

# Record of Decision taken by Chief Executive

**Decision title:** Discretionary Energy Rebate Scheme

**Chief Executive making the decision:** Andrew Pritchard

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**Date of Decision:** 5 May 2022

## Details of decision:

The Chief Executive has agreed to a local discretionary energy rebate scheme.

£292,200 funding for this discretionary scheme has been provided by Government to provide financial support to households that are struggling with the rising cost of their household energy bills.

This decision has been taken in accordance with the urgent decisions provision contained in paragraph 5 of the Budget and Policy Framework of the Council's Constitution because it is not practical to convene a quorate Full Council meeting within the required timeframe.

The Chair of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Wren, has been consulted and agrees that this decision is required as a matter of urgency and that it is appropriate for it to be made under the urgency provisions. A report will be made to the next available Full Council meeting to explain the reasons for the urgent decision.

## Background

On 3 February 2022, the Government announced measures to help protect millions of households from rising energy costs.

As part of these measures in early April, SWT were provided with £292,200 with which to develop a discretionary energy rebate scheme.

This discretionary pot is in addition to the £8m which the Government has made available to SWT to operate the mandatory Energy Rebate Scheme. That scheme is focused on Households within Council Tax bands A to D who, with few exceptions, have, or will receive a flat rate £150 one-off payment.

We have a fairly free hand in designing our discretionary scheme and have developed it collaboratively with the other Somerset districts.

## Government guidance

The guidance can be viewed at:  
[Support for energy bills - the council tax rebate 2022-23: billing authority guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/support-for-energy-bills-the-council-tax-rebate-2022-23-billing-authority-guidance)

## Scheme agreed by this decision

Our proposed scheme has 3 parts:

1. 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 Council Tax Support (CTS).
2. A single “top up” payment of £24 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
3. A General Energy Support Fund of £5k, plus the balance after making payment of 1. and 2. above.

This part will be available only to those households not qualifying for an energy rebate payment under 1. or 2 above or the main scheme and is directly responsible for household energy bills; and are experiencing financial hardship and struggling to meet their energy costs

The payment under this part will be £150 and will be made upon referral by a partner agency (such as the CAB for example) rather than by direct application to the Council.

#### **Reasons for proposed decision:**

The decision provides an approach to distributing the discretionary grant funding which:

- 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 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.
- Also provides support for households in difficult circumstances which cannot be captured within a rigid rules-based framework.

#### **Alternative options considered and rejected:**

We considered having an open scheme, whereby any household could apply to us for help.

This was dismissed as it would have been administratively resource-heavy and would have potentially exposed us to thousands of applications which would have taken a considerable time to process and would have greatly impacted on our ability to manage our core workload.

We also considered restricting payments under part 2 of this scheme to working age Council Tax Support recipient households, on the basis that pensioner households qualified for Winter Fuel Allowance payments to help with their energy costs. This would have allowed us to award a higher financial top-up to working age households. However, we felt this could have been, or appeared to have been, potentially discriminatory.

We also considered just awarding the top-up in part 2 of our scheme to only those households that were in receipt of maximum levels of Council Tax Support, as these potentially had the very lowest income and capital levels. We were however, concerned that this would limit the number of people that we could help, and exclude many low income households within the Council Tax Support scheme from an energy rebate top-up.

<b>The below has been completed:</b>	<b>Name(s)</b>	<b>Date</b>
Relevant Portfolio Holder(s) consulted	Cllr Henley	31 March 2022
Chair of Corporate Scrutiny Committee	Cllr Wren	6 April 2022
<b>The following are if appropriate / applicable: Yes/No. If yes the implications should be attached to this decision notice.</b>		
Finance implications	No, as the scheme allows us to keep the cost within the funding provided	
Legal implications	No	
Links to corporate aims	Yes, the effective and quick distribution of grant funding supports the community objectives in our strategy.	
Community Safety implications	No	
Environmental implications	No	
Equalities Impact	An EIA has been undertaken. No disproportionate impacts have been identified to affect any of the protected groups. Both pensioner and working age Council Tax Support recipients are included within the main part of the scheme. A portion of funding has been held back with which to help households outside of the Council Tax system, such as those who live in houses of multiple occupation, who are responsible for energy payments and who tend to have a younger age profile as well as households in higher bands where they are 'cash poor', for example.	
Safeguarding Implications	There are NO safeguarding implications	
Risk management	The scheme contains appropriate measures to help prevent fraud	
Partnership implications	The general energy support fund that we will make available can be accessed on referral from partner agencies.	

**Any conflicts of interest declared by Leader or Portfolio Holders consulted on the proposed decision. If Yes provide confirmation from Chief Executive to grant dispensation for the Leader's / Portfolio Holder's views to be considered.**

### **Financial Implication Summary**

The funding for this scheme (£292k) is provided by Central Government. Our scheme has been designed in a way that prevents us from spending more than the allocated funding.

Central Government have provided funding under the New Burdens funding arrangements toward the administration costs.

### **Decision Maker**

**I am aware of the details of this decision(s), considered the reasons, options, representations and consultation responses and give my approval / agreement to its implementation.**

**Signed:**



**Name:** Andrew Pritchard

**Date:** 5 May 2022

Note – This decision record is for decisions taken by Chief Executive/Director. The decision(s) can be implemented in accordance with the approved delegations.

**Note:** A copy should also be sent to the Governance Team – [governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)