

Appendix C

West Devon Borough Council - Additional Financial Support Schemes

1. Existing Council Tax Support Scheme

- 1.1. Council Tax Reduction (CTR also known as Council Tax Support CTS) was introduced in 2013 and replaced the national Council Tax Benefit Scheme. The CTR scheme for working-age residents is a local scheme that has been designed to support people back into work.
- 1.2. Residents can apply for CTR by completing a claim form on-line. For those in receipt of Universal Credit we automatically receive notification of their award direct from the DWP. We accept this as their claim form and apply CTR accordingly. For those customers that don't have access to the internet, Customer Services will complete an on-line form with them over the phone.
- 1.3. It should be noted that the scheme for pensioners is, still a national scheme prescribed by regulations and cannot be varied locally.
- 1.4. To date we have 1,849 working age claims in payment with a cost of £1,943,034 and 1,436 pensioner claims with a cost of £895,112.

2. Existing Discretionary Schemes

- 2.1. The Council currently administers two other discretionary schemes to assist those suffering hardship, and we are in the process of setting up a further scheme for the second round of the Governments Household Support Fund (HSF) The schemes are detailed below.

2.2. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

- 2.2.1. For the financial year 2022/23 we have been awarded £126,207 this will be further increased in October 2022 but as yet we don't know by how much. This fund is to assist those that are in receipt of Housing Benefit or the Housing Element within Universal Credit. It is mainly used to assist those that are struggling with the shortfall between their rent and housing benefit, for rent in advance, rent deposits and rent arrears etc. The main criterion for this fund is that you have to be in receipt of housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit to qualify for any assistance.

2.3. Exceptional Hardship Fund (EHF)

- 2.3.1. For the financial year 2022/23, we have £19,000 in the fund. This fund is available to assist residents who are in receipt of CTR and facing exceptional hardship. The fund provides further assistance where the resident is in receipt of CTR but the level of support being paid does not meet their full Council Tax liability.
- 2.4. To make a claim from either of the above funds claimants generally have to complete an on-line claim form, the form includes a section on income and expenditure, this detail enables Officers to gauge how much financial hardship the claimant is suffering and therefore allows them to make the decision on how much they need to award. In certain circumstances, the Officer may feel the need to refer the claimant to Homemaker for further financial or budgeting assistance.
- 2.5. The fund is also used to make direct awards following recommendations from the Job Centre and the Housing.

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- 2.6. DCLG Council Tax Funding - in 2021 DCLG awarded the Council £102,868 as an additional Hardship Fund to meet the additional costs of the Council Tax Reduction scheme due to the additional caseload resulting from increased unemployment.
- 2.7. The Council allocated this funding to the existing EHF fund to award additional help to those most in need. At the end of 2021/22 the Council still has £62k in the fund, this is being carried forward into this new financial year to assist more people in arrears.

3. Household Support Fund

3.1. On 23rd March 2022, the Government announced in the spring statement that the household support fund would be extended from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. As previously, the fund was made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need. DCC is to receive funding of £5,064,876.12. At least one third of the funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on pensioners. The extension of the fund should be used in a similar way to the original fund but greater emphasis should be put on supporting households with energy bills, although food and water bills also remain priorities.

3.2. Household Support Fund – First Scheme (2021/22).

3.2.1. The first scheme funding was split two ways, 50% had to be spent on families with children and 50% could be spent on anyone else. The families with children element was covered by Devon County Council (DCC). We received £91,747.70 this figure includes 10% administration costs. The funding was used to assist anyone that required assistance with;

- essential repairs of replacement white goods
- increased energy bills
- meter top-ups
- water bills
- warm clothing or duvets
- food

3.3. The Scheme for 2022/23

3.3.1. The second scheme is slightly different to the first one, the DWP have split the fund into three,

- 33% to families with children
- 33% to Pensioners
- 33% to everyone else.

3.3.2. Like the first scheme, Devon County Council will fund the cost of free school meals holiday vouchers out of the 33% for families with children at a cost of £1.7m.

3.3.3. Team Devon has agreed that all authorities will make a payment of £90 to all pensioners that are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. For West Devon we would receive £129,510 to distribute to 1439 claimants.

3.3.4. Once these payments have been made we will receive a further award of £42,782.76 to use at the Council's discretion as per the first scheme.