

Title of Report	DISCRETIONARY COUNCIL TAX ENERGY REBATE SCHEME	
Presented by	Councillor Roger Bayliss Cabinet Member for Housing, Property and Customer Services	
Background Papers	None	Public Report: Yes
		Key Decision: Yes
Financial Implications	The financial implications of the rebate scheme will be addressed via direct government funding and new burdens funding. As such there is no direct impact on budget.	
	Signed off by the Section 151 Officer: Yes	
Legal Implications	The process for agreeing a new Council Tax energy rebate scheme as outlined in the report has followed the correct process and is in accordance with the Constitution.	
	Signed off by the Monitoring Officer: Yes	
Staffing and Corporate Implications	None – addressed via the report or new burdens funding.	
	Signed off by the Head of Paid Service: Yes	
Purpose of Report	For cabinet to agree the discretionary scheme for the Council Tax Energy Rebate scheme as detailed in the report.	
Reason for Decision	To comply with the constitution.	
Recommendations	<p>THAT CABINET</p> <p>1. AGREE THE DISCRESSIONARY COUNCIL TAX ENERGY REBATE SCHEME AS SET OUT IN THE REPORT</p> <p>2. DELEGATE ANY SUBSEQUENT CHANGES TO SCHEME TO THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICE IN CONSULATION WITH THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER.</p>	

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1** On 3 February 2022 the Government announced a package of support known as the Energy Bills Rebate to help people with rising energy bills. This included a £150 non-repayable rebate for households in England in council tax bands A – D (including those valued in Band E but reduced to band D as a result of the disabled band reduction). This is known as the Council Tax Rebate (Main Scheme).
- 1.2** There is also discretionary funding for billing authorities to support households who are in need but are not eligible for the main Council Tax Rebate, known as the Discretionary Scheme. The guidance for both schemes were published on 23 February 2022, with further FAQ's being issued during March 2022.
- 1.3** The main scheme for properties in the A-D scheme will start to receive payments in the coming weeks, either through a bank payment where details are held, or via an alternative method allowing collection through the post office.

2.0 DISCRETIONARY SCHEME

- 2.1** NWL has been awarded £133,350.00 funding for the discretionary scheme, which is to complete payment by the end of November this year. As members are aware NWL is part of the Revenues and Benefits Partnership and as such we are harmonising this approach across those member authorities.
- 2.2** The Guidance states, Councils can determine locally how best to make use of this funding to support those suffering financial hardship as a result of the rising cost of living. This could include for example :
- Households living in property valued in bands E to H that are on income related benefits or those where the energy bills payers are not liable for council tax.
 - Where councils consider it the best means of supporting those in financial difficulty, they can use the discretionary fund to offer carefully targeted 'top-up' payments to the most vulnerable households in bands A to D (for example, those on means tested benefits), or to offer discretionary support exceeding £150 per household.
 - Occupants of class M (student halls) are unlikely to be eligible for discretionary support, unless they are exposed to rising energy prices in a similar way to other households.
 - Discretionary support should not be offered to occupants of property in exemption class O, where the Ministry of Defence will provide cost of living support. Support from the Discretionary Fund does not have to be provided in relation to the position on 1 April 2022.
- 2.3** The discretionary scheme can make payments at any level and is not limited to only making payments at £150. However officers are of the opinion to maintain parity with the main scheme payments of not less than £150 per property are made.
- 2.4 The Scheme**
- 2.5** Council Tax payers that will be eligible for £150 in bands E-H are as follows:
- I. Those resident and liable for Council Tax and in receipt of Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) on 1.4.2022.
 - II. Households who have a liability for rent on 1.4.2022, but not Council Tax, and are also liable for an energy bill and in receipt of housing benefit.

- III. The household must occupy the property as their main residence and be liable for rent or council tax on 1.4.2022.
 - IV. All those in receipt of a carers disregard on 1.4.2022.
 - V. Those in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) on 1.4.2022.
 - VI. Those in receipt of Discretionary Discount fund (DDF) (who by default should also be in receipt of LCTS) on 1.4.2022.
 - VII. All those in receipt of care leavers discount on 1.4.2022.
 - VIII. Those in exemption classes, N (students occupation), S (occupied only by persons under 18) , U (occupied solely by persons who are severely mentally impaired), W (annex occupied by a dependent relative) (to mirror the main scheme).
 - IX. Those across all bands where the energy bill payer is not the liable person e.g., HMOS
 - X. Those properties that have an alternative valuation band of band F to H, because of the disabled band reduction scheme.
- 2.6** At the end of the payment period, if funds remain available, we then look at the allocation remaining, and allocate on a taper basis according to band and the numbers of properties in each band and in receipt of LCTS. Likewise if the funds available were exhausted prior to the end of the period then the scheme would close
- 2.7** No award will be made to a local authority, corporate body, or other body such as a housing association, the government or governmental body. This is in line with the main scheme.
- 2.8** Payments for the discretionary scheme will be made in the same way as the main scheme where possible – for example where we hold the data that the council tax payer complies with the scheme and we hold backing details, payment will be made automatically once the scheme is launched. For those where we need further data or detail then an approach will be made to collect that to enable payment.
- 2.9** There will not be an appeals process, any matters arising will be dealt with via the NWLDC complaints procedure.
- 2.10** As this is still a developing area of policy development, the recommendation enables changes to be made to the scheme by the appropriate Director. Any changes will only be made after consultation with the portfolio holder and will maintain the direction of the scheme contained in this report.
- 2.11** This policy has not been able to be commented on by a scrutiny committee due to the timings of final government guidance on this issue, and the need to adopt a policy promptly to enable payments to begin being made. However, it has been informally circulate do Corporate Scrutiny Members and any comments made will be presented to Cabinet as part of the item.

Policies and other considerations, as appropriate	
Council Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local people live in high quality, affordable homes - Our communities are safe, healthy and connected
Policy Considerations:	Existing Council Tax guidance

Safeguarding:	None
Equalities/Diversity:	The scheme attempts to further target support to those most in energy need and subject to disability.
Customer Impact:	None
Economic and Social Impact:	Discretionary scheme will aim to focus those parts of society experiencing most pressure due to the impacts of the energy price rises.
Environment and Climate Change:	None
Consultation/Community Engagement:	None
Risks:	None - wider that the risk and fraud issues associated with a grants process, which are and will be address in scheme design and future audit processes.
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