

REPORT TO	DATE
Chief Executive, in Consultation with the Leader of the Council	18 May 2020



TITLE	PORTFOLIO	REPORT OF
Urgent Decision Under Section 35 of the Council's Constitution: S13A (1)(c) Hardship Policy	Leader	Paul Hussey

Is this report a key decision? (i.e. more than £100,000 or a significant impact on more than 2 Borough wards)	Yes
Is this report confidential?	No

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of the report is to update the Chief Executive and the Leader on the current situation in relation to the Council Tax COVID-19 hardship fund 2020-21 and seek approval of the s13A(1)(c) Hardship Policy as an urgent decision under Section 35 of the Council's Constitution.
2. The Council Tax COVID-19 hardship fund grant allocation is expected to be used to reduce the council tax liability of claimants in our area, using discretionary powers under s13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as itemised in the policy. It is expected that councils expedite provision of support using policies and schemes to deliver assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. That the Chief Executive and Leader notes the proposals detailed in the report.
4. That the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader approves the adoption of the s13A(1)(c) Hardship Policy.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

5. Under s13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 the council has the ability to reduce the liability for council tax in relation to individual cases or class(es) of cases that it may determine national discounts and exemptions cannot be applied.
6. As part of its response to COVID-19, the Government has provided local authorities in England with £500m of new grant funding to support economically vulnerable people and households in their local area.
7. The grant allocation is expected to be used to reduce the council tax liability of claimants in our area, using our discretionary powers under s13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the s13A(1)(c) Hardship Policy has been compiled to include this new provision.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

8. This report sets out detail as to how the hardship fund is to be utilised and implemented, including software functionality needed to achieve this.

CORPORATE OUTCOMES

9. The report relates to the following corporate outcomes:

Excellence, Investment and Financial Sustainability	x
Health, Wellbeing and Leisure	x
Place, Homes and Environment	

Projects relating to People in the Corporate Plan:

Our People and Communities	
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BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

10. The Council Tax COVID-19 hardship fund grant allocation is expected to be used to reduce the council tax liability of claimants in our area, using discretionary our powers under s13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as itemised in the policy.
11. It has been recognised that COVID-19 is likely to cause fluctuations in household incomes and as a result, some individuals may struggle to meet council tax payments.
12. The expectation is that the funding provided by central government will be used to provide all recipients of working age local council tax support during the financial year 2020-21 with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of £150, using discretionary powers to reduce the liability of council tax payers outside of the formal Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme design. Where a claimant's liability for 2020-21 is, 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 is nil, no reduction to the council tax bill will be necessary. Claimants are not expected to make a separate claim for a reduction under this scheme.
13. Once we have allocated a grant to reduce the council tax bill of working age CTS recipients by a further £150, we are able to establish our own approach to using any remaining grant to assist those in need. For example, by awarding a higher level of council tax reduction for those working age CTS recipients whose annual liability exceeds £150.

PROPOSALS (e.g. rationale, detail, finance, procurement)

14. South Ribble Borough Council's grant funding allocation is £707,201 based on a Council Tax Support caseload of 3274.
15. Our software provider Capita has provided some initial software to enable awards of hardship to be made through the CTS system. Users across the country have been testing this and have reported issues with the performance of the software but also with the actual approach taken,

which relies heavily on constant rerunning of the process on a regular basis and a great deal of manual intervention. These issues have been fed back to Capita by the respective Chairs of the Northern and Southern User Groups. Capita have been in discussion with User Group representatives and MHCLG. They have advised they are to present a revised high-level business requirement confirming the core features of a solution which they will share with users if agreed.

CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT AND OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION

There are no statutory requirements to consult on the proposals outline within this report.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

There are no alternative options available due to the strict guidelines associated with the implementation of the Government funds.

AIR QUALITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no Air Quality implications associated with this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The risks and mitigating actions have been considered when producing this report.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPACT

An EIA will be undertaken to ensure effective implementation of the Policy and associated fund.

COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

The council's total allocation for the Hardship Fund is £707k and was received in April 2020. This paper outlines how this allocation will be utilised.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

The proposed support scheme is permitted under section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and may be approved as sought.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

South Ribble S13A1C Policy

Report Author:	Telephone:	Date:
Paul Hussey	01772 625522	18 th May 2020

Approval of Urgent Decision

I confirm that I consider this decision is one of genuine urgency in accordance with section the Council's constitution:



Councillor David Howarth
Chair of the Scrutiny Committee

Dated: 19 May 2020

Following careful consideration and assessment of the contents of the report, I approve the recommendations contained in the report in accordance with the Council's constitution in consultation with the Leader of the Council:



Gary Hall
Chief Executive

Dated: 21 May 2020



Councillor Paul Foster
Leader of the Council

Dated: 21 May 2020