

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	1 June 2022
Subject:	Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme Discretionary Scheme 2022-23
Report of:	Head of Finance and Asset Management
Corporate Lead:	Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Finance and Asset Management
Number of Appendices:	One

Executive Summary:

The purpose of the report is to seek approval for the Council Tax Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme 2022-23.

The report also seeks approval for decisions on any future changes to government guidance on the scope and operation of the scheme to be delegated to the Lead Member for Finance and Asset Management in consultation with the Head of Finance and Asset Management.

Recommendation:

- 1. That the Council Tax Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme 2022-23 at Appendix A is ADOPTED.**
- 2. That delegated authority is given to the Head of Finance and Asset Management, in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance and Asset Management, to make technical amendments to the scheme if further or revised government guidance is issued.**

Reasons for Recommendation:

To ensure that Members are fully supportive of the proposed scheme which aims to target help to those most in need of support with rising energy costs.

Resource Implications:

The government has provided funding for the Discretionary Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme, with our allocation being £152,400. The guidance states that support from the Discretionary Fund should consist of no more than £150 per household.

If the Council overspends against the allocation, the Council will need to meet that cost which means expenditure against allocation will be tightly controlled and the scheme will close once the allocation has been spent.

Legal Implications:

The proposed scheme is consistent with Government guidance '**Support for energy bills – the council tax rebate 2022-23:billing authority guidance**'. If there is no appeals process from any decision then the decision must be in accordance with the principles of decision making e.g. lawful, reasonable, proportionate and in accordance with policy as the decision could be subject to a judicial review challenge or complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Having a clear policy will assist in the decision-making process.

Risk Management Implications:

The government has issued guidance to advise billing authorities of the criteria to be used in making discretionary council tax energy rebate payments. If the recommendations in this report are not approved, support will not be provided to households which could cause reputational damage to the Council.

There is an inherent level of fraud and error risk involved in the processing of several payments of this nature, however we will undertake pre-payment checks before providing any support from the Discretionary Fund.

Performance Management Follow-up:

The number of households benefitting from the scheme will be monitored by the Energy Rebate Team. Further, we are required to submit regular returns on the progress of the scheme through DELTA, the online data collection system of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Environmental Implications:

None.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

1.1 On 3 February 2022, the Government announced a package of support known as 'Support for energy bills – the council tax rebate 2022-23' to help households with rising energy bills. This included a £150 non-repayable rebate for households in England in council tax bands A to D and further discretionary funding for billing authorities to support households who are not eligible for the main scheme.

1.2 Tewkesbury Borough Council has been allocated discretionary funding to support other energy bill payers who are not eligible under the terms of the core scheme.

2.0 Discretionary Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme

2.1 The Council has received discretionary funding of £152,400 in recognition of the fact that we may wish to provide support to other energy bill payers who are not eligible under the terms of the core scheme.

2.2 The Council can determine locally how to make best use of this funding to make payments to other households who are energy bill payers, but are not covered by the core Council Tax Energy Rebate. This can include households living in properties in council tax bands E to H that are on income related benefits or those where the energy bill payers are not liable for council tax. Allocations from the discretionary fund must be spent by 30 November 2022.

- 2.3 Discussions have taken place between the six Gloucestershire Districts to agree broad common principles which are incorporated in the proposed Council Tax Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme 2022/23.

Eligibility Criteria

- 2.4 The Council has established the eligibility criteria based on government guidance and with the aim of supporting low-income households in band E to H properties and not eligible for the core rebate scheme. We are also keen to support other residents who have individual circumstances which means they are less able to adapt to increasing energy costs.

- 2.5 The following summarises the proposed eligibility criteria, which is detailed in full in the scheme documentation at Appendix A:

- **Households living in property in Bands E to H who are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction on 1 April 2022.**

This will provide support to those households not eligible for the core scheme. The proposed award of £150 means that support will be levelled up for all low-income households in receipt of council tax reduction. We estimate that there are 202 households who will meet this criterion.

- **Households in Bands F* to H eligible for Disabled Band Reduction on 1 April 2022.**

* Property that is in valuation band E, has an alternative valuation band of D due to disabled band reduction and is eligible for a payment under the core scheme.

This will provide support to those households which may have higher energy costs due to the disability of the residents. We estimate we will be able to provide support to 59 households.

- **Households with occupiers where increased energy costs are likely to be felt more significantly including those where all occupiers are under the age of 18, severely mentally impaired, care leavers, students, and elderly dependant relatives.**

This will provide support to those households who may need a little extra support due to their age or mental capacity. We estimate that there are 111 households which meet this eligibility criteria.

- **People in supported/emergency accommodation**

This will provide support to those residents who may need to use pre-payment energy cards or meters. It is not possible to provide an estimate about how many households we will be able to support as this figure will fluctuate throughout the year.

- **People who live in houses of multiple occupation and other properties where the resident is not the liable party for council tax.**

This will provide support to those residents who are more likely to need to use pre-payment energy cards or meters. Again, it is difficult to estimate how many households we will be able to support as we do not always have these details in our council tax records.

- 2.6 Where we can confirm eligibility using our council tax records, we will not require an application to be made as we are keen to make payments to affected households as soon as possible.

2.7 In all other cases we will require an application form to be completed. It is proposed that the application window will run from 1 to 31 July in order for us to make payments as quickly as possible.

3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

3.1 Members could choose not to agree the Council Tax Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme, however there is a clear expectation from government that we will use the funding to support households with rising energy bills.

4.0 CONSULTATION

4.1 Discussions have taken place between the six Gloucestershire Districts on the Discretionary Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme, to agree broad principles for scheme alignment. This includes supporting low-income households and those residents who may have increased energy costs due to their specific circumstances.

5.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

5.1 None.

6.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

6.1 Support packages for rising energy costs.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

7.1 None directly associated with this report other than officer time.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

8.1 None.

9.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

9.1 The scheme must be within the broad guidance set out by the government. The scheme is primarily targeted at households receiving Council tax reduction, income related benefits and other low-income households.

10.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

10.1 None.

Background Papers: None.

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Appendices: A – Council Tax Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme.