support Scheme in place to offer Council Tax reductions to those facing financial hardship.
- 8.1.2 To supplement that local support, additional government funding is being provided in 2023-24 via the Council Tax Support Fund which is not confined to Council Tax reductions. Councils have a discretion in how to allocate that funding, as long as it is in line with the Government Guidance.
- 8.1.3 The proposed “Discretionary Council Tax Support Fund Policy” complies with the requirements set out in the associated Guidance and there is no reason why it should not be implemented
- 8.1.4 This is a key decision which may be taken by the Lead Member with the Leader’s approval, following publication on the Forward Plan for the requisite period.
- 8.1.5 Unless the decision is called-in for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it may be implemented following the expiry of the call-in period.

### **8.2 Equalities**

- 8.2.1 The council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
  - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not
  - Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not
- 8.2.2 The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.
- 8.2.3 Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristics.
- 8.2.4 A full EQIA has been completed for this decision and is attached as an appendix.
- 8.2.5 The EQIA finds the scheme is designed to support vulnerable people and individuals on low incomes.
- 8.2.6 The EQIA details groups who have been identified as needing additional, tailored communications to ensure they are aware of the scheme and supported to make an application, thereby promoting equality of opportunity.

### **8.3 Chief Finance Officer**

- 8.3.1 The total funding available to Haringey for Council Tax Support Fund is £719,854 including the mandatory scheme. The mandatory scheme has cost £264,054 leaving £455,800 for the discretionary element.
- 8.3.2 The service should revisit their discretionary approach at intervals during the financial year, in order to ensure expenditure for 2023-24 remains within the grant allocation.
- 8.3.3 The service should also maintain a record of support provided as Government intend to collect data on the grant application on a quarterly basis. Evidence of additional costs incurred with administering the scheme should also be kept as the Government plans to provide New Burdens funding and may require evidence to support allocations.

## **9 Use of Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Discretionary Council Tax Support Fund Policy
- Appendix 2 – EQIA

## **10 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

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10.3 Council Tax Discretionary Reductions Policy (s13a)  
<https://www.minutes.haringey.gov.uk/documents/s30327/REVS%20BENS%20DEC.pdf>