

Report to Cabinet

17 March 2021

Subject:	Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework 2021/22
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Wasim Ali - Cabinet Member for Resources and Core Services
Director:	Acting Section 151 officer – Rebecca Maher
Key Decision:	Yes To approve Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework 2021/22
Contact Officer:	Sue Knowles – Head of ICT and Revenues and Benefits sue_knowles@sandwell.gov.uk Ian Dunn – Service manager Revenues and Benefits ian_dunn@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Revenues and Benefits policy framework for 2021-2022 be approved.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Revenues and Benefits Service conducts an annual review of their policies. The review has now been completed and this report seeks approval of the Revenues and Benefits policy framework for 2021-22.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?



The policies cover a wide range of functions carried out by the Revenues and Benefits Service. These policies aim to support our most vulnerable residents and local businesses.

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The current Revenues and Benefits Policy Framework was approved by Cabinet on 19th February 2020 and includes:

- Council Tax Discretionary Relief Policy
- Non-Domestic Rates Hardship Relief Policy
- Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy
- Council Tax Award of Discount Policy
- Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Policy
- Corporate Debt Recovery Policy
- Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
- Local Welfare Provision Policy

4.2 The Non-Domestic Rates Hardship Relief Policy has been amended for 2021/22 so that decision making takes into consideration:

- how many employees of the business making an application live in Sandwell
- whether there is government support available for applications received during times of a national crisis/pandemic – to ensure that businesses utilise government support in the first instance

4.3 The Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy has been amended for 2021/22 to ensure that no relief will be awarded for applications received during times of a national crisis/pandemic. This will ensure that businesses utilise government support in the first instance. This policy has also been amended to remove the schemes covering Public House Relief and Discretionary Relief following the 2017 revaluation as these ended on 31 March 2021.



- 4.4 The Council Tax Award of Discount Policy has not been amended but it should be noted that in accordance with the policy from 01 April 2021 onwards, a 300% 'premium' will be applied for homes empty for over 10 years, generating a Council Tax charge of 400%.
- 4.5 The Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Policy for 2021/22 has been amended to reduce the invoice value which triggers payment by one instalment.
- 4.6 A new policy Flood Relief Policy has been added to the framework for 2021/22. The government will determine when this support can be made available. Weather incidents with localised impact will not usually trigger a recovery support package. Funding might typically be deployed when facing severe weather which impacts multiple numbers of local authorities, such as those where nationwide storms take place. This policy is provided to ensure the Council is prepared should the government scheme be activated and will allow suitable preparations to be made in respect of planning for flood events.
- 4.7 There have been no changes to any of the other policies except for some cosmetic changes.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 There are no alternative options as the council is required to set out its application of certain areas of the legislation which allow local application of rules. The suite of policies included in the framework achieves this.

6 Implications

Resources:	<p>There is a direct cost to the local Council Tax payers for any Discretionary Rate Relief granted and the Council must not refuse any applications, which comply with its Discretionary Rate Relief Policy, on the grounds of unavailable resources.</p> <p>There is a direct cost to the local Council Tax payers of any relief granted under the provisions of Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.</p>
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	<p>The cost of any relief granted under Section 13A (Council Tax Discretionary Relief Policy) is borne by the local Council Tax payers.</p> <p>The cost of Discretionary Housing Payments in excess of the Government Contribution is borne by the local Council Tax payers.</p> <p>The Council Tax Award of Discounts Policy generates additional income for the council through Council Tax collection.</p>
Legal and Governance:	<p>The policy on Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 Hardship Relief complies with appropriate legislation relating to the Council's powers with regard to awarding relief.</p> <p>The Discretionary Rate Relief Policy complies with appropriate legislation relating to the Council's powers with regard to awarding Discretionary Rate Relief to businesses.</p> <p>The policy on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), complies with appropriate legislation.</p> <p>The Section 13A Council Tax Discretionary Relief Policy complies with appropriate legislation. The Council cannot refuse any applications for relief, which comply with its policy, on the grounds of unavailable resources.</p> <p>The Council Tax Award of Discount Policy complies with appropriate legislation which allow the Council to set locally prescribed levels of discounts for empty domestic properties.</p>
Risk:	Risk assessments, where required, have been undertaken.
Equality:	<p>Equality impact assessments (EIA) have previously been completed on all of the policies.</p> <p>We have consulted with the Council's Equality Officer who has advised that the new flood relief policy does not require an EIA as this is geographically based and the changes to the other policies do not require a further EIA to be undertaken.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	A number of the policies provide additional financial support to some of our most vulnerable residents.



Social Value	Sandwell's Revenues and Benefits policy framework is operating well and providing crucial support to vulnerable, low income households.
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7. Appendices

- Appendix 1 Council Tax Discretionary Relief Policy
- Appendix 2 Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
- Appendix 3 Non Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy
- Appendix 4 Local Welfare Provision Policy
- Appendix 5 Non Domestic Rate Hardship Relief Policy
- Appendix 6 Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Policy
- Appendix 7 Council Tax Award of Discount Policy
- Appendix 8 Corporate Debt Recovery Policy
- Appendix 9 Flood Relief Policy

8. Background Papers

None

