



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date	<b>Council: Wednesday, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022</b>
Report Number	<b>Agenda Item No. 9</b>
Subject	<b>Emergency / Urgency Delegations Decisions</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Michele Mead, Leader; Email: Michele.mead@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To note decisions taken under the emergency and urgency delegation arrangements approved by Council on 13 May 2020.
Appendices	None
Recommendations	That the report be noted.
Corporate priorities	Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council  Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone
Key Decision	N/A
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	Leader

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. At its meeting on 13 May 2020, the Council approved Emergency and Urgency delegations to the Chief Executive to enable decisions to be taken which were either an emergency, or where there was urgency such that the matter could not reasonably await the next meeting of whichever body would otherwise take that decision.
- 1.2. The report on the matter included the statement that: *“Any decision under the above provisions shall be recorded and published, and reported to Council, Cabinet or the appropriate Committee or Sub-Committee, such report to include the reasons that the powers needed to be used”*.

## 2. £150 COUNCIL TAX REBATE AND HOMES FOR UKRAINE HOSTING ALLOWANCE

- 2.1. The Chief Executive used his delegated powers on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022 to approve the following changes to the Council’s Section 13A Policy.

*That the:*

*a) £150 Council Tax Rebate be fully disregarded from the assessment of Council Tax Support;*

*b) monthly allowance for Hosting Ukrainian Refugees be fully disregarded; and*

*c) The 2022/2023 Council Tax Support scheme be amended to reflect this additional disregard*

- 2.2. The Council implemented a local Council Tax Support Scheme on 1 April 2013.
- 2.3. Each year the Council has to decide whether to make changes to its Council Tax Support scheme (CTS) for working age customers. The current scheme was adopted in 2020/2021, which was supported by Citizens Advice, west Oxfordshire and delivered an increase in support to the most vulnerable residents within the District.
- 2.4. On 23 February 2022, the Council approved that the CTS scheme would remain unchanged for 2022/2023 in order for it to continue to support the Council’s key priority to facilitate healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for its residents. The only changes required to the scheme were the annual uplift of allowances (which provides an increase in financial support) and non-dependent deductions.
- 2.5. Since then the Government has published its guidance to local Authorities on the delivery of the Council Tax Rebate scheme, which would see those households in council tax bands A to D and those more vulnerable residents in council tax bands E to H receive a payment of up to £150.00 per household.
- 2.6. In its response to the refugee crisis caused by the Russian war on Ukraine, the Government has also decided to give a monthly allowance of £350.00 to households who come forward and host a Ukrainian refugee for at least 6 months rent free.
- 2.7. The Council’s CTS scheme is based on income bands with certain disregards on some income, such as child maintenance payments and disability payments. This means that these payments are totally disregarded when assessing a household’s income.
- 2.8. Other income not already allocated within the ‘disregarded group’ in the CTS scheme would qualify as ‘income’ and be considered when calculating a person’s income assessment.

- 2.9. The £150 Council Tax Rebate is currently not disregarded. However for other statutory benefit schemes; such as Housing Benefit, it will be treated as a local welfare provision and disregarded in full within any calculation. The Department for Work and Pensions will legislate to ensure payments are also fully disregarded within the calculation of Universal Credit.
- 2.10. A one off payment of £150.00 could result in households moving into a higher income band and therefore being charged a higher level of Council Tax for a one-month period.
- 2.11. The intention of this additional financial support is to assist households with their energy bills and not penalise them through a reduction of benefits and/or support, such as CTS.
- 2.12. The Government is implementing a scheme to award a monthly payment to households who host a Ukrainian refugee; and if that household is in receipt of CTS, the current CTS scheme would not allow this award to be disregarded.
- 2.13. The additional payment would significantly increase a household's income, which would result in a higher income band for the assessment of CTS; and in some cases move the household off CTS altogether.
- 2.14. The intention of this additional financial support will be to host Ukrainians; to support the refugee crisis and by way of a 'thank-you' for doing so from Government.
- 2.15. Therefore, a slight amendment was required to the Council's 2022/2023 CTS scheme to ensure that both payments are fully disregarded in the assessment of CTS claims.

### **3. REASONS FOR USE OF URGENCY POWERS**

- 3.1. Use of urgency powers enabled these decisions to be made ahead of the 2022/23 financial year allowing the Council to deliver these Government initiatives in a smooth and efficient manner, and ensure that West Oxfordshire residents are not disadvantaged.

### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1. There will be no financial impact on the collection fund; this is a cost neutral process.

### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished Council Tax Benefit and instead required each authority to design a scheme specifying the reductions, which are to apply to amounts of Council Tax.
- 5.2. This is a small change to the Council's CTS scheme that will not negatively affect its collection fund or its residents. There is no requirement for consultation.

### **6. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS**

- 6.1. None, as the report is for noting.

### **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1. None