



WELWYN HATFIELD

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

1. **SERVICE AREA**

Resources

2. **CASE REFERENCE**

3. **DECISION
TITLE**

Council Tax Support Payments and Hardship Fund – 2021/22

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

Ka Ng

Richard Baker

Job titles

Chief Executive

Head of Resources

Signatures

Date this decision was taken

6 April 2021

6. DETAILS OF THE DECISION

Decision taken

As part of its response to COVID-19, the Government provided local authorities in England with £500m of new grant funding to support economically vulnerable people. The expectation was that most of the hardship fund would be used to provide council tax relief, alongside existing local council tax support schemes. The Government's expectation was that we would provide all recipients of working age local council tax support during the 2020/21 year with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of £150, using our discretionary powers to reduce the liability of council tax payers outside of our formal council tax support scheme design.

The Council did not amend its existing Council Tax Support Scheme but used discretionary powers to increase the amounts paid to existing claimants by up to £150 and increasing the total amount available in the existing hardship fund. This meant that where a taxpayer's liability for 2020/21 was, following the application of council tax support, less than £150, then their liability would be reduced to nil. Where a taxpayer's liability for 2020/21 was nil, no reduction to the council tax bill will be available.

We received a grant of £826k and through a section 31 grant and we were informed that we would be funded in full for the new burdens cost for delivering the support. Once the Council has allocated a proportion of the grant to reduce the council tax bill of qualifying claimants by a further £150, we were advised to establish our own local approach to using any remaining grant to assist those in need. In February 2021, our expenditure was £469k and we therefore reposted council tax support payments for £250, increasing the existing £150 posting by £100 and providing £250 hardship payments to all new claimants during the 2020/21 year. This increase was covered by our residual funding.

On the 24 March 2021, we received MHCLG notification that hardship funding that remains unspent at the end of the financial year, can now be spent in 2021/22 in a way that is consistent with the aims of the fund and there is no requirement to return any unspent allocation at the end of the year. This should involve the provision of additional support to vulnerable households, predominately those who qualify for working-age local council tax support, under the same broad strategic policy agenda governing their application of the hardship fund in 2020/21.

At the end of the 2020/21 year, we still had £69,366.44 funding remaining and propose using this to boost our existing £25k hardship fund and provide additional support to vulnerable household in accordance with our existing hardship scheme.

Reasons

This will provide much needed support to our vulnerable residents through the funding awarded to local authorities for this purpose.

Delegated authority was provided to the Chief Executive and the Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services). Since this delegation, the post holder for the Corporate Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) has been appointed as the Chief Executive, and the Head of Resources as the Section 151 Officer. On this basis the decision is being made by the Chief Executive and Head of Resources.

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

Return residual funding to support our vulnerable residents during the pandemic to the Government.

Not deliver the much-needed support to the vulnerable residents in our community.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS USED TO INFORM THE DECISION

Background Papers	Location
Government paper S13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/council-tax-covid-19-hardship-fund-2020-to-2021-guidance

8. DETAILS OF ANY MEMBER(S) CONSULTED

Councillor Tony Kingsbury (Leader)

Councillor Duncan Bell (Executive Member for Resources)

Councillor Bernard Sarson (Executive Member for Regeneration, Economic Development and Partnerships)

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

15 April 2021