

REPORT FROM: CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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£150 ENERGY REBATE DISCRETIONARY SCHEME

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To set out the arrangements for the delivery of the £150 Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme.

RECOMMENDATION

To Approve the Scheme for Pendle Borough Council as set out in Section 9 of the report.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

To allow funds to be distributed in accordance with the Scheme as set out.

ISSUE

1. On 3 February 2022, HM Treasury announced an Energy Rebate Scheme for households in England. The scheme included two elements;
 - i domestic electricity customers will get £200 off their energy bills from October 2022, and,
 - ii Households in Bands A-D will receive a £150 Council Tax rebate from April 2022.
2. This report deals with the £150 Council Tax rebate (ii) which is to be administered by each Billing Authority across their area and further focuses on the discretionary element of scheme.
3. The administration of the scheme is being delivered by Liberata UK and agreement for this was given at the Council meeting on 24th March 2022. The main scheme is well underway with over 90% of all payments being made by the end of June 2022.

The Discretionary Fund

4. Pendle received £232,200 for the Discretionary Scheme. Guidance on the scheme is set out below.
5. The government recognises that billing authorities may also wish to provide support to other energy bill payers who are not eligible under the terms of the core scheme, or to provide carefully targeted 'top-up' payments to the most vulnerable households in bands A to D. It will therefore provide every billing authority with a share of a £144 million Discretionary Fund, as per the allocations at Annex A.
6. 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 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.
7. Once determined (and approved where considered appropriate by elected members), councils should publish their agreed guidelines setting out the eligibility criteria for their Discretionary Fund. Councils should undertake pre-payment checks similar to those described at paragraphs 23 to 29 before providing support from the Discretionary Fund.
8. Allocations from the discretionary fund should be spent by 30 November 2022. Any remaining funding will be required to be repaid to government.

Pendle Borough Council Scheme

9. It is proposed that the scheme for Pendle Borough Council residents be as follows;
 - i A payment of £150 shall be made to all households in Bands E – H that were in receipt of Council Tax Support on 1st April 2022. At the time of writing there are 83 such households.
 - ii A credit top up of £28 shall be applied to the Council Tax account of all households in Bands A – D that were in receipt of Council Tax Support 1st April 2022. At the time of writing there 7,840 such households.
10. This scheme follows broadly in line with other local Authorities both locally and nationally and targets those residents most in need.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: The Policy issues are as set out in the report.

Financial: The Financial issues are as set out in the report.

Legal: DLUHC have issued Letters and guidance notes to all Local Authorities, the most recent being, 7/2022: Council Tax information letter - 16 March 2022. Links are provided in the Background Papers.

Risk Management: The Risks re as set out in the report.

Health and Safety: There are no health and safety implications arising directly from the contents of this report.

Sustainability: There are no sustainability implications arising directly from this report.

Community Safety: There are no community safety issues arising directly from the contents of this report

Equality and Diversity: The Equality & Diversity issues are as set out in the report.

APPENDICES

Pendle Discretionary Council Tax Rebate Scheme

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

<https://www.pendle.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/3031/council>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-council-tax-rebate-2022-23-billing-authority-guidance/support-for-energy-bills-the-council-tax-rebate-2022-23-billing-authority-guidance#the-discretionary-fund>