

Report for: Cabinet Member Signing – 22 April 2022

Title: Council Tax (Energy) Rebate Discretionary Scheme

Report authorised by: Susie Faulkner, Director for Customers, Transformation and Resources

Lead Officer: David Graaff, Head of Service Delivery,
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Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** Key Decision

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 The Government issued the guidance for the delivery of the Council Tax Rebate scheme on 16 March 2022. This includes the core scheme of payments to qualifying occupiers of properties in Council Tax bands A-D.
- 1.2 The Council is required to develop and publish a Discretionary scheme in accordance with the requirements set out in the Guidance issued by the Government.
- 1.3 This report sets out the proposed discretionary scheme in Appendix A.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

Not applicable.

3. Recommendations

The Cabinet Member is asked:

- 3.1 To approve Haringey's Discretionary Council Tax (Energy) Rebate Scheme April 2022 (as set out in Appendix A) as the methodology to determine the allocation of funding in accordance with the guidance issued by Government.
- 3.2 To authorise the Director of Customers, Transformation, and Resources, after consultation with the Lead Member, to make appropriate amendments to the Discretionary Council Tax (Energy) Rebate Scheme April 2022 where considered necessary.

4. Reasons for Decision

- 4.1 The Council is required to develop and publish a discretionary scheme in accordance with the requirements set out in the Guidance issued by the Government on 16 March 2022.

5. Alternative Options Considered

5.1 None

6. Background Information

6.1 The government announced a package of support known as the Energy Bills Rebate to help households with rising energy bills, worth £9.1 billion nationally in 2022-23. This includes:

6.1.1 A £200 discount on their energy bill this Autumn for domestic electricity customers in Great Britain. This will be paid back automatically over the next 5 years.

6.1.2 A £150 non-repayable rebate for households in England in council tax bands A – D, known as the Council Tax Rebate.

6.1.3 £144 million of discretionary funding for billing authorities to support households who are in need but are not eligible for the Council Tax Rebate, known as the Discretionary Fund.

6.2 This policy will deal exclusively with paragraph 6.1.3 above, to support households ineligible for the £150 Council Tax Rebate but in need of support with energy bills due to their financial position.

6.3 The requirements of a discretionary scheme are set out in the Government guidance to local authorities published on 23rd February 2022 in paragraphs 36-40.

<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-council-tax-rebate>

6.4 These requirements include the following:

6.4.1 Authorities are to design a scheme to support those outside core scheme

6.4.2 The scheme can include E to H properties particularly CTS claimants, and energy bill payers not liable for Council Tax

6.4.3 Discretionary payments may be paid to top up those who have received core scheme support

6.4.4 Payments will be no more than £150 excluding top-ups.

6.4.5 The funding is to be allocated by 30th November 2022

6.5 There is further guidance in the Council Tax FAQ document issued on 16th March 2022. This includes the requirements that:

6.5.1 Councils can determine how best to use their Discretionary Fund to support those suffering financial hardship as a result of the rising cost of living, in consideration of paragraphs 36 – 40 of the guidance.

- 6.5.2 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 - D (for example, those on means tested benefits), or to offer support exceeding £150 per household under their discretionary scheme.
- 6.5.3 The Government expects that all support from the Discretionary Fund is targeted towards those most likely to be suffering hardship as a result of the rising cost of living.
- 6.5.4 Allocations from the Discretionary Fund should be spent by 30 November 2022. Any remaining funding will be required to be repaid to government.

7. Contribution to Strategic Outcomes

- 7.1 The policy supports our corporate priorities, including:
- Sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness
 - Supporting the vulnerable and elderly to live independent lives
 - Creating a fair and equal borough by tackling the underlying factors of poverty and disadvantage
 - Early help and intervention

8. Statutory Officers Comments

Legal

- 8.1 This decision may be taken by the Lead Member following publication on the Forward Plan for the requisite period of time provided that doing so is consistent with the allocations made by the Leader.
- 8.2 Unless the decision is called-in for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it may be implemented following the expiry of the call-in period.
- 8.3 The proposed “Haringey’s Discretionary Council Tax (Energy) Rebate Scheme April 2022” complies with the requirements of the Government’s Energy Rebate Scheme and the rules set out in the associated Guidance.

Equalities

- 8.4 The council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not
 - Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not

- 8.5 The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.
- 8.6 Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristics.
- 8.7 A full EQIA has been completed for this decision and is attached as an appendix.
- 8.8 The EQIA finds the scheme is designed to support vulnerable people and individuals on low incomes.
- 8.9 The “no application” groups were chosen because they are likely to be suffering financial hardship as a result of the rising cost of living, and they are known to the Council through existing Council Tax and Benefits records. These groups are all experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage: identified by being on CTRS or LIFT, students, disabled, severely mentally impaired, occupying annexes as part of extended households, care leavers or households where everyone is under 18.
- 8.10 The “application” groups were chosen because they meet the requirements of the discretionary scheme but are not known to the Council, so an application is required. These are people who are either those where the energy bills payers are not liable for council tax, or those who would otherwise have been eligible for the core scheme had their household been in existence on the 1st April 2022.
- 8.11 The EQIA details groups who have been identified as needing additional, tailored communications to ensure they are aware of the scheme and supported to make an application, thereby promoting equality of opportunity.

Finance

- 8.12 The Council has received £1,464,750 to fund a discretionary Council Tax (Energy) Rebate Scheme. The policy proposed as part of this paper will contain the costs of this scheme within the available funding. As set out in the Government guidance any unspent funding by 30 November 2022 will be required to be repaid to government and in the event of an overspend, no additional funding will be provided. The reasonable costs of administering this Scheme will be funded by the Government in accordance with its new burdens doctrine.

9. Use of Appendices

Appendix A – Discretionary Energy Rebate April 2022
Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

10. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Not applicable.