

MINUTE OF EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26 MAY 2022

12 COUNCIL TAX AND NNDR DISCRETIONARY FUNDING SCHEMES

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Transformation, Housing and Resources as contained on pages 61 to 104 of the Book of Reports, which was 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.

The Head of Corporate and Customer Services outlined the report and responded to questions raised by Members in respect of the following:

- Section 4.5(g)(i) No mention of Pension Credit on list of means tested benefits – This is covered in the existing wording of the Policy Document. Residents on a low income will be encouraged to apply, and the Pension Credit along with other benefits will specifically be mentioned
- Section 4.11 – how a credit of £150 to residents Council Tax will affect their future payments? – The amount will reduce off the outstanding account balance and instalments for the rest of the financial year will be recalculated and reduced accordingly
- Section 9.3 Clarity in Independent Valuation Service – Regulations 13a policy re flooding – The Valuation Tribunal is an appropriate independent route for this under Section 13a Regulations
- Will Residents in receipt of Single Occupancy also receive £150 - Single Occupancy will receive discount, regardless of whether they are already in receipt of a discount
- The Discretionary Council Tax Rebate Scheme Policy document S10.1 – anti fraud provision exists – s11.2 – prosecution for false/withheld information will be considered - Proposed amendments to deal with this inconsistency
- CARF Scheme criteria set by Government make this a difficult relief to apply for – The Team will identify Businesses and support them with their application
- Implications re means tested assessments on benefits / some benefits fall within income and contribution - Under s13 it is in WLBC discretion to signpost those Applicants. WLBC will mention ESA contribution in literature sent out so this will be made clear
- CARF Scheme – How do Businesses prove adversely affected by Covid - Ensuring Government criteria are met, and we include set criteria in the application process

RESOLVED:

- A. That the Committee considered and noted the content of the Policy to underpin implementation of the Borough Council's proposed Local Council Tax Discretionary Energy Support Scheme as appended to the report.
- B. 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 the report, and that the following agreed comments of Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee be passed to Cabinet for their consideration:
 - 1. That Paragraph 10.1 of the Discretionary Council Tax Rebate Scheme Policy Document to read as follows:

"The Council will not accept deliberate manipulation of this policy or fraud. Any person caught falsifying information to gain a discretion payment, **the Council will look to prosecute** under the Fraud Act 2006 and any amount awarded will be recovered from them.
 - 2. That Paragraph 11.1 of the 'CARF' Scheme to read as follows:

"Where a ratepayer falsely applies for any relief, or where the ratepayer provides false information, makes false representation, or deliberately withholds information in order to gain relief, **the Council will look to prosecute** under the Fraud Act 2006" and any amount awarded will be recovered from them.