

# **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **EXECUTIVE**

**7<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2022**

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**Title:**

**Approval of the Discretionary “Energy Rebate” Scheme**

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**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Mark Merryweather, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Assets & Commercial Services

**Head of Service:** Peter Vickers, Head of Finance and Property

**Key decision:** Yes

**Access:** Public

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### **1. Purpose and summary**

1.1 In February 2022 the government announced a package of support known as the Energy Bills Rebate to help households with rising energy bills. The scheme includes a £150 rebate to all properties in council tax band A-D with criteria set by the government (the main scheme). The announcement includes a discretionary fund to support other financially vulnerable energy bill payers not covered under the main scheme. This report sets out a local scheme to comply with the government guidance.

### **2. Recommendation**

2.1 That the Executive approve the Discretionary Energy Rebate Scheme set out in this report.

### **3. Reason for the recommendation**

3.1 Waverley has been allocated discretionary funding of £216,600 to support those suffering financial hardship as a result of the rising cost of living, but not eligible for the main energy rebate scheme.

3.2 Councils can decide locally how best to use the funding to support those suffering financial hardship as a result of the rising cost of living. This could include households living in property valued in council tax bands E to H that are on income related benefits or those where the energy bills payers are liable for council tax.

3.3 The discretionary fund should be paid out by 30<sup>th</sup> November, any remaining funding will be required to be returned to the government.

#### 4. **Background**

4.1 The discretionary scheme funding allocation will enable 1,444 rebates of £150.00.

4.2 The government guidance states:

- Councils can determine locally how best to make use of this funding to provide payments to other households who are energy bill payers but not covered by the Council Tax band A-D Rebate.
- This could include households living in property valued in bands E – H that are on income related benefits or those where the energy bills payers are not liable for council tax.
- 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.

4.3 Following these guidelines, an Energy Rebate Scheme Discretionary Policy has been drafted for consideration and approval at **annexe 1**.

4.4 Based on the proposed criteria in annexe 1, there are 780 properties (£117,000 of rebate) in bands E to H that:

- are in receipt of Council Tax Support on the 1 April 2022 or
- are in receipt of a Disabled Band Reduction on the 1 April 2022 or
- are classed as a Care Leaver in accordance with The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 on the 1 April 2022 or
- are exempt from Council Tax under class U due to a determination of being Severely Mentally Impaired in accordance with The Council Tax (Discount Disregards) Order 1992 (as amended)

4.5 Of the 780 there are 496 with active direct debit mandates that can be paid immediately, and the remainder will be invited to apply for the rebate.

4.6 Within bands E to H, the council does not have specific information to identify where the Council Tax payer or partner are in receipt of any of the following means tested benefits on or after 1 April 2022 and a media campaign will invite applications for a rebate:

- Housing Benefit (c4,000 claimants will require a manual cross reference to the council tax system to establish banding)
- Universal Credit
- Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit

- 4.7 The intention is that discretionary scheme qualifying rebates identified within the council tax database (para 4.4 and 4.5) will be paid directly into their bank accounts where we hold valid direct debit instructions and will receive a letter informing them of the award. Other qualifying people will be written to with a QR code to claim the rebate.
- 4.8 People who qualify under the criteria in paragraph 4.6 will be invited to apply via an online application form that has been designed and is ready to go live once the discretionary scheme is approved. Appropriate media communications will be on the web and the publicised on social media, including asking other agencies to assist in publicising the scheme.

## 5. **Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan**

- 5.1 The scheme supports the wellbeing of our residents and communities.

## 6. **Implications of decision**

### 6.1 **Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)**

The scheme is funded by the government with a one-off cash limited amount of £216,600 and the government requires unallocated monies as of 30 November 2022 will be returned. The government has provided an administration grant which covers the administrative cost of the whole scheme.

### 6.2 **Risk management – covered in the report.**

The council is required to ensure rigorous anti-fraud systems are in place for disbursement of the rebate and any incorrectly awards are to be recovered.

### 6.3 **Legal**

The scheme is discretionary but the guidance on qualifying core criteria has been specified by the government as detailed in the report.

### 6.4 **Equality, diversity, and inclusion**

The scheme has to be within the guidance set out by the government and is aimed at those in receipt of Council Tax Support or other benefits. There are no wider specific direct equality, diversity, or inclusion implications in this report.

### 6.5 **Climate emergency declaration**

The proposal set out in this report will ultimately enable the Council to identify leisure and community facilities options for the site including environmental enhancements that will support corporate objectives including the Climate Change Action Plan.

## 7. **Consultation and engagement**

- 7.1 The proposal within this report have been reviewed in line with other currently publicised schemes across the country.

## 8. **Other options considered**

8.1 This scheme is statutory requirement; the design objective is to recognise financial hardship across all property tenures within the limited funds available.

**9. Governance journey**

9.1 The scheme will be proposed directly to the executive for approval to expedite the disbursement of funds to those in financial need.

**Annexes:**

Annexe 1: Discretionary Energy Rebate Scheme Policy

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**Background Papers**

There are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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Agreed and signed off by:

Legal Services: 20/05/2022

Head of Finance: 20/05/2022

Strategic Director: 20/05/2022

Portfolio Holder: 20/05/2022