



EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Finance and Governance
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Finance and Customer Services
DATE:	29 th May 2020

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Finance and Governance
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WARD/S AFFECTED:	All
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SUBJECT: Hardship Scheme 2020/21

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details how the Council will award its allocation of the Government announced COVID-19 Hardship Fund 2020/21.

The government has recognised that COVID-19 is likely to cause fluctuations in household incomes and, as a result, some individuals may struggle to meet their Council Tax payments. This new grant has therefore been allocated to support economically vulnerable people through the pandemic via a council tax relief.

The Government has instructed Councils to allocate additional support using the discretionary powers under s13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Member approves the scheme outlined in the report.

3. BACKGROUND

As part of its response to COVID-19, the Government announced in the Budget on the 11th March 2020 that it would provide local authorities in England with £500m of new grant funding to support economically vulnerable people and households in their local area. For Blackburn with Darwen BC our allocation amounts to £2,194,182.

The Government has outlined its expectation that all recipients of working age Council Tax Support during the financial year 2020/21 will receive a further reduction in their annual Council Tax bill of £150. In addition, Councils have been asked to establish their own local approach to using the remainder of the grant to assist those in need.

On the 31st March there was a total of 10,609 working age claimants in receipt of Council Tax Support. However as expected, this figure has continued to increase throughout April and looks likely to increase significantly during the financial year.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

4.1 Details of the relief scheme

It is the Council's intention to ensure that the assessment and award of the Hardship relief is simple and efficient to administer.

As indicated in section 3, in line with the Government instructions, all current recipients of Council Tax Support will be awarded an additional £150, however, if following the application of Council Tax Support, the amount owed is less than £150, the amount awarded will look to reduce the Council Tax liability to nil.

As the impact of the recession becomes known, it will become clearer as to how many additional claimants of Council Tax Support will require the £150 award. Once we have greater clarity on the number of people claiming Council Tax Support we will be in a position to develop further policies to allocate any residual funding.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The discounts outlined in this report will be fully funded by the Government through a grant under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The administration and award of the relief will be through s13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

The policy the Council has adopted provides transparency and shows the criteria that the Council will apply when making their decisions as to whether or not to grant the discounts. The Council must, however, consider applications which may fall outside the policies and should not be fettered in its decision making by the terms of the policy. The Council is, however, bound by the guidance set out by the Government as to when reliefs can be made.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Any additional work required from the administration of the new relief will be undertaken within existing resources.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

None.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded and published if applicable.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Andy Ormerod
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DATE:	21 st May 2020
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	
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