

## WRITTEN STATEMENT OF DECISION BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

### SECTION A

**DATE OF DECISION:**

*13 February 2022*

**PORTFOLIO AREA:**

*Finance & Housing*

**SUBJECT TITLE:** *Household Support Fund and Vulnerable Rents Grant – Financial Support Scheme*

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

### SECTION B – IDENTITY OF THE “DECISION-MAKER”

**Name of Officer:**

*Andrew Ferrier*

**Title:**

*Chief Executive*

Pursuant to Delegated Powers as set out in paragraph (2) of “Delegations to Chief Executive” in Part 3 of the Constitution, namely

“To do anything, in consultation with the Leader, which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of the Council’s functions subject to:

- (i) the matter being regarded as an emergency or urgent situation; and
- (ii) A report back to the Council, Cabinet or Committee concerned. “

### SECTION C – SUMMARY

#### Background

The government has announced two funding streams which have been passed to the council to administer. The first via the Department for Work and Pensions, “Household Support Fund”, and the second via the Department for Levelling up Housing and Communities, “Vulnerable Renters Grant”. Both funds aim to support those who are struggling financially as a result of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. The urgency of addressing the use of these funds is that they must be spent or committed by the end of March 2022. The funds will support Test Valley residents with their financial difficulties in the key priority areas of housing, utility costs, fuel costs and essential day to day expenses.

A summary of each of the Grants is as follows:

1. Household Support Fund - £97,000

This fund is to support residents in any property tenure with their essential living costs, this may include fuel related costs, transport costs, clothing, appliances and rent arrears as some key examples. The scheme cannot help with mortgage payments or mortgage arrears.

2. Vulnerable Renters Grant - £77,000

This scheme provides support to those in private rented accommodation, or those who need to secure new private rented accommodation. The fund can cover a wide range of costs to prevent the customer from becoming homeless or living in financial hardship.

The proposal is to run one scheme, Renters Financial Support Scheme, available for residents (those currently living within Test Valley) to apply for financial support online. A web page has been built with an online

application form. Staff within housing options will assess applications and determine awards in line with the policy. The policy has been written with due regard to the criteria and associated guidance provided by government in terms of using the funds.

The decision has been taken not to pay council tax arrears.

As far as practicably possible, applications will be looked at holistically with referrals and signposting to other services and support to ensure long term and sustainable solutions for people we are seeking to support.

#### **SECTION D – THE DECISION**

“That authority is given to the Head of Finance & Revenues and the Head of Housing and Environmental Health:-

1. To implement and administer grants under Vulnerable Renters and Household Support Fund.
2. In consultation with the Leader, to agree the policy and administration of the funds.

#### **SECTION E – REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

*The decision-maker's reasons for making the decision recorded in Section D:*

Whilst the Vulnerable Renters Fund was subject to Cabinet delegated authority following its meeting in January, the administration of the Household Support Fund is not subject to delegated authority as it is not a homelessness grant. In that context, the proposal to merge these funding streams into a single TVBC Renters Financial Support Scheme does not fall within the scope of existing delegated authority.

Government and our residents will expect applications to be determined and grants to be paid out as soon as practically possible. Therefore appropriate authority is required to meet these expectations and determine applications and pay the grants to eligible people.

There is no convenient meeting of the Council or Cabinet to which this decision could be brought and officer discussions on the best way forward to use these 2 time-bound funding streams have now progressed to the point of a draft policy to underpin decisions on applications received under the proposed scheme. Waiting to bring the decision to Cabinet would cause unacceptable delay in implementing the scheme and likely hardship to eligible recipients. All eligible grants under these schemes must be paid by the Council before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

The Covid-19 pandemic, its associated restrictions and the need to immediately implement these grant Schemes constitute an 'urgent' situation for the purposes of the delegation described at Section B above.

## SECTION F – DETAILS OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The options are:

1. to give delegated authority to the Head of Finance & Revenues and Head of Housing & Environmental Health (in consultation with specified members where appropriate); or
2. to refer applications (or the issue of giving delegated authority) to Committee.

Option 2 would result in delays, the loss of central government grant funding, and economic harm to customers/residents, as well as damage to the Council's reputation and is rejected.

## SECTION G – OTHER RELEVANT MATTERS CONCERNING THE DECISION

None

## SECTION H – BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were taken into consideration when making the decision:

1. Guidance and criteria associated with the Household Support Fund - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/household-support-fund-final-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england>
2. Chief Executives letter regarding Vulnerable Renters Fund – top up to Homeless Prevention Grant
3. Renters Financial Support Scheme draft policy

## SECTION I – Any Conflict of Interest Declared and Dispensation Granted

None.

We certify that the decision this document records was made Pursuant to Delegated Powers as set out in paragraph (2) of "Delegations to Chief Executive" in Part 3 of the Constitution and is a true and accurate record or minute of that decision.

Chief Executive:



Dated:

16.3.22

The Leader of the Council



Dated:

10.3.2022