



Report to Council

Date:	22 February 2023
Title:	Council Tax Support Fund
Cabinet Member(s):	Councillor John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources
Contact officer:	Mark Preston Mark.Preston@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
Ward(s) affected:	All
Recommendations:	Council are requested to APPROVE the adoption of the discretionary Council Tax Support Fund Policy for Buckinghamshire local council tax support claimants as shown in Appendix A
Reason for decision:	The recommended approach ensures that all eligible council tax support claimants receive the support they are entitled to automatically and in line with government guidance.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Central Government have provided funds to the Council under S31 of the Local Government Act 2003 with the proviso that all monies are paid strictly in accordance with S13a (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and in line with guidance issued on 23 December 2022.
- 1.2 The fund, named by Central Government as the 'Council Tax Support Fund' is designed to meet the immediate needs of all taxpayers who are currently claiming Council Tax Reduction (CTR). The mandatory element is to award all recipients of Council Tax Reduction (both working age and pension age) with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of up to £25. This reduction will apply to all Council Tax Reduction recipients who have an outstanding liability for the 2023-24 financial year.

- 1.3 Buckinghamshire proposes after applying the mandatory reduction in liability above, that the Council will continue to make similar discretionary payments to all applicants who become eligible for Council Tax Reduction for the first time after 1 April 2023.
- 1.4 The report proposes an additional policy framework that sets out the Council's approach to the award of the mandatory and discretionary elements of the Council Tax Support Fund from 1 April 2023, which is a new policy in addition to the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme Policy.

2. Content of report

- 2.1 In the guidance issued by DLUHC, the government expects local authorities to use the majority of their Council Tax Support Fund allocations to reduce council tax bills for the Council's current working age and pension age Council Tax Reduction claimants by up to £25. Councils can use their remaining allocation as they see fit to support vulnerable households with council tax bills.
- 2.2 Appendix A details the proposed operation of the Council Tax Support Fund mandatory and discretionary elements. After the initial allocation as part of annual billing, the proposal is to support any new Council Tax Reduction claimants with a further reduction of up to £25.
- 2.3 The Council has been allocated a limited amount of funding (£634,939) and in view of this, should the allocation be exhausted, the policy of the Council will be to cease any further reductions in liability. Where this occurs, any taxpayer may apply for a reduction under the Council's existing S13a(1)(c) policy and each case will be considered on its merits in line with the legislation.
- 2.4 Any reduction in liability under this policy shall apply for the 2023-24 financial year only.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 No other options have been considered as the timescales to implement this policy are extremely tight to be implemented with annual billing in April 23.

4. Legal and financial implications

- 4.1 Section 13a(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Council has the power to reduce the amount of Council Tax a person must pay. This includes the power to reduce the amount to nil and may be applied in relation to specified cases, or by determining a particular type of property in which liability is to be reduced.

- 4.2 There is no cost to the Council in respect of Council Tax Discretionary Discounts awards as government has made a budget allocation of £634,939. The budget available after the awarding of the initial maximum £25 at annual billing for the local discretionary offer in the 2023/24 year is estimated to be £70,000. The net cost to the council is nil.

5. Corporate implications

- 5.1 None known.

6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

- 6.1 No consultation has occurred.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 7.1 There are no direct communication implications as the reduction to Council Tax will be awarded automatically. The website will be updated to reflect the additional support that will be provided.

8. Next steps and review

- 8.1 If this report is approved, the Council Tax Support Fund Policy will come into force from the 1st April 2023 for the 2023/24 financial year.

9. Background papers

- 9.1 Appendix A – Council Tax Support Fund for Buckinghamshire Council.

10. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

- 10.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by email to democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.