

## Slough Borough Council

Information needed	Details
Report To:	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
Date:	29 July 2025
Subject:	Update on Temporary Financial Support Scheme for Residents through the Council Tax Support Scheme Hardship Fund
Chief Officer:	Annabel Scholes, Executive Director of Corporate Resources (S151)
Contact Officer:	Andy Jeffs, Director of Revenues and Welfare Services
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	NO
Appendices:	Appendix A – Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/26 Appendix B – Council Tax Support Hardship Fund Policy Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report provides an update on the Council Tax Support Hardship Fund (CTSHF) for the period April to June 2025.

#### Recommendations:

Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- (a) Note the update provided on the first three months of the new CTS HF as outlined in the report.
- (b) Note the learnings and proposed actions as outlined in Section 2.11.

### 2. Report

#### Introductory paragraph

2.1 On the 20 January 2025 Cabinet recommended to Council the approval of a revised Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme for 2025/26 appended at Appendix A. It also agreed that if Council approved the revised CTS scheme, there should be an increased CTS HF of £0.350m along with a new CTS HF Policy. On the 23 January 2025, Council approved the revised CTS scheme, which came into effect on the 1 April 2025.

2.2 Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee requested regular updates on the way the CTS HF was being utilised, and this report provides the first of these updates.

#### Background

2.3 Paragraph 5 of Schedule 1A to the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended by Schedule 4 of the Local Government Act 2012, requires the council to review its localised CTS scheme and whether to revise its scheme or to replace

it with another scheme for each financial year. Following review of the scheme for 2025/26 financial year a consultation was carried out and a revised scheme was approved by Council, which came into effect on 1 April 2025.

2.4 The 2025/26 CTS scheme reduced all the percentage reductions in Council Tax across all Bands for working age claimants. Table 1 below outlines the percentage reductions in the previous and current schemes.

Table 1 – Previous and current scheme

Income Bands	2024/25 Scheme	2025/26 Scheme
	Discount off CT	Discount off CT
	liability	liability
1	100.00%	80.00%
-	-	-
1	75.00%	50.00%
2	60.00%	40.00%
3	40.00%	30.00%
4	30.00%	20.00%
5	20.00%	10.00%
6	10.00%	5.00%
7	0.00%	0.00%

2.5 The working age caseload when the modelling for a revised scheme was carried out in October 2024 was 6,504. The current caseload is 6,466.

2.6 A decision to reduce the level of funding of CTS that these households received was recognised by the council as being a difficult decision to make. During the consultation the council sought views about providing a CTS HF to help those most affected with most respondents clearly agreeing with this with some indicating that the proposed £0.175m was not sufficient to help those who needed support and that one-year was not enough time.

2.7 Following receipt of this feedback, Cabinet agreed a CTS HF of £0.350m in 2025/26 to support those who are in receipt of CTS and find themselves in financial hardship. It also planned to set aside £0.175m in 2026/27, however this would be kept under review and would inform a decision on the CTS scheme for 2026/27. A CTS Hardship Policy was agreed by Cabinet in March 2025, appended at Appendix B.

### **Update on the Council Tax Support Hardship Fund April to June 2025**

2.8 The CTS HF went live on the 1 April 2025, with applications being made by using the on-line Discretionary Hardship Payments application form accessed using the following link <https://sloughdhp.teammetsol.com/dhp/home>. We offer support to complete this process. Paper copies can also be made available.

2.9 Over the period 1 April to 30 June 2025 the council has received 337 applications. Of these applications:

- 26 have been awarded a CTS Hardship payment the total payment posted to the Council Tax account totalling £9,499, the highest payment being £690, the lowest £100, with the average payment being £365.35 per award. The amount of funding available for the remainder of the year is £340,501.
- 45 cases are currently pending, and we have written to the resident requesting they provide supporting information within a 1-month period.
- 173 cases are awaiting processing. If all are successful based on the average award value of £365.35 the total amount awarded would be £63,206. That would take the total awarded to £72,705 and would leave a balance of £277,295, enough for a further 759 awards of the average amount.
- 93 applications have been refused. The reasons for refusal are:
  - Sufficient income to deal with expenditure in details provided to support application – 65.
  - Sufficient capital to pay the Council Tax – 3.
  - Exempt/not liable/property not in SBC area – 5.
  - Council Tax account in credit – 3.
  - Failed to provide information to support the hardship request – 17.

2.10 An impairment allowance for non-payment of £0.136m was included in the 2025/26 budget. The June Council Tax collection rate for CTS accounts was 26.82%, with the collection rate for all accounts was 27.98%, a variance of 1.16%, or £0.062m, £0.074m better than the amount budgeted.

### **Learnings from first 3-months of operating the CTSHF**

2.11 It was always anticipated that there would be learnings from the implementation of the new CTSHF and that we would need to regularly review the way the scheme was used and administered. The key learnings to date are:

- Due to the high number of applications received, additional resource is required to successfully deliver the scheme. This resource has been allocated.
- 17 (18%) of those applications refused in the first three months were due to supporting information not being provided within the 1-month stipulated within the CTS Hardship Fund Policy. We will continue to process any application where the supporting information is received after that 1-month period to ensure vulnerable residents are supported.
- The total number of applications received of 337 only represents 5% of the 6,466 current residents in receipt of CTS. As a result, we will make direct contact with those in receipt of CTS informing them of the availability of the CTSHF.

### **3. Implications of the Recommendation**

#### 3.1 Financial implications

3.1.1 There are no financial implications from this report.

#### 3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 There are no legal implications from this report.

#### 3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 There are no risk implications from this report.

#### 3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 There are no environmental implications from this report.

#### 3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 A detailed Equality Impact Assessment was carried out as part of the development of the revised CTS scheme for 2025/26. This is appended as Appendix C to this report.

### **4. Background Papers**

None.