

SUBJECT:	Local Council Tax Support - Discretionary Assistance
REPORT OF:	Officer Management Team - Director of Resources Prepared by N Berry - Senior Contracts Officer

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider guidance relating to the payment of discretionary support in respect of Council Tax throughout 2013/2014.

2. Links to Council Policy Objectives

- 2.1 The Council aims to support a thriving local economy, and as part of this it aims to support local people in these difficult economic times. In particular certain residents will be affected by the abolition of Council Tax Benefit and the introduction of localised Council Tax Support which will result in many receiving higher council tax bills from April 2013.

3. Background

- 3.1 At a meeting held on 22 January 2013 the Council adopted a localised scheme for Council tax Support which is to be introduced from April 2013.
- 3.2 Due to the fact that central government funding to support those on low incomes has been reduced in line with other welfare reforms, the scheme adopted by the council has had to be less generous than previously.
- 3.3 Whilst certain groups are 'protected' and will receive the same support as previously, working age claimants who are not in receipt of disability benefits will have the support they receive reduced by 20% meaning that they will have to pay at least 20% of their Council Tax bill.
- 3.4 At the same meeting a decision was also made to provide £30,000 for 2013/14 for a hardship fund to provide short term support to individuals on a case by case basis. The hardship fund is intended to help those most in need adjust to the new arrangements.
- 3.5 Currently (until 31 March 2013) should a claimant need additional support with their Council Tax this can be paid through the Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme (DHP's), a fund provided by central government, however from 1 April due to the localisation of Council Tax Support this will no longer be possible. The DHP scheme will then only support claimants with their rent costs.

4. Guidance

- 4.1 Whilst it would be very difficult to prescribe exactly the circumstances where an award should be made it is important to agree some guidelines where help would be appropriate.

- 4.2 Attached at appendix A is a document detailing such guidance for 2013/2014.
- 4.3 Any support granted would be on a one-off basis
- 4.4 For clarity in Section 2.3 of the guidance it is stated that in exceptional circumstances an award can be made without an application being made. This may occur where a welfare visit has taken place or discussions with for example Citizens Advice have identified that assistance would be appropriate.

5. Monitoring of the scheme

- 5.1 The discretionary scheme will be monitored throughout 2013/14 with a view to identifying the types of claim received, whether there are particular groups struggling more than others with the new support scheme and whether the scheme needs revisiting in light of the results.
- 5.2 A report will be provided to Members at the end of the financial year.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 The advice of the PAG is sought on whether the Portfolio Holder should be asked to recommend to the Cabinet that the discretionary assistance scheme as set out in the Appendix be adopted subject to its operation being monitored during the course of the year.

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Background Papers:	Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2013/2014