

Record of individual Cabinet member decision

Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Decision made by	Andy Crawford
Key decision?	Yes
Date of decision (same as date form signed)	3 August 2023
Name and job title of officer requesting the decision	Trevor Gaffney Revenues and Benefits Manager
Officer contact details	trevor.gaffney@southandvale.gov.uk
Decision	<p>Arrangements approved for the allocation and distribution of the remaining £83,000 grant funding available, following the bulk award process under the government's mandatory Council Tax Support Fund award scheme.</p> <p><u>Background summary</u> Under the government's mandatory Council Tax Support Fund scheme the council was required to grant to all households in receipt of Council Tax Reduction (CTR) an initial award of up to £25 against their 2023/24 council tax bill. With the initial mandatory exercise having been successfully undertaken and that tranche of awards made, it has left surplus funding available which government (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) (DLUHC) does not require to be repaid. Instead, in accordance with their Council Tax Support Fund guidance, it is expected that local authorities will use as much of the remaining allocation as possible to further support economically vulnerable households with their 2023/24 council tax bill.</p> <p>This ICMD specifically provides approval for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To utilise up to 85 per cent of this remaining funding to apply a one off 'top up' award of up to £35 against all household accounts in receipt of CTR that do not already have a nil liability following the initial mandatory award. • To utilise the remaining funds to continue to make awards (mandatory and 'top up') to any new CTR cases throughout the remainder of the 2023/24 financial year.

<p>Reasons for decision</p>	<p>Residents across the district continue to feel the impact of significant increases in the cost of living. Targeting all households on CTR will ensure this remaining funding continues to support households on the lowest incomes (that still have a council tax liability to pay) with their remaining bill.</p> <p>It also complies with expectations of DLUHC for local authorities to use the majority of their funding to reduce bills for CTR claimants.</p> <p>Under the council's existing CTR scheme, many households already qualify for full (100 per cent) support, and therefore did not have a 2023/24 council tax bill to pay. This is mainly why there is a surplus of funding left over after the mandatory awards were made. As this funding can only be used for council tax support, i.e. reduce council tax bills, and must be applied for 2023/24, then a further 'top up' to those with remaining balances will utilise the vast majority of the funding but still have money available to cover new CTR cases for the remainder of the 2023/24 financial year. This approach would ensure fairness and consistency to all CTR households with a council tax bill to pay.</p> <p>Government, and this council, have deployed a range of measures to help support households during this difficult period and, collectively, these will help a number of low-income households currently under severe pressure throughout the financial year.</p> <p>Nationally, Citizens Advice continue to report more contacts than at any point and, therefore, while this further 'top up' award is relatively small it will make a difference to the targeted caseload.</p> <p><u>Cost of living measures</u></p> <p>To date, the council offers the following additional measures to assist with the cost-of-living crisis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roll-over of £20,000 top up from COMF to the discretionary housing payment (DHP) scheme. - Removal of the 91.5 per cent working age council tax reduction scheme cap from 2023/24 onwards, benefiting 1,400 low-income households. - The Council Tax Extreme Hardship Fund launched in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council in January 2023 which will continue throughout 2023/2024. - Emergency Food Voucher Provision through the community hub for people at imminent risk of hunger (emergency food and fuel) - Funding for food banks and larders across the district launched in 2023 - The household support fund (the third such scheme) launched in early January 2023 (now fully spent) - A further £60,000 top up to the household support fund from COMF to assist more people who cannot afford basic household essentials and bills (now fully spent) - Community Connectors to work with residents to signpost, refer and advice residents who are struggling to groups, voluntary community groups/organisations and Warm Welcome spaces with Oxfordshire County Council.
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	<p>- Community Hub Officers are currently researching and developing proposals for winter cost of living measures using Household Support Fund 4</p> <p>Resources required to manage the ‘top up’ awards will be minimal, as cases should be easily identified and applied directly to council tax accounts. This will also remove any risk of potential for fraud or misuse of the limited funds available.</p> <p>The allocation of spend will be targeted and is consistent with the guidance and in line with approaches taken by many other councils.</p>			
Alternative options rejected	<p>An application-based Council Tax Support Fund discretionary scheme was considered but rejected, as the council already has an application-based Council Tax Extreme Hardship scheme live. A similar approach was considered unnecessary and also could not ensure the majority of funding was actually spent.</p> <p>In addition to the above, any manual application approach would be more costly to administer (labour intensive).</p>			
Climate and ecological implications	None			
Legal implications	There are no legal implications emanating from this decision. Council Tax Support Fund ‘top up’ awards will be made in accordance with legislation (discretionary powers under s13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992) and applied to the 2023/2024 council tax accounts accordingly.			
Financial implications	The awards of ‘top up’ support is fully funded by DLUHC			
Other implications	None			
Background papers considered	Council Tax Support Fund guidance papers and Discretionary calculation breakdowns			
Declarations/ conflict of interest? Declaration of other councillor/ officer consulted by the Cabinet member?	None			
List consultees		Name	Outcome	Date
	Ward councillors			
	Legal legal@southandvale.gov.uk	Patrick Arran	No issues raised	28.06.2023
	Finance Finance@southandvale.gov.uk	Simon Hewings	Approved	28.06.2023

	dvale.gov.uk			
	Human resources hradminandpayroll@southandvale.gov.uk			
	Climate and biodiversity climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk			
	Diversity and equality equalities@southandvale.gov.uk	Lynne Mitchel	Agree to support	26.06.2023
	Health and safety healthandsafety@southandvale.gov.uk			
	Risk and insurance risk@southandvale.gov.uk			
	Communications communications@southandvale.gov.uk	Gail Buckle	Please keep comms informed of outcome so we can plan communications	27.06.2023
Confidential decision? If so, under which exempt category?	No			
Call-in waived by Scrutiny Committee chairman?	No			
Has this been discussed by Cabinet members?				
Cabinet portfolio holder's signature To confirm the decision as set out in this notice.	Signature _____ Andrew Crawford _____ Date _____ 03.08.2023 _____			

ONCE SIGNED, THIS FORM MUST BE HANDED TO DEMOCRATIC SERVICES IMMEDIATELY.

For Democratic Services office use only		
Form received	Date: 3 August 2023	Time: 12:00
Date published to all councillors	Date: 3 August 2023	
Call-in deadline	Date: 10 August 2023	Time: 17:00

Guidance notes

1. This form must be completed by the lead officer who becomes the contact officer. The lead officer is responsible for ensuring that the necessary internal consultees have signed it off, including the chief executive. The lead officer must then seek the Cabinet portfolio holder's agreement and signature.
2. Once satisfied with the decision, the Cabinet portfolio holder must hand-sign and date the form and return it to the lead officer who should send it to Democratic Services immediately to allow the call-in period to commence.
Tel. 01235 422520 or extension 2520.
Email: democratic.services@southandvale.gov.uk
3. Democratic Services will then publish the decision to the website (unless it is confidential) and send it to all councillors to commence the call-in period (five clear working days) if it is a 'key' decision (see the definition of a 'key' decision below). A key decision cannot be implemented until the call-in period expires. The call-in procedure can be found in the council's constitution, part 4, under the Scrutiny Committee procedure rules.
4. Before implementing a key decision, the lead officer is responsible for checking with Democratic Services that the decision has not been called in.
5. If a key decision has been called in, Democratic Services will notify the lead officer and decision-maker. This call-in puts the decision on hold.
6. Democratic Services will liaise with the Scrutiny Committee chairman over the date of the call-in debate. The Cabinet portfolio holder will be requested to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting to answer the committee's questions.
7. The Scrutiny Committee may:
 - refer the decision back to the Cabinet portfolio holder for reconsideration or
 - refer the matter to Council with an alternative set of proposals (where the final decision rests with full Council) or
 - accept the Cabinet portfolio holder's decision, in which case it can be implemented immediately.

Key decisions: assessing whether a decision should be classified as 'key'

The South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' Constitutions now have the same definition of a key decision:

A key decision is a decision of the Cabinet, an individual Cabinet member, or an officer acting under delegated powers, which is likely:

- (a) to incur expenditure, make savings or to receive income of more than £75,000;**

- (b) to award a revenue or capital grant of over £25,000; or**
- (c) to agree an action that, in the view of the chief executive or relevant head of service, would be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising more than one ward in the area of the council.**

Key decisions are subject to the scrutiny call-in procedure; non-key decisions are not and can be implemented immediately.

In assessing whether a decision should be classified as 'key', you should consider:

- (a) Will the expenditure, savings or income total more than £75,000 across all financial years?
- (b) Will the grant award to one person or organisation be more than £25,000 across all financial years?
- (c) Does the decision impact on more than one district council ward? And if so, is the impact significant? If residents or property affected by the decision is in one ward but is close to the border of an adjacent ward, it may have a significant impact on that second ward, e.g. through additional traffic, noise, light pollution, odour. Examples of significant impacts on two or more wards are:
 - Decisions to spend Didcot Garden Town funds (significant impact on more than one ward)
 - Changes to the household waste collection policy (affects all households in the district)
 - Reviewing a housing strategy (could have a significant impact on residents in many wards)
 - Adopting a supplementary planning document for a redevelopment site (could significantly affect more than one ward) or a new design guide (affects all wards)
 - Decisions to build new or improve existing leisure facilities (used by residents of more than one ward)

The overriding principle is that before 'key' decisions are made, they must be published in the Cabinet Work Programme for 28 calendar days. Classifying a decision as non-key when it should be a key decision could expose the decision to challenge and delay its implementation.