



EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Resources
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Finance & Customer Services
DATE:	13th March 2019

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Resources
WARD/S AFFECTED:	All

SUBJECT: Revenues and Benefits policy changes 2019/20

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Business Rates Local Discretionary Scheme and Discretionary Housing Payment scheme policies have been reviewed in preparation for the 2019/20 financial year. Appropriate adjustments have been made to accommodate the reduction in budget for the Business Rates Local Discretionary Scheme and the administrative changes for the Discretionary Housing Payment.

Business Rates Local Discretionary Scheme

In the March 2017 budget a number of separate measures were announced to assist businesses that had faced increases in Business Rate bills following the revaluation of all business properties in the country; one of those measures introduced by the budget was the Local Discretionary scheme. The government information and guidance is contained in the document 'Business rates information letter (2/2017)'.

In line with the reduced government funding, this scheme has been reviewed to see how the 2019/20 award of £38,000 can be allocated to those businesses facing increased bills. As such, this report seeks the approval to award a discretionary discount in 2019/20 equivalent to 45% of the increase faced by those businesses that qualify for the relief. The 45% relates to the increase from 2018/19 to 2019/20.

Discretionary Housing Payment scheme

Department of Work and Pensions guidance on the administration of the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme has previously made reference to the fact that councils should avoid awarding discretionary payments to applicants that had been sanctioned. Analysis of cases over the last 12 months has shown that increasing numbers of customers have been detrimentally affected by this exclusion, particularly if they are claiming Universal Credit.

We are amending the policy to clarify the position for applicants who have had the imposition of a sanction by the Department of Work and Pensions. In these cases, it is only where the rent arrears are as a direct result of the sanction that will be disentitled to a payment/award. It is hoped that this change will ensure that more residents will be entitled to make eligible claims.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Member approves the amendments to the policies for 2019/20.

2. BACKGROUND

Each financial year all Revenues and Benefits policies are reviewed and amended following any changes to council priorities, legislative or administrative requirements.

This report proposes policy changes in respect of the Business Rates Local Discretionary Scheme due to the reduced funding by central government, and to the Discretionary Housing Payments scheme as a consequence of the roll out of Universal Credit.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

4.1 Discretionary Business Rates relief

As detailed in the Executive Board report from 2018, the amount of relief to be awarded in future financial years will be determined on a year by year basis based on the funding available; for 2019/20 this is £35,000. It is proposed that 45% relief is awarded for those qualifying properties.

The Government has provided one further year of funding (2020/21), however the total amount of relief to be distributed across businesses in the borough for that year is only £5,000. A final decision on its allocation will be made in January/February 2020.

The full policy is attached as Appendix A.

4.2 Discretionary Housing Payments

The new policy document is attached as Appendix B.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The proposed changes to the Discretionary Rate Relief scheme and Discretionary Housing Payment policies are contained in the Appendices.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Discretionary Business Rate Relief will be fully funded by the Government based on the criteria set out in the guidance. Whilst the Local Discretionary Relief is capped based on a Government calculation, it is not proposed that the council spend in excess of the allocation.

The amount of funding for the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme is determined by the Department of Work and Pensions each financial year. We are still awaiting the final award figure for 2019/20.

Whilst a council can top up the fund if it wishes, it is not proposed that this council does so in 2019/20. Therefore once the allocation for the financial year is exhausted, future applications will be refused.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The schemes will be administered through the Council's discretionary relief powers under Section 47 of the Local Finance Government Act 1988 (as amended).

The policies provide transparency and show the criteria that the Council will apply when making their decisions as to whether or not to grant relief or make payments. The Council must, however, consider applications which may fall outside the policies in appropriate cases and should not be fettered in its decision making by the terms of the policy. The council is, however, bound by the legislation which also provides for limits set by the Government as to when relief grants or payments can be made.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Any additional work required from the changes listed in the policy documents will be undertaken within existing resources.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

None.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded and published if applicable.

VERSION:	4
-----------------	----------

CONTACT OFFICER:	Andy Ormerod
-------------------------	---------------------

DATE:	20th February 2019
--------------	---------------------------

BACKGROUND PAPER:	
--------------------------	--