



Discretionary CTS Hardship Scheme 2017/2018

Context

Lambeth's Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme aims to strike a balance between fairness and sustainability. Even so there will always be cases where residents simply cannot afford to meet their contribution to their Council Tax (CT) costs. This scheme is in place to further help vulnerable residents with their CT costs.

The budget for the scheme is £400,000 and may be claimed by the CT liable person or awarded directly by the council. Any award made under the scheme will be made as a reduction to the CT bill and not by any other means.

The Discretionary CTS Hardship Fund is an addition to the council's welfare safety net and complements the Financial Resilience and Income and Debt strategies.

Application, Decision, and Appeal

Requests for reductions in Council Tax liability should be made to the council in writing by the liable person or their representative. Our suite of online forms will be enhanced to make application as straight forward as possible.

The request must set out the circumstances upon which the application is based and any hardship or personal circumstances concerning why the relief is required.

Details of the liable person's financial circumstances are required. Evidence can include, but is not limited to, household income and expenditure details (using an Income and Expenditure form such as the National Debt Line budget form), utility and household bills. Evidence may be requested that is relevant to the application (e.g. Income and expenditure details, evidence of disability etc.).

Where an application in writing is not possible the Council will consider alternative forms of application and may choose to award without application where it is clearly beneficial and appropriate to do so.

The Council aims to process all Discretionary CTS Hardship Fund applications in 28 days of receipt. Applicants will receive written notification of the outcome of their application. This will state both duration and amount of award. Applications will be processed alongside DHP applications to ensure a joined up approach to use of the council's resources.

Applicants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their application may request a reconsideration of the Council's decision. This should be requested in writing and should include the reasons it is believed the decision is incorrect. Any additional evidence to support the reconsideration should also be provided.

DCTSH Budget – Priorities

The Council's priorities for the award of support through this hardship fund are; households that fall into the following categories:

- Private Sector Working Families
- Working Families
- Single people with disabilities (defined as being in receipt of DLA or PIP)
- Single people with vulnerability indicators as defined as:
 - A learning or physical disability
 - A physical or mental illness, chronic or otherwise, including an addiction to alcohol or drugs; or
 - A reduction in physical or mental capacity
- Those engaged in caring full time for a family member who may therefore face additional difficulties entering work

In addition to supporting people falling into the categories listed above, short-term DCTSH awards are also made in circumstances where a household's vulnerability, coupled with their living situation, merits it. Generally, this would be in a situation where a household is engaging with the council to find a permanent solution to their financial difficulties and enables the CT debt to become manageable through short-term support.

Within these categories there is a focus on targeting DCTSH at:

- Intervening at an early stage to prevent households from falling into debt and removing the threat of legal action.
- Finding long-term solutions, with continued engagement with council services and conditionality where appropriate a requirement of some awards.

The scheme is not available to the following;

- Pension age CTS recipients
- Non-CTS recipients (Unless they have an underlying entitlement to CTS)

Administration and Review

The scheme is administered by the Revenues and Benefits team under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended by section 76 of the Local Government Act 2003).

The scheme and associated budget will be reviewed annually alongside the Council's CTS scheme.