

Officer decision record

Officer: Rachael Mann, Director (Resources and Property)	Service: Resources and Property
<p>Delegated power being exercised</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On 3 February 2022 the Government announced measures to help protect households from rising energy costs. These measures include a £150 Council Tax energy rebate. 2. The Government has provided funding to billing authorities to give all households in England whose primary residence is valued in Council Tax bands A to D a one-off Council Tax energy rebate payment of £150. West Suffolk Council received £9,533,400 for this "main scheme". This payment operates outside of the Council Tax system, using Council Tax lists to identify eligible households. The operation of this element of the scheme has already been implemented and is the subject of a separate decision. 3. West Suffolk Council has also implemented a discretionary energy rebate scheme, for which the council received £270,300 from Government. Through their discretionary schemes, the Government asked billing authorities 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." 4. West Suffolk Council's discretionary scheme gave support to the following groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recipients of Local Council Tax Support in bands E to H • Properties exempt from Council Tax under class U (severely mentally impaired) in bands E to H • Those liable Council Taxpayers in Band F-H who qualify for the Disabled Band Reduction • Movers from temporary accommodation or a care placement after 1 April 2022 • Residents of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) where the landlord pays Council Tax but the applicant pays for energy • Residents of band E-H properties who do not meet any of the above categories but are experiencing exceptional financial hardship 5. A total of £217,920 has already been paid out from West Suffolk Council's discretionary allocation. £52,380 now remains and needs to be allocated to local residents in need of additional support with energy bills. 	

<p>6. Delegation has been given to the Director for Resources and Property, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Property, to implement in full the council tax energy rebate scheme and discretionary fund.</p> <p>7. This power is being exercised through this decision in order to develop an extension to the discretionary Council Tax energy rebate scheme in West Suffolk through which grants will be paid to residents liable for Council Tax.</p>	
Subject of decision	A decision on the extension of the Council Tax energy rebate "discretionary scheme", in order to ensure the available funds are paid to local residents in need of support.
Decision taken (specify precise details)	<p>To use the following approach to allocate additional payments to households under the "discretionary scheme":</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To build on the principles for eligibility for the scheme, as set out in the Government guidance. 2. For the scheme to be administered by Anglia Revenues Partnership 3. To identify households in need of additional support through data on recipients of Discretionary Housing Payments and the Household Support Fund since 1 April 2022. While not a perfect proxy for financial vulnerability, eligibility for DHP and HSF means that a customer is in a situation of hardship and is also eligible for means tested benefits (Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit) (see other options considered below). 4. The money will be applied to the Council Tax account relating to the property, and a new bill issued. If, following payment of the rebate, the Council Tax account shows a credit balance, a follow-up process will then be initiated whereby the liable person is contacted by post and phone to help them claim a refund (a range of methods will be offered). No time limit has been set by Government for this process.
Reasons for the decision (specify all reasons for taking the decision including, where necessary, reference to council policy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils are required to develop local arrangements for distributing the energy rebate funding from Government. • The funding is critical to supporting householders who are impacted by rising energy prices

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decision was within the delegation given to the Director for Resources and Property • The principles set out above have arisen from work by Council officers, including expert operational advice from Anglia Revenues Partnership, in order to identify the arrangements that will: target the most vulnerable groups and those most in need of financial support for rising energy costs; not result in high administration costs; enable as many residents as possible to easily access the money, even if they don't pay Council Tax by direct debit; and ensure payments can be made quickly.
<p>Alternative options considered (if appropriate)</p>	<p>Other options include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Running an application process - Making top-up payments to all previous recipients of the energy rebate. - Writing to all direct debit payers to ask them to apply for the grant - Putting in place no, or a different time limit for non-direct debit payers to contact the Council with payment details <p>Following consideration, all of these options were dismissed on the grounds of their overlooking of vulnerable groups; negative implications for speed of payment; volume of customers to whom payments can be made quickly; partial coverage of vulnerable groups (as an application would rely on communication); extremely small amounts of assistance; or excessive cost to the public purse in terms of administrative burden.</p> <p>An assessment of the equalities implications of the decision was carried out, and it was determined that using DHP and HSF as proxies for financial hardship did not disproportionately exclude any groups sharing a protected characteristic.</p>
<p>Background/reports/information considered and attached (legal, personnel, financial implications and so on)</p>	<p>Government guidance to local authorities on the Council Tax energy rebate grant:</p> <p>Government guidance on Council Tax energy rebate grant</p>

	<p>West Suffolk Council Tax energy rebate scheme, April 2022 (Appendix A).</p> <p>Decision notice for the West Suffolk Council Tax energy rebate scheme (main scheme). Decision - Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme (westsuffolk.gov.uk)</p> <p>Decision notice for the West Suffolk Council Tax energy rebate scheme (discretionary scheme) Decision - Council Tax Energy Rebate: Discretionary Scheme (westsuffolk.gov.uk)</p>
Parties consulted before the decision has been taken	<p>Resources and Property Portfolio Holder. Growth Portfolio Holder.</p> <p>Cabinet members informed.</p>
Conflicts of interest declared by executive members consulted, including whether the Chief Executive has authorised councillors with conflicts to continue to act	None
Decision	To make available funding to households based on the scheme criteria
<p>Signature and date</p> <p>Rachael Mann</p> <p>18 November 2022</p>	