



WELWYN HATFIELD

OPENNESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES REGULATIONS 2014 RECORD OF OFFICER DECISION TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

1. **SERVICE AREA**

Finance and Transformation

2. **CASE REFERENCE**

3. **DECISION
TITLE**

Changes to the Council Tax Support Fund Scheme

4. **AUTHORITY TO TAKE THE DECISION**

(tick)

This decision has been taken under a specific express authorisation

This decision has been taken under a general authorisation

The effect of the decision is to:

(a) grant a permission or licence

(b) affect the rights of an individual

(c) award a contract or incur expenditure which materially affects
the Council's financial position

5. **DETAILS OF THE DECISION MAKING OFFICER**

Name of decision making Officers

Richard Baker

Job titles

Executive Director
(Finance and
Transformation)

Signatures

Date this decision was taken

17 June 2024

6. DETAILS OF THE DECISION

Decision taken

Recognising the impact of rising bills, the Government provided a new grant funding in 2023-24 for local authorities to support economically vulnerable households in their area with council tax payments.

Funding was allocated to councils based on their share of local council tax support claimants according to the latest data. The Government expected local authorities to use the majority of their funding allocations to reduce bills for current working age and pension age Council Tax Support (CTS) claimants by up to £25. Councils can use their remaining allocation as they see fit to support economically vulnerable households.

In accordance with guidelines, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council used our grant allocation to fund further reductions in the council tax liability of individuals receiving CTS with an outstanding council tax liability, by up to £25. The discount was applied to current CTS claimants that had an outstanding council tax liability for the 2023/24 financial year and was included on council tax bills issued in March 2023 for this year.

Where a resident's liability for 2023/24 was, following the application of CTS, less than £25, their liability was reduced to nil. Where a resident's liability for 2023-24 was nil, no reduction to the council tax bill was available and those bills were not credited. Funding has also been used throughout the year to pay new CTS claimants and this will continue through the year.

£43,000 of the funding has been allocated to top up our existing £25,000 hardship payment fund. The existing hardship fund is relief funded by the Council which is available to those recipients of CTS who are suffering exceptional hardship. The amount of relief available is limited and is awarded under exceptional circumstances.

In addition, some funding was shared with the Income and Home Ownership Team to provide support to residents who were struggling financially. These cases included those affected by under occupancy, benefit cap and a shortfall in the housing element from universal credit or housing benefit. Those that are on a low income but struggling due to cost of living were also included. Payments of up to £500 were been paid to these individuals' rent accounts, after verification processes were completed.

The Council received £162,530 funding. This cannot be exceeded and we had paid residents a net total of £147,000, at 31 March 2024. The original amounts awarded have reduced due to CTS overpayments, where CTS has been reclaimed due to changes in circumstances. This leaves circa £15,000 surplus funding.

The proposal to utilise the surplus funding is to apportion the remaining funding over the council tax accounts with arrears remaining from the 2023/24 financial year. This ensures that we comply with the requirement to use the funding on 2023/24 cases.

Reasons

The funding made available for local authorities is to support the most vulnerable households in England. The intention of this funding is to allow councils to deliver additional support to households already receiving council tax support. Such households are deemed to be vulnerable and on low income.

The funding must be spent by 30 June 2024.

Alternative options considered and reasons for their rejection (if any)

Not utilise the available funding – this would not be acceptable – Some of our vulnerable residents could be adversely affected by not delivering this scheme and the council would be heavily criticised for not making use of the funding available.

Deliver an unrestricted, or less restricted scheme – The options available are limited due to the Government guidance which our scheme needs to be based on and the timeframe by which the final funds must be spent.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS USED TO INFORM THE DECISION

Background Papers	Location

8. DETAILS OF ANY MEMBER(S) CONSULTED

Councillor Duncan Jones (Executive Member for Resources)

In the case of a decision made under specific express authorisation, the name of any Member who has declared a conflict of interest

n/a

9. DETAILS OF ANY OFFICER(S) CONSULTED

Client Services Support Manager

10. OPINION OF DECISION MAKING OFFICER AS TO CONFIDENTIAL/EXEMPT INFORMATION

In my opinion this record and/or background papers contain confidential/exempt information and the material is therefore not to be placed on the website or disclosed to the public



11. ACTION FOLLOWING THE DECISION

Date of publication

17 June 2024