



Date	21.10.2022	
Report Title	Council Tax (Energy Bills) Rebate Policy	
Cabinet Portfolio	Cllr Vicky Ashworth Cabinet Member for Jobs, Social Inclusion and Equalities	Confirmation of consultation 
Report Signatory	John Turnbull Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Signature 
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Appendices	Appendix 1 – Policy Document	

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The government announced a package of support known as the Energy Bills Rebate to help households with rising energy bills, worth £9.1 billion in 2022-23. Waltham Forest received funding of £14,269,350 help households within Bands A to D as part of a mandatory scheme and £776,250 for a discretionary scheme for households not entitled to the mandatory scheme regardless of banding.
- 1.2 It is proposed that the discretionary scheme supports those households that are eligible under the terms set out in the Policy attached at Appendix 1 and outlined below.
- 1.3 This report sets out the policy scope and qualifying criteria for the discretionary scheme and seeks approval to adopt the scheme recommended in the report.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Strategic Director of Finance and Governance agrees that the Discretionary Council Tax (energy bills) Rebate Policy at Appendix 1 will be adopted the Council's Policy.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The first tranche of the governments package was a grant of £14,269,350 which was distributed using a specific set of criteria issued by the government. A total of £13,953,600 was actually spent with the difference being attributable to churn in the tax base.
- 3.2 The authority is required to design and administer a Discretionary Fund as part of the Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme. The scheme is intended to support at least 5,175 households (assuming an award of £150 to each household) who were not entitled under the mandatory scheme.
- 3.3 The Council has been provided with funding totalling £776,250 for these purposes. The funding must be spent by 30 November 2022 with any unspent monies having to be returned. For these purposes, the term 'unspent' includes payments made by way of vouchers which have yet to be cashed.
- 3.4 The discretionary scheme is being delivered using the Council's wider discretionary powers under the Local Welfare Provisions legislation meaning that it will be disregarded for the purposes of calculating entitlement to means-tested welfare benefits and local Council Tax Support.
- 3.5 All payments made under the discretionary scheme are non-taxable and recipients do not need to notify HMRC of amounts received.
- 3.6 The discretionary scheme includes flexibility to determine the number of payments made per household (for example, in the case of joint liable parties and houses in multiple occupation).

4. PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The primary aim of the discretionary scheme is to offer support to as many households as possible that have not benefited from a payment under the mandatory scheme. There are approximately 102,894 Council Tax households and 93,024 falling in Council Tax Bands A to D have already received an award under the mandatory scheme.
- 4.2 These proposals are designed to provide support to certain households that have not been supported. The discretionary scheme will make the same level of £150.00 awards to households that meet any of the main eligibility criteria

outlined below. The remaining funding will be divided and an equal share, estimated to be £62.00 awarded by way of a credit to the Council Tax account of the other households falling in Council Tax Bands E - H that are not otherwise exempted from the scheme.

4.3 The qualifying criteria for a £150.00 are:

- households in receipt of either Council Tax Support or Housing Benefit,
- persons who are in receipt of a second adult rebate and would, were it not for the presence of the second adult, have been entitled to Council Tax Support.
- homes where a single person discount/disregard has been applied on the grounds that all but one of the residents severally mentally impaired,
- homes with reduced Council Tax liability on the grounds that all or all but one occupant are severely mentally impaired or aged under 18
- homes where an occupant has received assistance from either the Discretionary Housing Payment or Discretionary Council Tax Hardship schemes operated by the Revenues and Benefits Service.
- Residents who would have received an award under the mandatory scheme but have not received a payment.
- Residents who were paid under the mandatory scheme in error, where it is considered unreasonable to recover the payment, will have the sum paid converted to a discretionary award under this scheme.

4.4 The remaining households in Bands E to H that are not otherwise exempted from the scheme, for example empty properties, would be awarded an equal share of the remaining grant allocation, estimated to be £62.00 to ensure that the funding pot is exhausted. This amount may be increased in the event that the Council identifies an underspend.

4.5 In the event of a projected overspend, which is considered to be unlikely to any significant extent, funding from the Discretionary Council Tax Hardship or the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme will be used to provide an equivalent award to those that were entitled but did not receive a payment due to any inaccuracy within the Council Tax database.

4.6 By adopting this method, the Council will be able to identify those residents most likely to be in priority need whilst, at the same time, significantly reducing the administrative burden associated with an applications-based system and ensuring that all of the available funding is spent.

4.7 Payments made using this methodology will largely be made using automatic processing with manual intervention only being required in the cases of exceptions or challenges.

5. Reason for Decision

- 5.1 Direct awards to vulnerable households will deliver all the funding across the eligible council tax bands in a timely manner and before the end of the scheme on 30.11.2022.
- 5.2 Making awards by Post Office voucher offers value for money in terms of funds distribution as the council already has a contract with the Post Office and this is a tried and tested effective means of circulation.
- 5.3 Crediting Council Tax accounts for households that do not redeem their voucher protects the funding which must be spent by the end of the scheme which is 30.11.2022 and, in the case of properties in bands E-H will avoid any possible delays caused by the large numbers of vouchers being issued.
- 5.4 The value of the awards made to households falling within bands E to H may be amended to ensure that all funds made available by central government are spent before 30.11.2022

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 It is recommended that the discretionary Policy is approved on the basis set out above.