	<h2>ACTION TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS BY OFFICER</h2>
<p style="text-align: right;">Title</p>	<p>Financial Assistance – Emergency Support for Barnet Residents</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Report of</p>	<p>Director of Public Health and Prevention in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Wards</p>	<p>All</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Status</p>	<p>Public</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Enclosures</p>	<p>None</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Officer Contact Details</p>	<p>Allan Clark – Head of Finance: Exchequer (Finance Service) 020 8359 2824 allan.clark@barnet.gov.uk</p>

Summary

This report proposes to temporarily amend the eligibility to the Council's Discretionary Financial Assistance Schemes in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Decisions

1. To approve the suspension of the application of the Minimum Income Floor (MIF) within Barnet's Council Tax Support Scheme
2. To disburse Barnet's COVID-19 Hardship Fund allocation of £4,132,829 as follows:
 - a. To credit the 2020/21 council tax account of all Council Tax Support (CTS) recipients with £150. This will also apply to those who claim and are entitled to CTS on or before 31/05/2020.
 - b. Allocate any remaining funds to be used in line with the Council's Discretionary Council Tax Hardship Scheme and or Crisis Fund as required.

3. To approve the temporary change to Barnet's Crisis Fund policy.

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

SUSPENSION OF MIMIMUM INCOME FLOOR

- 1.1 Barnet's CTS scheme applies MIF rules within its award calculation. This means that for self employed claimants who are declaring less income than minimum wage, their awards are calculated on an assumed income equal to what they would receive if they were earning the national living wage.
- 1.2 Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic it is recognised that some self-employed workers will no longer be able to work and where they can their hours are likely reduced. To help support our self-employed residents the application of MIF will be suspended until 30th September 2020. This is a temporary arrangement and the CTS scheme approved for 2020/21 will continue in operation, apart from this suspension, and from 1 October 2020, the minimum income floor will be applied.

COVID-19 HARDSHIP FUND ALLOCATION

- 1.3 Government has provided Barnet with funding to support council tax payers. This fund totals £4,132,829 and is based on the number of working age CTS claimants in the area. Government guidance has been published stating the Government's expectation that the majority of this funding is used to provide council tax relief, alongside existing council tax support schemes.
- 1.4 In line with Government guidance we are proposing to award up to £150 to all working age customers currently in receipt of our CTS. The award will be applied as a credit on their 2020/21 council tax account. Where the customer owes less than £150, they will receive an award equal to the amount required to clear their liability.
- 1.5 The award will be available to all existing CTS working age claimants and to any new eligible claims made on or before the 30th May 2020.
- 1.6 Any remaining funding following these awards will be used to support those impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and in accordance Barnet's Discretionary Council Tax Hardship Scheme and or the Crisis fund. This is in line with the guidance issued by Government.

TEMPORARY CHANGE TO CRISIS FUND POLICY

- 1.7 In response to the COVID-19 outbreak we are looking to make our crisis fund accessible to all Barnet Residents who may have found themselves in financial hardship as a result.
- 1.8 Barnet's current policy has the following eligibility criteria:
 - Customer must be aged 16 or over
 - Customers must have been a resident in Barnet for at least six weeks, or if they are moving into Barnet from an institution such as a hospital, care home or prison,

they must have a local connection such as family or support services that they receive in the area.

- Customers must be in receipt of a qualifying benefit – Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support, Income related Employment and Support Allowance, Guaranteed Pension Credit or Universal Credit (or likely to be in receipt of these benefits on release from an institution).
- Customers must not be excluded from receiving public funds due to their immigration status
- Customers must not have received more than one award in the last six months
- Customers must be making a claim not completely covered by insurance

1.9 The eligibility criteria will be temporarily relaxed until the 30th September 2020. In order to be eligible to apply for support during this time you must simply be a Barnet resident over the age of 16 and facing financial hardship. This is a temporary arrangement and from 1st October 2020 the policy will revert to the criteria at 1.8.

1.10 Where an applicant is facing hardship and requires emergency support owing to the pandemic, the crisis fund will make cash grants as appropriate. Where a cash grant is awarded, the recipient will either be emailed a voucher in order to draw cash from a PayPoint outlet or have the money paid to their bank.

2. REASONS FOR DECISION

2.1 These decisions have been taken in response to the COVID-19 outbreak to ensure that Barnet residents have access to appropriate financial support during this emergency.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

3.1 No alternatives have been considered.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 The revenues and benefits system will be updated to remove the MIF calculation and customers will be rebilled.

4.2 The revenues and benefits system will be updated to allow the £150 to be credited to all relevant accounts. This will take place as soon as civica (our software supplier) makes the necessary changes to the software.

- 4.3 The relaxation of the Crisis Fund policy will be communicated to relevant officers and our website updated to promote these changes and encourage those in need to apply.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- This temporary expansion of financial support being made available supports the Council's Corporate Plan which sets out how our residents should live happy, healthy, independent lives with our most vulnerable protected.

5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- Government have provided funding totalling £4,132,829 which will support much of these changes.
- The crisis fund budget has been increased by £250,000 to £500,000 for 2019/20 with any underspend being rolled forward into 2020/21. The budget has also been increased for 2020/21 again by £250,000 to £500,000.

5.3 Social Value

- The decisions taken within this report will provide financial support to our most vulnerable residents who are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.4 Legal and Constitutional References

- The CTS scheme and discretionary relief council tax hardship scheme are made under the Local Government Finance Act 1992. The CTS scheme is approved on an annual basis following consultation and has already been approved for 2020/21. The Government guidance confirms an expectation that support is provided as soon as possible using existing schemes and policies. For this reason, the Council has temporarily suspended one aspect of its CTS scheme and is using its existing discretionary hardship scheme and crisis fund policy to administer further financial support.

In relation to the decisions to disburse Barnet's COVID-19 Hardship Fund allocation of £4,132,829 as follows:

- a. To credit the 2020/21 council tax account of all Council Tax Support (CTS) recipients with £150. This will also apply to those who claim and are entitled to CTS on or before 31/05/2020.
- b. Allocate any remaining funds to be used in line with the Council's Discretionary Council Tax Hardship Scheme and or Crisis Fund as required.

This money is allocated from central government and the council are being asked to allocate it. This is a temporary measure.

To approve the temporary change to Barnet's Crisis Fund policy.

The Council Tax support scheme was approved by Full Council on 3rd March 2020.

Article 9.7 the Director of Public Health is responsible for exercising the local authorities functions in planning for, and in responding to, emergencies that present a risk to public health. The country is currently in a public health emergency and these changes are required to alleviate some of the financial pressures and ensure that people can afford to stay at home and follow Public Health England, the Government's guidance and requirements within the Coronavirus act and related public health legislation, guidance and regulations.

The Leader had been consulted on these decisions and is in agreement with them. The decisions within this report relate to money which is coming directly from central government and pass ported by the council and are temporary changes.

5.5 Risk Management

- No risks have been identified in this report

5.6 Equalities and Diversity

5.6.1 The Equality Act 2010, section 149, outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires Public Bodies **to have due regard** to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not

The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day to day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services.

Equality implications were taken into account when the annual CTS scheme was approved. The temporary suspension will support self employed people, who will be of working age. The amendments to the discretionary hardship fund scheme and crisis fund policy will support those in financial need. This is likely to include residents with children, including lone parents, as well as single people and couples on low incomes. The additional support will have a positive impact on these residents and as the funds are being provided from central Government, provision of this funding will not have an adverse impact on any other group.

5.7 Corporate Parenting

- In line with Children and Social Work Act 2017, the council has a duty to consider Corporate Parenting Principles in decision-making across the council. The outcomes and priorities in the refreshed Corporate Plan, Barnet 2024, reflect the council's commitment to the Corporate Parenting duty to ensure the most vulnerable are protected and the needs of children are considered in everything that the council does.
- It is not believed that the decisions within this report will negatively impact on our most vulnerable or the needs of children.

5.8 Consultation and Engagement

- The need to move quickly with these measures in response to the outbreak has meant there is no time to consult or engage on these matters.

5.9 Insight

5.9.1 Not Applicable

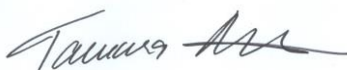
6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1 None applicable to this report

7. DECISION TAKER'S STATEMENT

7.1 *I have the required powers to make the decision documented in this report. I am responsible for the report's content and am satisfied that all relevant advice has been sought in the preparation of this report and that it is compliant with the decision-making framework of the organisation which includes Constitution, Scheme of Delegation, Budget and Policy Framework and Legal issues including Equalities obligations. The decision is compliant with the principles of decision making in Article 10 of the constitution.*

Chief Officer: Dr Tamara Djuretic, Director of Public Health and Prevention



Signed:

Dated: 01/04/2020

**In consultation with
Chief Officer: Anisa Darr, Director of Finance**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anisa Darr', is enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Signed:

Dated: 1 April 2020