



**EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
26 May 2022**

CABINET: 7 June 2022

Report of: Corporate Director of Transformation, Housing & Resources

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor Adam Yates

**Contact for further information: Name (Extn.) Estelle Dobson
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SUBJECT: Council Tax and NNDR Discretionary Funding Schemes

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update following the agreement as part of the 2022/23 Budget Setting process to fund £260K to support the most vulnerable affected by rising energy costs, to approve the Borough Council's proposed **Local Council Tax Discretionary Energy Support Scheme Policy** as appended to this report.
- 1.2 To highlight recent Government announcements in respect of funding made available to support local Council Tax and Business Rate payers in meeting increased energy bills and the financial impact of Covid 19 and to note the Policies to underpin these Schemes, as appended to this Report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 2.1 That the Committee consider the content of the Policy to underpin implementation of the Borough Council's proposed Local Council Tax Discretionary Energy Support Scheme as appended to this report.
- 2.2 That the Committee note the Policy coverage to underpin the recently announced Government funded Schemes to support local Council Tax and Business Rate payers in meeting increased energy bills and the financial impact of Covid 19, as appended to this report, and that the agreed comments of the Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee be passed to Cabinet for their consideration

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

- 3.1 That Cabinet, having regards to the content of this report and to the agreed comments of the Executive Overview & Scrutiny Committee, consider and approve the policies, as appended to this report.
 - 3.2 Following discussion with cross party members, it be agreed that the Local Council Tax Discretionary Energy Support Scheme launch be effective from the date of 1st September 2022
 - 3.3 That the Corporate Director of Transformation, Housing and Resources be given delegated authority to make any minor/inconsequential amendments to the Policies.
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4.0 Background

- 4.1 On 3rd February 2022 the government announced a package of support known as the Energy Bills Rebate to help households with rising energy bills, this includes a single one-off grant of £150 to all eligible households in England in council tax bands A to D known as the Council Tax Rebate Mandatory Scheme. Within West Lancashire this will equate to circa 41,000 households being awarded the rebate should they meet the relevant criteria. Government have provided funding to the Council of £6m; all payments *will have to be made* prior to the 30th September 2022 which is the deadline for this scheme.
- 4.2 Also announced was a Discretionary funding for authorities. Government has determined that the Council can decide locally how best to make use of the discretionary funding to provide payments to other households who are energy bill payers but not covered by the mandatory Council Tax Rebate, known as the Discretionary Council Tax Rebate Scheme. Government have provided funding to the Council of £260,000; however, all payments *will have to be made* prior to the 30th November 2022 which is the deadline for this scheme.
- 4.3 In addition to the Central Government schemes, at Budget in February, £260,000 of funding (this is not to be confused with the allocation in 4.2) was approved for 2022/23 to further support the most vulnerable within the Borough affected by the increasing energy and fuel costs, known as the Local Council Tax Discretionary Energy Support Scheme. Prior to presenting report a meeting with party leaders was undertaken whereby considerations to launch the scheme in September 2022 was agreed, this is reflected in 3.2 recommendation
- 4.4 Central Government has provided the authority with funding to assist those ratepayers who businesses have been (and continue to be) affected by the pandemic but that are ineligible for existing support linked to business rates, known as the Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF). Whilst funding is provided by Central Government, it is for the Council to decide its own local scheme and determine in each individual case whether to grant this particular relief. Relief under the CARF scheme will only be available to reduce chargeable amounts in respect of the 2021/22 financial year. Government have provided funding to the Council of £2.2m; however, all payments will have to be made prior to the 30th September 2022 which is the deadline for this scheme

5.0 Current Position

- 5.1 A detailed Policy document has been *drafted* to support the implementation of the Borough Council funded Local Council Tax Discretionary Energy Support Scheme (£260K including any administration/resource costs).
- 5.2 Detailed Policy documents have been *drafted* to underpin the Government funded Schemes to support local Council Tax and Business Rate payers in meeting increased energy bills and the financial impact of Covid.

6.0 Issues

- 6.1 In order to support the delivery and payment of the Council Tax Mandatory & Discretionary Energy Rebate schemes to the right people, there is piece of system work that must be undertaken. Our software supplier Northgate have offered this additional software at a cost to all local authorities who have their core Revenues System already. This functionality has already been procured as part of this process see point 9.3

7.0 Implementation

- 7.1 Due to complexity and significant resources required to implement these Schemes, detailed Project Plan's for each are underway and at different stages. These will identify key milestones, tasks, dates and responsible Officers/Teams.

8.0 Sustainability Implications

- 8.1 The Policies appended to this report will support eligible Council Taxpayers in meeting increased energy, fuel, and other household bills that are likely to increase significantly in the coming months. In addition, the CARF scheme will also help eligible local NNDR (Business Rate) payers meet the recent impact of Covid 19 on their businesses and the local community.

9.0 Financial and Resource Implications

- 9.1 Additional administrative resources will be required to administer these Schemes – this will include the appointment of temporary agency staff to assist in the application and assessment processes, additional overtime to engage existing staff to set up and implement these schemes through to payment and cross organisational working, involving several different WLBC Services e.g., Business Support Grants Team. These costs are being monitored but will be covered through the government allocation mentioned in 9.2 below therefore not impacting the local £260,000 budget agreed.
- 9.2 An interim allocation of £62k down payment has been provided by Government to support the early set-up costs related to the implementation of the Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme. This payment has been made based on initial

assessment of activities by Local Authorities related to the purchase of scheme specific software and an element of direct staffing costs for the delivery of the main scheme. A wider, more detailed assessment of the full range of new burdens costs incurred as a result of delivering the rebate scheme will be undertaken by Government over the coming months.

- 9.3 Specialist external consultancy support to assist in Scheme and Policy Design has been procured @ 5 days @ £675.00 per day + VAT = **£3,375.00 + VAT**. This cost will be covered from allocation mentioned in 9.2.
- 9.4 Additional system functionality has been procured at a cost of **£7,325.00**. This cost will be covered from allocation 9.2.

10.0 Risk Assessment

- 10.1 The recommendations contained in this report present an opportunity to support local Council Taxpayers and local NNDR payers who have been deemed to be significantly impacted by the current rise in energy, fuel and other household bills and also local businesses that are deemed to have been significantly impacted by the Covid 19 Pandemic.
- 10.2 One risk worth flagging is the administrative impact on delivering the Government schemes in the allocated timescales, this is above and beyond usual practice. Government have set the timescales for implementation and delivery of 3 of these schemes. Failure to deliver within the timescales noted in points 4.1/4.2/4.4 could result in non-compliance to spend the allocated funds and the underspend being returned to Central Government. This would have a negative impact on our residents and businesses.
- 10.3 There is also a risk of not having enough funds to cover the demands of the discretionary schemes both local and government, however every effort is being made to apply a priority system in ensuring we manage effectively and assess the greatest vulnerability.

11.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 11.1 The delivery of the proposed schemes will provide a positive impact on health and wellbeing. It is anticipated that the successful achievement of these policies will *maximise positive and minimise negative impacts in the following areas:*
- Improvements to major health issues
 - Supporting residents' mental health
 - Cold homes
 - Anti-poverty
 - Financial Inclusion strategy
 - Supporting Businesses within the Borough

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders, therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been considered in the Recommendations contained within this report

Appendices

1. WLBC Council Tax Discretionary Energy Support Scheme – Policy Document



West Lancashire
S13A1C 2022 FINAL

2. Government Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme CT Bands A-D - Policy Document



West Lancs -
Council Tax Rebate I

3. Government Council Tax Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme - Policy Document



West Lancs
Discretionary Council

4. Government NNDR CARF Scheme - Policy Document



West Lancs NDR
CARF DRR Policy FIN

5. Equality Impact Assessment

Equality Impact Assessment Form	
Directorate: Transformation & Resources	Service: Revenues and Benefits
Completed by: Estelle Dobson	Date: 15.3.22
Subject Title:	
1. DESCRIPTION	
Is a policy or strategy being produced or revised?	<i>*delete as appropriate</i>
Is a service being designed, redesigned or cutback:	Yes
Is a commissioning plan or contract specification being developed?	No*
Is a budget being set or funding allocated:	Yes
Is a programme or project being planned?	Yes
Are recommendations being presented to senior managers and/or Councillors:	Yes
Does the activity contribute to meeting our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty (Eliminating unlawful discrimination/harassment, advancing equality of opportunity, fostering good relations)?	Yes
Details of the matter under consideration:	A number of Discretionary Schemes both Borough Council and Central Government funded have been announced/agreed and Policy to underpin these Discretions requires decision and adoption to progress payment to eligible Council Tax and NNDR payers
<p><i>If you answered Yes to any of the above go straight to Section 3</i></p> <p><i>If you answered No to all the above, please complete Section 2</i></p>	
2. RELEVANCE	
Does the work being carried out impact on service users, staff or Councillors (stakeholders):	<i>*delete as appropriate</i>
If yes , provide details of how these impact on service users, staff or Councillors (stakeholders):	Yes/No*
<i>If you answered Yes go to Section 3</i>	
If you answered No to both Sections 1 and 2	



provide details of why there is no impact on these three groups: <i>You do not need to complete the rest of this form.</i>	
3. EVIDENCE COLLECTION	
Who does the work being carried out impact on, i.e. who is/are the stakeholder(s)?	Local Council Tax and NNDR payers
If the work being carried out relates to a universal service, who needs or uses it most? (Is there any particular group affected more than others)?	Yes
Which of the protected characteristics are most relevant to the work being carried out? Age Gender Disability Race and Culture Sexual Orientation Religion or Belief Gender Reassignment Marriage and Civil Partnership Pregnancy and Maternity	<i>*delete as appropriate</i> No No* No* No* No* No* No* No* No*
4. DATA ANALYSIS	
In relation to the work being carried out, and the service/function in question, who is actually or currently using the service and why?	The service/discretionary scheme is not yet set up and running
What will the impact of the work being carried out be on usage/the stakeholders?	Support their ability to meeting rising energy, fuel, other household bills and the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic
What are people's views about the services? Are some customers more satisfied than others, and if so, what are the reasons? Can these be affected by the proposals?	n/a
What sources of data including consultation results have you used to analyse the impact of the work being carried out on users/stakeholders with protected characteristics?	Existing data contained within the Northgate Revenues computer system
If any further data/consultation is needed and is to be gathered, please specify:	
5. IMPACT OF DECISIONS	
In what way will the changes impact on people with particular protected characteristics (either	n/a

positively or negatively or in terms of disproportionate impact)?	
6. CONSIDERING THE IMPACT	
If there is a negative impact what action can be taken to mitigate it? (If it is not possible or desirable to take actions to reduce the impact, explain why this is the case (e.g. legislative or financial drivers etc.).	
What actions do you plan to take to address any other issues above?	<i>If no actions are planned state no actions</i>
7. MONITORING AND REVIEWING	
When will this assessment be reviewed and who will review it?	October 2022 – Revenues Manager