

Report to:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date:	26 January 2022
Executive Member:	Councillor Oliver Ryan – Executive Member (Finance and Economic Growth)
Reporting Officer:	Ilys Cookson – Assistant Director Exchequer Services
Subject:	LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2022/23
Report Summary:	<p>The Council must adopt a Council Tax Support scheme no later than 11 March before the start of the financial year to which the scheme applies in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 2012 as amended by The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2017.</p> <p>The Council could decide not to set a scheme and the default scheme would apply in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 2012. However, this would have significant financial impact on the Council. Additional costs associated with the default scheme were estimated to be in excess of £3.2m in 2013/14, and this will probably be significantly increased in 2022/23 depending on demand and the amount of Council Tax Support applied.</p> <p>The Council could also decide to set an alternative scheme however to do so without rationale and evidence from the operation of the current scheme in the timescales required would carry significant risk.</p>
Recommendations:	<p>It is recommended that the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) continues the scheme introduced in 2013/14, as amended in 2016/17, and adopts the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23 set out in Appendix 3; save for the annual benefit upratings which are not yet released by DWP. (ii) approves a £50,000 hardship fund be in place in order to assist severe cases of hardship funded from existing budgets, to be administered by Exchequer Services under the Section 13A Policy.
Corporate Plan:	The Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme assists the most financially vulnerable in the Borough by providing means tested financial support towards Council Tax costs.
Policy Implications:	In line with Council policy and guidance from The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, formerly known as Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	The Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme is a cost to the Council in the sense that it reduces the amount of Council Tax that can be collected. For 2021/22, the estimated ‘cost’ of the scheme, in terms of revenue foregone, is approximately £15.4m, compared to £16.5m in 2020/21. The cost of the Council Tax Support is usually expected to increase year on year as the Council Tax charge increases. The reduction in forecast costs this year is due to the 2020/21 figures including the impact of additional support funded through the Local Council Tax Support COVID grant.

The revenue forgone as a result of the scheme is factored into the Council Tax base and Council Tax setting as part of the annual budget process. No changes are proposed to either the Council Tax Support Scheme or the Hardship Fund for 2021/22.

If the Council chose to adopt the default scheme, rather than a local scheme, the 'cost' to the Council is estimated to be significantly greater than the cost of the local scheme. The Council could choose to adopt a less generous local scheme however any reduction in the level of support provided is expected to increase levels of uncollected Council Tax as those claimants in receipt of Council Tax Support are often the most economically vulnerable.

Legal Implications:
(Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

The legal implications are set out in the main body of the report together with a consideration of the risks related to this matter set out in section 8 of the report. The Council in setting the scheme has attempted to achieve a balance between those who struggle to pay owing to levels of income and everyone else who pays whilst taking into account legal requirements of the scheme.

Risk Management:

The scheme is legally compliant in the way it has been set and Risks are set out in Section 8 of this report.

Background Information:

Appendix 1	equality impact assessment
Appendix 2	The Hardship Fund
Appendix 3	Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2022/23

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Karen Milner, Service Unit Manager — Assess and Pay and Income and Collection:

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 contained provision to abolish Council Tax Benefit. The Government replaced it with a power for each local authority to have its own locally set Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The necessary primary legislation is included in the Local Government Finance Act, passed on 31 October 2012 which contained provision, amended by The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2017, that Councils wishing to implement a local scheme must have the scheme approved by 11 March each year.
- 1.2 The local scheme was funded in the first year by way of a fixed grant which the Department of Communities and Local Government (now The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) have determined as being 90% of the 2011/12 outturn for Council Tax Benefit expenditure. In real terms this reduction in funding equated to 17.3% for Tameside for 2013/14 and a local Council Tax Support Scheme was set taking into account the costing envelope available.
- 1.3 Tameside's own local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme was set at the Council meeting on 21 December 2012. The scheme was adopted to a challenging timescale additionally, the Universal Credit Regulations 2013, on which the principals of the Council Tax Support Scheme were based, was not passed through parliament until 25 February 2013.
- 1.4 The 2013/14 CTS scheme which had been in place since 1 April 2013 was revised after consultation had been carried out with the public between 14 September 2015 and 30 November 2015. The Police Authority and Fire and Rescue Authority precepting bodies were also consulted.
- 1.5 The following elements were introduced to the scheme from 1 April 2016:
 - Capping support to a Band A property.
 - Reduce the maximum CTS award to 75%.
 - Align deductions for non-dependents of working age to the same level as those in the prescribed scheme for claimants of pensionable age.
 - Non-dependent deductions are disregarded for CTS claimants in receipt of a Staying Put payment.
- 1.6 In consideration of setting the local CTS scheme for 2022/23 this reports sets out:
 - What the Council is required to do
 - The operation of the Council Tax Support scheme since 2013/14 and revisions effective from 01 April 2016 and in line with recommendations in 2019 The Local Government Ombudsman.
 - The operation of the scheme in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - The operation of the Hardship Payment Fund under the Section 13A Policy.
 - Proposed Council Tax Support scheme 2022/2023.

2. PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS

- 2.1 In setting a Council Tax Support scheme the Council must:
 - Adopt a Council Tax Support scheme no later than 11 March before the start of the financial year to which the scheme applies.
 - There are prescribed requirements which must apply to all schemes, which include local schemes, the prescribed scheme for persons of state pension credit age and default schemes (the same as the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme).
 - Ensure that claimants of state pension credit age continue to receive the same support under the scheme as they received in Council Tax Benefit.

- Consider the statutory public sector equality duty in adopting a scheme and the child poverty strategy.
- Consult all major precepting authorities.
- Consult generally on the draft scheme.

2.2 A procedural requirement in drafting the Council Tax Support Scheme was to consult with members of the public and precepting bodies. As the scheme will remain unchanged from that set for 2013/14 and amended for 2016/17 it is not necessary to consult as no changes are proposed for the forthcoming year. Precepting bodies have been informed that the 2022/23 scheme will be unchanged from that which was set in 2016, and therefore there will be no impact on the precept budgets as a result of this.

2.3 The procedural requirements are contained in the Local Government Finance Act 2012.

3. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME IN OPERATION

3.1 In considering the setting of the local Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23, it has been important to examine the information arising from the continual review of the scheme to ensure that demand and cost of the scheme, impact on equalities, communications and on the recovery of Council Tax remained within projections which took place at the time the scheme was set.

Demand

3.2 As at the end of quarter two of 2021/22 approximately 17,898 people claim Council Tax Support. Of this number, there are approximately 7,406 (41%) people of pensionable age who will be guaranteed protection under the CTS scheme. Therefore approximately 10,492 (59%) claimants are of working age. Demand on the scheme is monitored on a quarterly basis and, Table 1 details the decline in demand since the scheme was first introduced in April 2013.

Table 1

Demand on Local Council Tax Support Scheme

Year	Total claimants
01/04/2013	23,716
14/04/2014	23,231
10/04/2015	22,029
18/04/2016	20,889
04/04/2017	20,087
18/10/2018	19,140
01/10/2019	18,161
29/10/2020	18,155
01/10/2021	17,898

Claimant caseload fluctuates on a daily basis and overall there has been a reduction in overall claimant numbers from 01 April 2013. The caseload continued to fall during 2021/22 even though residents had more to pay in Council Tax due to the Council Tax rise in April 2021 and despite the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic; however this decline appears to follow the pattern from previous years. The fall is unlikely to be attributed to the changes introduced to the scheme which became effective from 01 April 2016 because, while the changes affected the majority of existing claimants by way of a reduced amount of CTS awarded, it did not change the eligibility criteria.

4. OTHER FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Valuation Tribunal Service considers appeals by any resident with regard to Council Tax Support schemes. The Tribunal Service is independent of the Council. On occasion the Valuation Tribunal may advise a Local Authority to reconsider elements of the scheme which can be for a number of reasons and, bearing in mind that each Local Authority will set its own scheme, so any decision of the Tribunal can only be directed to the Local Authority scheme being considered at appeal. Tameside has not received any direction from the Valuation Tribunal Service in 2021/22.
- 4.2 The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities have not issued any guidance on what Local Authorities should consider including in their local scheme for the forthcoming financial year. Should The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities release guidance at a future date then this would be included in a revision to the scheme to be effective from 01 April 2022.
- 4.3 The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) in their report of August 2019 to Local Authorities titled "Council Tax Reduction – Guidance for Practitioners" to help Local Authorities manage complex council tax reduction enquiries and complaints, made a number of recommendations to all Local Authorities. It is considered best practice to recognise the recommendations by the LGO and provide clarity within the scheme. Therefore to provide clarity in Tameside's Council Tax Support Scheme in relation to the treatment of these adjustments to entitlement, wording was inserted into the Scheme for 2020/21 at Schedule 8, paragraph (10). The wording will remain in the scheme for 2022/23.
- 4.4 Tameside has been progressive in moving from paper forms to electronic digital alternatives. The application process for Council Tax Support is an on-line form which can be commenced, saved and completed at a later date prior to submission.
- 4.5 To provide clarity in Tameside's Council Tax Support Scheme in relation to determining the commencement date of entitlement to Council Tax Support, wording was inserted into the Scheme for 2020/21 to clarify the definition within the prescribed Regulations of when an application form is "issued". Wording was inserted in to the Scheme for 2020/21 at Schedule 1, paragraph 48 and Schedule 9, paragraph 64. The wording will remain in the scheme for 2022/23.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The Equality Act 2010 makes certain types of discrimination unlawful on the grounds of: Age, gender, race, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, disability, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief.
- 5.2 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 places the Council and all public bodies under a duty to promote equality. All public bodies are required to have regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
 - Promote equal opportunities between members of different equality groups.
 - Foster good relations between members of different equality groups including by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
 - Eliminate harassment on the grounds of membership of an equality group.
 - Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by members of a particular equality group.
 - Take steps to meet needs of people who are members of a particular equality group.
 - Encourage people who are members of an equality group to participate in public life, or in any other area where participation is low.

- This specifically includes having regard to the need to take account of disabled people's disabilities.

- 5.3 The Act therefore imposes a duty on the Council which is separate from the general duty not to discriminate. When a local authority carries out any of its functions, including deciding what Council Tax Support scheme to adopt, the local authority must have due regard to the matters within the section of the Act outlined above. The courts have made it clear that the local authority is expected to rigorously exercise that duty.
- 5.4 The Government has confirmed that people of state pension credit age are to have their current Council Tax Support levels protected and that the prescribed scheme must apply to them.
- 5.5 The population of Tameside is estimated at 227,117 based on the 2020 mid-year population statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Trends show an ageing population. The number of people aged 65 years and over is now 39,976 according to the ONS and the gender split of Tameside's overall population is 49% male and 51% female. There are currently 102,369 households in Tameside as at October 2020.
- 5.6 Tameside has approximately 17,898 CTS claimants (as at October 2021), of these 7,406 have reached pension credit age and are therefore fully protected under legislation contained in the prescribed scheme and will not see any change in their benefit entitlement. A full equality impact assessment on the scheme is detailed at **Appendix 1** undertaken in 2015 in consideration of the changes to the scheme which became effective from 01 April 2016. The scheme to be adopted in 2021/22 is the same scheme as that set for 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22.
- 5.7 In addition to considering the effects on the key characteristic groups it is important to also consider:
- Economic vulnerability – 94% of the working age claimants (i.e. non-protected people below pension credit age) are out of work. For those with a disability this is 99% (although this is a function of incapacity / disability benefits being used as a proxy for disability).
 - Carers – 880 (5%) of all claimants receive Carer's Allowance.
 - Maternity – 8 (0.08%) of working age claimants receive Maternity Allowance.
 - War widows – 21 (0.1%) of all claimants are war widows (of which 6 are of working age).
- (Data as at 01 October 2021)
- 5.8 To ensure that the Council Tax Support scheme complied with the statutory public sector equality duty and the child poverty strategy quarterly reviews have been undertaken. It has been important to continually consider the equality impact to ensure that no adverse impacts emerged on the key characteristic groups of age, disability, gender, pregnancy and maternity, race, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership and religion and belief.
- 5.9 The detail of the quarter two review of the scheme for 2021/22 , and conclusions drawn from the evidence and analysis of the effects on equality on the key characteristic groups are detailed here:

Workers

- 5.10 As at the end of quarter two (data taken 1 October 2021) 10,492 or 59% of total claimant base are working age claimants and 94% of those working age claimants are out of work. Working age claimants have decreased by 203 people between quarters one and two. Those on low incomes / or reduced means as a result of a previous period of unemployment are

protected by virtue of keeping support for 4 weeks once back in employment after having been out of work for more than 26 continuous weeks.

Disabled

- 5.11 A total of 5,373 claimants are disabled (30% of total claimants) and of those 2,674 are pensioners and so must be fully protected. There has been a distinct increase in the number of working age disabled claimants from 2,578 to 2,699 between quarter four of 2020/21 and quarter two of 2021/22. The cause for this increase is not known but coincides with the COVID pandemic.
- 5.12 Of the 2,699 working age disabled claimants there has been an increase in the claimants that are given protection by the exclusion of Disability Living Allowance from their income taken into account when calculating CTS, which can be up to £152.15 per week (2021/22 rates), from 684 in quarter four of 2020/21 and 793 in quarter two of 2021/22.
- 5.13 A total of 26 disabled claimants were working in quarter two; an increase of five claimants between quarter one to quarter two. A total of 880 claimants (5%) receive Carer's Allowance and have been provided with extra support by having an additional element of allowable income in the assessment. This is a decrease of 1 person from quarter one.
- 5.14 The number of claimants in receipt of war pensions or war widow's pensions which are excluded from the assessment for Council Tax Support, has stayed the same from quarter four in 2020/21 to quarter two 2021/22.

Women

- 5.15 A total of 59% (10,560) of claimants are female. The number of lone parent households has decreased by 68 claims between quarter one and quarter two. Of all the lone parent households, 2,522 (91% of all lone parent claims) are female. Of those that do not receive maximum support, disregarding Child Benefit in full offers some protection to this claimant category, (1,684 claims, 65% of the total female lone parent claims) however this is not specifically restricted to female households nor is the disregard of childcare costs for working claimants with children. The number of female pensioners has fallen between quarter one and two to 4,243 from 4,254 (23.7 % of total claimants). The scheme has affected women more than men as expected as there are more female claimants.

Children and families

- 5.16 In setting the 2013/14 scheme the Child Poverty Strategy was considered as this commits the Council and its partners to eliminating the effects of child poverty and supporting the most vulnerable while reducing inequalities. There are 3,727 claimants with children. The scheme continues to provide some protection for families with children by disregarding child benefit in full which affected 2,495 working age claimants (24% of working age claimants) of which 1,684 or 68% are lone parents and female in quarter two. Child care costs are disregarded for claimants in work in 18 claims of which 16 (89%) are single parents and 2 (11%) are couples.
- 5.17 Child maintenance has been taken into account in the calculation for 26 cases where CTS is payable or 0.2% of the total working age case load. However, in the majority of these cases the claimants were found to receive high amounts of tax credits which then with their earnings took them over the required amount to attract CTS.

War pensions

- 5.18 War pensions and war widow's pensions are disregarded in full from the calculation for CTS.

Effect of scheme changes introduced in April 2016

- 5.19 Band A cap. 1,614 (15%) of working age claimants have been affected by the introduction of cap on the amount of CTS awarded to that of a Band A property. Claimants living in higher banded properties have to pay the difference in Council Tax between a Band A property. There are 52,636 Band A properties in the Borough.
- 5.20 Reducing the maximum award to 75%. The total working age caseload of 10,492 has been affected by reducing the maximum award from 80% when the scheme was set in April 2013 to 75% in April 2016. Pensioners are not affected as they continue to be protected in accordance with legislation.
- 5.21 Align deductions for non-dependents of working age to the same level as those in the prescribed scheme for claimants of pensionable age. There are 10,492 working age claimants however of these only 436 have a working age non-dependant where a deduction is taken.
- 5.22 Non-dependent deductions are disregarded for CTS claimants in receipt of a Staying Put payment. In the last year 1 claimant has benefitted from having a non-dependent deduction disregarded as they have an 18 year to 21 year old person living in the household who is subject to the Staying Put scheme after leaving care.

6. MITIGATION AND SUPPORT

- 6.1 In setting the 2013/14 local Council Tax Support scheme a Hardship Fund was put in place. The purpose of the Hardship Fund is to mitigate the potential risk that some claimants may, in exceptional circumstances, suffer severe financial hardship as a result of the introduction of the scheme or changes to the scheme and may apply for additional monies to help pay their Council Tax. The Hardship Fund for 2021/22 was £50k and this will remain the same for 2022/23. Hardship funding is identified from existing budgets and is administered by Exchequer Services under the Section 13A Policy which is detailed at **Appendix 2**.
- 6.2 However this amount does not exclude approved applications being granted should the maximum allocated funding being exceeded.
- 6.3 Residents may also obtain advice and assistance on the Hardship Fund and Council Tax Support scheme from the Council's Benefits Service, Citizens Advice Bureau and Tameside Welfare Rights Service.
- 6.4 As at 09 November 2021, two applications for Hardship Relief have been successful in 2021/22 for the total sum of £1,484.00. The circumstances of the claims do not suggest that any one equalities group has been adversely affected.
- 6.5 Wherever possible mitigations have been put in place to protect the following equalities groups in the following ways:

Workers on low incomes / or reduced means as a result of a previous period of unemployment are protected by virtue of keeping support for 4 weeks once back in employment after having been out of work for more than 26 continuous weeks.

Disabled claimants of working age are protected by the exclusion of Disability Living Allowance from their income taken into account when calculating CTS, which can be up to £152.15 per week for the higher rate (2021/22 rates). This benefits 793 disabled claimants as at quarter two. 880 claimants in receipt of Carer's Allowance are provided with extra support by having an additional element of allowable income in the assessment. Disabled

claimants in receipt of war pensions or war widow's pensions are protected as this income is also excluded from the CTS assessment.

Women are affected more by the scheme than men because there are a higher proportion of female claimants. The number of female lone parents has remained at 91% of all lone parent claimants. Female pensioners have reduced between quarters one and two by 11. A total of 838 female single parent households receive maximum CTS benefit with the remainder being protected by the exclusion of Child Benefit from the CTS calculation.

Children and Families are protected by disregarding child benefit in full within the CTS calculation and child care costs being disregarded for claimants in work.

Staying Put Scheme: Non-dependent deductions are disregarded in households where there is an 18 year to 21 year old person living in the household who is subject to the Staying Put scheme after they have left local authority care. There is currently 13 people residing in Tameside in receipt of Staying Put payments however only 1 of these is in receipt of CTS and benefiting from the disregard at present.

There continues to be no specific impacts negative or positive on the following protected characteristic areas – ethnicity, marriage/civil partnership, sexual orientation, religion and belief, gender re-assignment.

- 6.6 The scheme was designed to provide extra support for vulnerable people with disabilities claiming benefit, carers and those in receipt of war pensions and to support as many claimants on low incomes as possible taking into account the requirements of the scheme as determined by the Government and affordability.
- 6.7 The scheme, including the changes introduced in April 2016, is operating as expected and no specific negative impacts have emerged to date other than those which were identified when the scheme was set and when revised, and the caseload continues to show a downward trend, therefore it is proposed to set in place the same scheme for 2022/23 that was set in 2013/14 and revised in 2016/17 and continue to use the annual DWP Housing Benefit upratings, and the annual uprated Universal Credit elements as applicable. Further equalities analysis will continue to take place in each claimant category at the end of each quarter to enable the scheme to be continually monitored and to identify and investigate any unforeseen negative impacts should they arise.
- 6.8 The Benefits and Council Tax service works closely with housing and voluntary sector colleagues who assist claimants in supported accommodation. There are links with local DWP Job Centre to ensure that claimants of Universal Credit also complete a claim for Council Tax Support at the point of becoming unemployed.
- 6.9 The law states that Universal Credit annual upratings must be used for claimants in receipt of Universal Credit.
- 6.10 In 2020/21 the Government, as part of its response to COVID-19, awarded the Council a Council Tax Hardship Grant of £2.158m which was mandated to be used to make a payment of £150 to all existing and new working age Council Tax Support (CTS) claims in 2020/21 (up to available funding).
- 6.11 For 2021/22 the Council has been awarded a further grant of £2.025m. The application of this grant is not mandated but provided with the guidance that grant is to be used to meet the anticipated additional costs due to COVID of providing Local Council Tax support in 2021-22, resulting from increased unemployment.

- 6.12 On 28 July 2021, the Executive Cabinet determined that £1,012,500 of the grant monies be used to directly support Council Tax Support claimants and financially vulnerable households as follows:

Claimant support	Cost
A maximum of £50 to be awarded to each CTS claimant	£634k
A maximum of £50 to be awarded to further new claims for CTS and for hardship cases under Section 13a Hardship Policy	£378k

- 6.13 The government has not made any announcements to date regarding additional grant funding in respect of the year 2022/23.

7. SCHEME COSTS AND IMPACT ON COLLECTION

- 7.1 The regulations state that all Councils must include in their Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme protection for claimants who have reached the age for state pension credit, so that they receive the same support as they would have received in Council Tax Benefit. This means that any reductions in funding cannot impact on pensioners so the full impact falls entirely upon claimants of below pension credit age.
- 7.2 A further policy update received in July 2013 from The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (now The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) confirmed that the amount of funding would not be identifiable from 2013/14 onwards as it stated that it is entirely for local authorities to decide how much they are prepared to spend on Council Tax Support, which is why allocations for future years will not be separately identifiable.
- 7.3 With the reduction in monies available to fund the scheme it has been important to continually monitor the cost of the scheme. The amount of Council Tax Support expenditure fluctuates on a daily basis and the scheme costs have stabilised over the last 4 years as detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Costs of scheme by year

Year	Costs
April 2013	£16.6m
April 2014	£15.9m
April 2015	£14.9m
April 2016	£14.3m
April 2017	£13.7m
April 2018	£13.8m
April 2019	£13.8m
April 2020	£13.9m
April 2021	£14.7m

- 7.4 A social care precept and a Council Tax increase are expected from April 2022 which will impact on the scheme. This however would be offset by any increase in Council Tax collected. Scheme costs will continue to be closely monitored every quarter.
- 7.5 Any increase in Council Tax from April 2022 will have the effect of increasing scheme costs however as the costs have stabilised over the last 4 years and, despite the Coronavirus pandemic, the number of claimants has not increased significantly, suggests that the scheme costs will stabilise or may even decrease.

- 7.6 Claimants in receipt of Council Tax Support are monitored in terms of ensuring that Council Tax liabilities are paid. This is particularly important to support claimants to pay on time and not fall into arrears which can in some cases be difficult to recover for both the claimants and the Council.
- 7.7 A total of 53.51% of all Council Tax due this year for CTS claimants was collected as at 31 October 2021 totalling £1.8m. Of that £717k was collected from pensioners in receipt of CTS and £1.08m from working age claimants in receipt of CTS.

8. RISKS

- 8.1 In setting the local Council Tax Support scheme for 2022/23 it is important to consider the risks in doing so. If a local scheme is not set by 11 March 2022 the default scheme will apply. The default scheme is the same as the Council Tax Benefit scheme, which ceased to exist in March 2013 however this Scheme is no longer funded by government and the Council has insufficient funds to pay for it without increasing Council Tax further. Costs associated with the default scheme were estimated to be in excess of £3.2m in 2013/14, and this is likely to increase depending on demand and the amount of Council Tax Support paid.
- 8.2 There is a continued risk that demand for support could increase if the economic picture worsens due to the COVID-19 pandemic and we cannot predict the number of people that may claim Council Tax Support in the future. However the evidence gathered to monitor the effects of the scheme on a quarterly basis show a sustained decrease in demand since the scheme was introduced in April 2013 and a stabilising in the cost of the scheme in recent years.
- 8.3 Implementation of the local scheme has meant that some working age people are paying 25% Council Tax. Small debts are difficult to collect and often take years to clear. This is particularly so where an attachment of benefit is in place to recover Council Tax arrears because the DWP have a hierarchy of attaching a debt to a benefit from source and Council Tax ranks below utility payments and other housing costs. There is a risk that Council Tax arrears may increase as a result.
- 8.4 There is also a continuing risk concerning provision of appropriate communication of the scheme to residents and in particular benefit recipients. To mitigate this communication on the scheme via the Councils web-site and on-line calculator will remain in place, as it is important that claimants are clear that they will have some Council Tax liability which will need to be paid.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 In setting a Council Tax Support scheme for 2022/23 it has been important to consider the current operation of the scheme in terms of demand, costs, equalities, support and risks. The scheme is operating as expected and therefore no changes are proposed to the scheme. Appendix Three details Tameside's Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022/23
- 9.2 Demand for the CTS scheme has been stable throughout the year to date despite the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The scheme, when drafted, was designed to be as fair as possible and it appears sensible to continue to provide a Hardship Fund of £50k to be administered by Exchequer Services as part of the Section 13A Policy.
- 9.3 The public sector equality duty has been considered in relation to the live operation of the scheme. There will be no anticipated specific impacts negative or positive on the following protected characteristic areas as a result of the Council Tax Support scheme – ethnicity, marriage/civil partnership, sexual orientation religion and belief and gender re-assignment,

disability, age and gender. There has been a reduction in overall caseload and categories of claimant as evidenced via the quarterly monitoring that has taken place.

- 9.4 The procedural requirements have been adhered to as the scheme will be adopted before 11 March 2022 before the start of the financial year to which the scheme applies. The prescribed requirements continue to be contained within the scheme and claimants of state pension credit age will continue to receive the same support as they received under Council Tax Benefit.
- 9.5 As it is not intended to change the basis of the scheme no consultation other than that required to precepting bodies no further consultation is believed to be required under the legislation. Precepting bodies have been notified that the same scheme is proposed to be adapted in 2022/23 as that set in 2013/14, and as revised in April 2016.
- 9.6 Council Tax collection rates have been monitored throughout the year and support and advice has been made available to all CTS claimants. Additional support will continue to be provided via the Hardship Fund, continuing to provide the on-line calculator, up to date web pages and self-service account access.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 As set out at the front of the report.