

Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme Policy

Executive Portfolio Holder:	Peter Seib, Finance and Legal Services
Strategic Director:	Kirsty Larkins, Service Delivery
Lead Officer:	Catherine Thompson, Benefits Specialist, Benefits & Housing
Contact Details:	Catherine.thompson@southsomerset.gov.uk

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform the Council of the Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme Policy that has been developed in collaboration with Somerset West & Taunton, Sedgemoor and Mendip District Councils.

Public Interest

2. On 3 February 2022, the Government announced measures to help protect millions of households from rising energy costs by way of Main and Discretionary payment schemes.
3. Whilst the Main Government scheme is limited to paying a £150 rebate to all eligible households in Council Tax bands A-D, the Government has also provided South Somerset District Council £298,350 for a Discretionary Fund to support those suffering financial hardship as a result of the rising cost of living.

Recommendation

4. That Full Council agree to endorse the Discretionary Energy Rebate Scheme.

Background

5. Councils can determine how best to use their Discretionary Fund and where it considers the best means of supporting those in financial difficulty including carefully targeted top up payments or to offer support exceeding £150 per household. 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. In designing our discretionary scheme we have focused on five objectives:
 - Delivers on the Government and public's expectation of quickly mobilising and delivering support to hard pressed households.
 - Uses the means-tested Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme as a consistent basis of identifying low income/low capital households, (and consequently those most likely to be impacted the most from rising energy bills).
 - Manages expenditure within the funding provided.
 - Is straightforward to administer.

- Ring-fences some of the funds available for households in difficult circumstances which cannot be captured within a rules- based framework.

The Discretionary Scheme Policy

7. The Discretionary Scheme was developed in conjunction with Somerset West & Taunton, Sedgemoor and Mendip District Councils with the aim of having a Somerset Wide scheme.
8. We designed the scheme with three parts:
 - a. A single one-off payment of £150 will be awarded to any household who resides in a dwelling with a Council Tax band E to H **and** who are in receipt of CTS.
 - b. A single “top up” payment of £27* to all households within Council Tax Band A to H who receive a £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate from either the main or discretionary scheme **and** who are in receipt of CTS
 - c. A **General Energy Support Fund** payment of £150 for any household not entitled to either a payment in (a) or (b) above or a payment under the Mandatory Council Tax Energy Rebate **and**
 - i. Is directly responsible for household energy bills; **and**
 - ii. Is experiencing financial hardship and struggling to meet their energy costs
9. The payment under part 3 will be by referral by a partner agency (in the case of South Somerset – Citizen’s Advice)
10. The effective date for this scheme is 1st April 2022. The Council will determine eligibility based on the position at the end of that day. This is in line with the Mandatory Scheme.
11. At the time of writing this report the three step scheme has been agreed in all Somerset Councils and is supported by South Somerset Citizen’s Advice.

Financial Implications

12. Funding received in the sum of £298,350 for the Discretionary Scheme.
13. £5,000 has been set aside towards the General Energy Support Fund
14. £150 for households in Council Tax bands E-H who also receive Council Tax Support. This equates to 234 households and the total sum of £35,100.00
15. This leaves £258,250 for the top up payment to Council Tax Support recipients in bands A-H. This is 9,357 recipients = £27.60.
16. Rounded down to the nearest pound of £27.00 leaves a balance of £5,611 to be added to the General Energy Support Fund bringing this to £10,611 which will be enough for 70 payments of £150.

17. *This calculation has been used by Somerset West & Taunton and Mendip Councils hence the variance in the top up payment due to differing caseloads. The top up payment in Mendip is £25, £21 in Sedgemoor and £24 for Somerset West & Taunton. Sedgemoor have not specified an amount for the General Fund (part 3).

Legal implications (if any) and details of Statutory Powers

18. None

Council Plan Implications

Priority 2: Healthy and self-reliant communities
Priority 3: Economy and Covid-19 recovery plan

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

None

Equality and Diversity Implications

<i>An Equality Impact Relevance Check Form has been completed in respect of the Proposal?</i>	No
<i>The Impact Relevance Check indicated that a full EIA was required?</i>	N/A
<i>If an EIA was not required please attach the Impact Relevance Check Form as an Appendix to this report and provide a brief summary of its findings in the comments box below.</i>	
<i>If an EIA was required please attach the completed EIA form as an Appendix to this report and provide a brief summary of the result of your Equality Impact Assessment in the comment box below.</i>	
Additional Comments	
A Somerset Wide EIA has been prepared which shows no negative impacts. See document attached.	

Privacy Impact Assessment

Although referrals may be received from our partner agency (in the case of South Somerset – Citizen’s Advice), all personal data will be processed by SSSDC staff.

Background Papers

- South Somerset District Council Discretionary Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme 2022-23
- Equalities Impact Assessment