



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 19 APRIL 2023
Subject	DISCRETIONARY COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT FUND
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	CLlr Dan Levy – Executive Member for Finance Email: <a href="mailto:dan.levy@westoxon.gov.uk">dan.levy@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Mandy Fathers – Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenues Email: <a href="mailto:mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk">mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk</a>
Report author	Mandy Fathers – Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenues Email: <a href="mailto:mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk">mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To adopt the Discretionary Council Tax Support Fund for 2023/2024
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	<i>That Executive resolves to:</i>  <i>a) Approve a payment of £55 as detailed in paras 3.3 and 3.4 of this report; and,</i>  <i>b) Delegate the distribution of surplus funds to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance</i>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council</li></ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Chief Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer, Interim Head of Legal Services, Finance Business Partner, Assistant Director for Resident Services, Director of Finance (Publica), Executive Member for Finance

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Government has announced £100 million of additional funding for local authorities to support the most vulnerable households in England, by providing additional support to those households already receiving council tax support (CTS).
- 1.2 The funding is for the 2023/2024 financial year with West Oxfordshire District Councils allocation being £114,643.
- 1.3 The discount should apply to current claimants in receipt of CTS that have an outstanding council tax liability for the 2023/24 financial year.
- 1.4 The funding is finite and therefore the Council, although keen to ensure that awards are distributed to the maximum number of residents, is conscious that its expenditure cannot exceed that amount.

The funding will be paid to the Council through a grant, under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

## 2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 The government expects local authorities to use the majority of their funding allocations to reduce the bills of current working age and pension age CTS claimants by up to £25.
- 2.2 Where a claimant's liability for 2023/24 is, following the application of CTS, less than £25, then their liability would be reduced to nil.
- 2.3 Where a claimant's liability for 2023/24 is nil, no reduction to the council tax bill will be available, as those bills should not be credited.
- 2.4 There will be no requirement for any recipient of CTS to make a separate application for reduction under the scheme. As part of the annual billing process in February/March, officers will assess who is eligible for support and automatically apply the discount.
- 2.5 The Council can establish its own local approach to utilise the remaining funding allocation to assist those in need throughout the financial year 2023/24. It is however being proposed that any new CTS applications awarded during the financial year is also considered for an award of £25 or less, depending on the amount of liability outstanding following an award of CTS.

## 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Government will be allocating funding to local councils to cover the scheme through a grant under section 31 of the Local Government Finance Act 2003. The allocation for West Oxfordshire District Council is £114,643.
- 3.2 Data obtained in January 2023 show the following predicted caseload as follows:

Working Age (WA) CTS	Pension Age (PA) CTS	Nil to pay WA CTS	Nil to pay PA CTS	Total Potential non-nil caseload
2544	1740	1241	1187	1856

**3.3** Based on data modelling an initial expenditure of £46,400 would be distributed. This leaves surplus funding of £68,243. The Council could consider other options as follows:

Award Topped up to:	Potential Cost	Surplus Funding	Potential New Awards during 2023/24
£50	£92,800	£21,834	436
£55	£102,080	£12,554	228
£60	£111,360	£3,274	54

**3.4** If the Council were to consider the option to award £55 per eligible CTS claim (£25 mandatory and £30 discretionary), then a further 228 potential new eligible CTS claimants following 1 April 2023 could be supported with additional funding.

**3.5** It is not anticipated that an additional 228 new claims will be made. However, close monitoring of the scheme will be maintained and reported to the Chief Finance Officer. It is proposed within the recommendations that should there be significant surplus funding towards the end of 2023/24, that delegation be given to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance with proposals on how to distribute any surplus funding.

#### **4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**4.1** The government have confirmed that they expect local authorities to administer the grant by using their discretionary relief powers under S13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

#### **5. RISK ASSESSMENT**

**5.1** The funding is limited, and therefore the Council must ensure it does not award more funding than is received. Close, weekly monitoring of payments will be undertaken to ensure spending remains within the funding allocation.

**5.2** If the funding is fully allocated before the end of the financial year, no further payments will be made to any new CTS applicants.

#### **6. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

**6.1** There are no unacceptable adverse effects on the protected characteristics covered by the Equalities Act 2010 that have been identified.

## **7. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 None

## **8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

8.1 Alternative options are detailed within paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 above.

8.2 The Council can also establish its own local approach to using any surplus funding, this may include apply council tax relief using its adapted existing discretionary/hardship policies. It is proposed that if this option is taken, that the delegation is given to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance to consider any future changes that may be necessary to maximise the support that can be given.