

This Report will be made public on 8 June 2022



Report Number **C/22/08**

To: Cabinet
Date: 16 June 2022
Status: Key Decision
Responsible Officer: Charlotte Spendley, Corporate Service Director
Cabinet Member: Councillor Tim Prater

SUBJECT: ENERGY REBATE DISCRETIONARY SCHEME

SUMMARY: This report presents the policy of allocating and managing the Discretionary Energy Rebate funding received from Government.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

To consider the proposed policy to support residents with Energy Rebate Payments that sit outside of the standard scheme.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/22/08.
2. To approve and adopt the Council's Discretionary Energy Rebate Scheme.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 On 23 February 2022 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLHC) published guidance and billing authority allocations for the implantation of the Council Tax Rebate and Discretionary Fund (which was announced on 3 February 2022).
- 1.2 The standard scheme consists of awarding a £150 non-repayable rebate to households in England in Council Tax bands A to D. This includes a property that is valued in band E but has an alternative valuation band of band D, as a result of the disabled band reduction scheme. The other criteria is that it must be someone's sole or main residence, is a chargeable dwelling (or in exemption classes N, S, U or W) and the person liable to pay the Council Tax is not a local authority corporate body or other body such as a housing association, the government or government body.
- 1.3 This means that a property that has no permanent resident, and is someone's second home, and unoccupied properties will not be eligible.
- 1.4 The award is based upon the circumstances of the property as at the end of the day on 1 April 2022.
- 1.5 On top of the standard award and funding allocations, Councils were also allocated funding for a discretionary scheme. It is up to each authority to define the eligibility criteria for this scheme and allocate funds accordingly.
- 1.6 Folkestone & Hythe District Council have received £302,100 in discretionary funding; this must be fully spent by 30 November 2022 and any unpaid funds will be required to be repaid to the Government.
- 1.7 Once determined (and approved by required elected members), Councils should publish their agreed guidelines setting out the eligibility criteria for their discretionary fund.

2. THE DISCRETIONARY SCHEME CRITERIA

- 2.1 Before devising the proposed policy officers shared thoughts on proposals across Kent to offer a largely consistent approach across the county. The proposals below follow this remit whilst also looking to support the most vulnerable residents in the district.
- 2.2 The main points of the policy are listed below and can be found in section 3.0 of the proposed policy (Appendix A). A single one off payment of £150 will be awarded to any household that:
 - a) Is in bands E to H and is entitled to Council Tax Reduction as at 1 April 2022. This will ensure support is given to larger banded properties of households that are on a lower income.
 - b) Is in bands F to H and is entitled to a Disability Band Reduction as at 1 April 2022 (band E is covered by the standard scheme as per paragraph 1.2). This will offer support to households known to have had adaptations made due to disabled residents.

- c) Is in bands E to H and is exempt from Council Tax under Class K, N (students), S (under 18s) and U (severely mentally impaired) as at 1 April 2022.
- d) Are not liable for Council Tax but responsible for the payment of energy bills as at 1 April 2022. For the sake of clarity, these will be houses in multiple occupation where the owner is liable for Council Tax but tenants are responsible for gas or electricity bills.

2.3 In the case of 'd' above, an application will need to be made to the Council to evidence the expense of a utility bill as these households may not be known to the Council. All other categories will be paid automatically where bank details are held (and verified) or will be contacted to supply details in order to make a payment; as is the case with the standard scheme.

2.4 Should funding be available after these awards have been made, the Council will consider making a top-up payment to all households in a dwelling with a Council Tax band A to H in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. This will be split evenly amongst these low income households once all other payments have been made.

3. PROMOTION

3.1 Once a policy has been agreed the Council intends to promote the scheme via the website, social media and the press.

3.2 This will include posters to be used in the district and the sharing of the scheme with local volunteer and support partners to ensure that residents are aware of the scheme and its eligibility criteria.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

4.1 There is not a great deal of risk management involved in this issue.

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
Funding is not fully spent and needs to be returned	Medium	Low	To ensure funding is fully allocated top ups will be offered as detailed in 3.3 of the proposed policy.

7. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

7.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

The energy payments are fully funded by the Government with the Council being fully reimbursed for all grants paid. All Government guidance in respect of the scheme will be followed by the Council in the administration of the scheme.

7.2 Finance Officer's Comments (ST)

No additional Finance implications to note other than those included within this report.

7.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

There are no negative equality and diversity implications directly arising from this report. The proposed policy measure is designed to support those households most in need with easing the cost of living.

7.4 Climate Change Implications (OF)

There are no climate change implications arising as a result of this report.

8. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting

Andrew Hatcher, Revenues and Benefits Lead Specialist

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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Folkestone & Hythe District Council Discretionary Energy Rebate Scheme