

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF THE HOUSING AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE 17 MARCH 2022

SUBJECT: Urgent Officer Decision in relation to the continuation of the Local Council Tax Hardship Fund for 2022/23

REPORT AUTHOR: James Hassett – Chief Executive

DATE: February 2022

EXTN: 37600

AREA: Corporate Support

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In accordance with the provisions of the Officer Scheme of Delegation in the Council's Constitution, this report provides an update to the Committee on the decisions taken by the Chief Executive to incur expenditure or take urgent action to continue the Hardship Fund for claimants of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS) for 2022/23 and further asks committee to authorise the Chief Executive to agree a Discretionary Scheme to be funded through central government grant for payments of up to £150 for households in Bands E to H who might be experiencing fuel poverty but not beneficiary of the Council Tax Rebate.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to:

1. Endorse and support the urgent decision to continue the Hardship Fund for claimants of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS) for 2022/23, which constitutes an additional discretionary discount of up to £150 per household for working age claimants in the District.
2. Authorise the Chief Executive to agree the County Wide discretionary rebate scheme being negotiated for households not eligible for the mandatory scheme.

1. BACKGROUND:

- 1.1. The Local Council Tax Hardship Fund commenced in 2020/21 and was fully funded from a government grant. The scheme was able to be continued in 2021/22 due to the support of West Sussex County Council who agreed to meet their share of the scheme.
- 1.2. West Sussex County Council have confirmed that they are willing to continue supporting the scheme in 2022/23. However, due to the timing of the notification, this could not be included in the budget 2022/23 process. The action of the County Council has enabled Arun to continue

with the scheme, as the District share can be met from the Covid19 Contingency budget for 2021/22.

2. PROPOSAL(S):

- 2.1.1 The decision to continue the Covid-19 Hardship Fund for claimants of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS) for 2022/23, which constitutes an additional discretionary discount of up to £150 per household for working age claimants in the District was taken by the Chief Executive on 25 February 2022.
- 2.1.2 West Sussex County Council has recently agreed to continue the Hardship Fund for 2022/23 subject to Arun funding the District Council share (approximately 12% of the overall cost or £100k). Funding has been allocated from the Covid 19 Contingency Budget for 2021/22.
- 2.1.3 The scheme is targeted towards those residents in most need.
- 2.1.4 The hardship fund was applied to 4,734 working age households in the District, with an initial award of £618,931. The share to be met by the Council is approximately £74,000 (this figure will increase during the year as new cases become eligible).
- 2.1.5 The government is funding a mandatory fuel allowance scheme through Council Tax for households in bands A-D (The Council Tax Rebate). For households outside these bands funding is being provided so that Councils can devise a discretionary scheme.
- 2.1.6 Councils can determine locally how best to make use of this funding to provide payments to other households who are energy bill payers but not covered by the Council Tax Rebate. This could include households living in property valued in bands E – H that are on income related benefits or those where the energy bill payers are not liable for council tax. Occupants of class M (student halls) are unlikely to be eligible for discretionary support, unless they are exposed to rising energy prices in a similar way to other households. Discretionary support should not be offered to occupants of property in exemption class O, where the Ministry of Defence will provide cost of living support.
- 2.1.7 In order to ensure that the Discretionary scheme for E-H is rolled out on time before the next Housing and Wellbeing Committee Committee meeting, Committee is being asked to authorise the Chief Executive to agree that scheme which is currently in discussion between the District Councils to ensure that it is an agreed County wide scheme.

3. OPTIONS:

None, as the officer made the decision in line with the delegated authority given by the Council.

4. CONSULTATION:

Has consultation been undertaken with:

YES

NO

Relevant Town/Parish Council		✓
Relevant District Ward Councillors		✓
Other groups/persons (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader of the Council • Group Leaders 	✓	
5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial	✓	
Legal	✓	
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		✓
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		✓
Sustainability		✓
Asset Management/Property/Land		✓
Technology		✓
Other (please explain)		✓
<p>6. IMPLICATIONS:</p> <p>Financial Implications Urgent officer decision made under delegation: The Section 151 Officer has been consulted on the decision and has approved the necessary virement for 2022/23. The decision by West Sussex County Council to fund the balance of the relief makes the proposal affordable, whilst ensuring that targeted support is provided for those local residents in most need.</p> <p>Application of additional Central Government Funding: The Council, as billing authority, is responsible for distribution to households of two schemes in relation to rising energy prices which are fully funded by central government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council Tax Energy Rebate scheme is mandatory, and the Council is acting as agent; and • The discretionary scheme intended for households not eligible for the mandatory scheme is also fully funded but requires a transparent scheme for applications to be made. The Council is therefore acting as principal for the discretionary scheme. <p>Legal Implications The Interim Monitoring Officer has been consulted on the decision. The decision taken by the officer has followed the provisions of the Council's Constitution and any direction or law issued by Central Government.</p>		

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:

To meet the requirements of the Council's Constitution and to enable payments in relation to the discretionary scheme to be made as soon as possible in line with the intentions of the grant.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Council's Constitution - Constitution