



Council Tax and Business Rates

Discretionary Discount Policy 2020/21

Contents

Document Control:	5
Record of Amendments:	5
Approved By:	6
1. Introduction	7
Aims of the Discretionary Discount Policy	7
2. Policy Objectives and Action Plan	8
Objective 1: To ensure that assistance is available and accessible to members of the community most in need.....	8
Objective 2: To ensure discretionary discounts are only considered when no other means of assistance is available.	8
Objective 3: To monitor and evaluate the administration of the policy to ensure that the service reflects the needs of the community.....	9
3. Discretionary Discount - Customers in receipt of local Council Tax Reduction (Hardship Fund).....	10
Responsible officer	10
Decision making process	10
Notification of decision	10
Review of decision/re-determination requests	11
Notification of review/re-determination decision	11
4. Discretionary Discounts – Customers not in receipt of local Council Tax Reduction	12
Responsible officer	12
Decision making process	12
Notification of decision	12
Review of decision/re-determination requests	12
Notification of review/re-determination decision	13
5. Discretionary Discounts – Rate Relief Policy relating to organisations established for Charitable, Sporting and Community Purposes.....	14
Responsible officer	15
Decision making process	15
Notification of decision	15
Review of decision/re-determination requests	15
Notification of review/re-determination decision	15
6. Other Discretionary Discounts	17
Responsible officer	17
Decision making process	17
Notification of decision	17
Review of decision/re-determination requests	17
Notification of review/re-determination decision	18
7. Hardship Relief	19

Responsible officer	19
Decision making process	19
Notification of decision	20
Review of decision/re-determination requests	20
Notification of review/re-determination decision	20
8. Rural Rate Relief	21
Responsible officer	21
Decision making process	21
Notification of decision	21
Review of decision/re-determination requests	21
Notification of review/re-determination decision	21
9. Temporary Part Occupation Relief	22
Responsible officer	22
Decision making process	22
Notification of decision	22
Review of decision/re-determination requests	22
Notification of review/re-determination decision	23
10. Retail Discount (includes 2020/21 Expanded Retail Discount)	24
Which properties will benefit from relief?.....	24
Decision making process	26
Responsible officer	27
Notification of decision	27
Review of decision/re-determination requests	27
Notification of review/re-determination decision	27
11. Nursery Discount	28
Responsible officer	28
Decision making process	28
Notification of decision	28
Review of decision/re-determination requests	28
Notification of review/re-determination decision	28
12. Local Newspaper Relief.....	29
Responsible officer	29
Decision making process	29
Notification of decision	29
Review of decision/re-determination requests	29
Notification of review/re-determination decision	29
13. Enterprise Zone Relief.....	31
14. Revaluation Relief.....	32

Legislative Background	32
The Council's approach to granting Government led Discretionary Relief schemes	32
Effect on the Council's Finances.....	32
Discretionary Relief – EU State Aid requirements	33
Administration of Discretionary Relief – General approach	34
Consultation	34
Revaluation Relief.....	35
Decisions by the Council under this scheme	36
Decision making process:.....	36
15. Fraud	37


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01/10/2014	1.2	Andrew Turpin	Rural Rate Relief pages 27-28
19/12/2014	1.3	Andrew Turpin	Retail Relief page 19
02/11/2015	1.4	Graeme Ruse	Temporary Part Occupation Relief
21/10/2016	1.5	Graeme Ruse	Removal of New Build and Re-Occupation Relief
10/10/2017	1.6	Louise Jones	No changes – review only
05/03/2018	1.7	Andrew Turpin	Inclusion of Revaluation Relief and Public House Relief
03/09/2018	1.8	Andrew Turpin / Louise Jones	Review of policy
14/12/2018	1.9	David Holmes	Inserted Retail Discount, Local Newspaper Relief, Hardship Relief and noted EZ Relief. Removed the Public House relief.
03/03/2020	1.10	Graeme Ruse	Amended Retail Discount and reinstated Public House relief.
08/09/2020	1.11	David Holmes	Changes to policy following a re-structure and an update to introduce COVID-19 measures, including the Expanded Retail Discount and the OFSTED Registered Nursery Discount scheme.

Approved By:

Name	Title	Signature	Date
Louise Jones	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services		8 September 2020

1. Introduction

Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) and sections 47, 48 and 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (as amended) empowers a billing authority to reduce the amount of tax payable.

Fylde has adopted a local Council Tax Reduction Scheme since 1st April 2013, which replaced Council Tax Benefit. However it is likely that other circumstances will arise where the Council could consider a further discretionary reduction in exceptional circumstances. In addition local Businesses who are experiencing severe financial difficulties may request assistance in meeting the burden of local taxation.

Funding for such reductions must be provided by the Council. This policy sets out how the Council will use these powers and the criteria that must be satisfied.

The Council is committed to publishing the policy to ensure that the local taxpayers are aware of the policy and are able to quickly and easily apply for assistance.

Aims of the Discretionary Discount Policy

- Provide a mechanism for the Council to assist members of the community who are unable to meet the financial burden of local taxation
- Helping residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction who are unable to increase their income
- Alleviating poverty
- Helping those who are trying to help themselves
- Supporting people who are starting work
- Supporting the most vulnerable in the local community
- Helping customers through difficult personal events
- Assisting customers in accordance with the Council's Child Poverty Strategy
- To ensure that no claimant or charge payer suffers any undue short-term disadvantage resulting from circumstances beyond their control

2. Policy Objectives and Action Plan

Objective 1: To ensure that assistance is available and accessible to members of the community most in need

- Ensure staff are aware of the policy and qualifying criteria
- Regular refresher training for assessment staff to promote proactive identification of potential cases
- Provide effective overview training on the policy and qualifying criteria on request to promote take-up and awareness in appropriate circumstances.
- Promote access to the scheme through continued development of the Fylde Council website to ensure that up to date information is provided and that relevant forms and information can be downloaded.
- Ensure advice providers are aware of the policy and qualifying criteria.
- Promoting awareness to Members
- Promote the scheme to target groups, which may include:
 - Social and Private Sector Housing Tenants with significant arrears who may apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP).
 - Council Tax payers who have been issued with a summons.
 - People requiring assistance from the Emergency Planning response team.
 - Customers who are seeking Council assistance with debts
- Providing a facility to visit customers to assist them in making an application and provide supporting documents.
- Working closely with existing and new service partners and stakeholders to promote awareness of the policy.

Objective 2: To ensure discretionary discounts are only considered when no other means of assistance is available.

- Ensure assessments of applications for local Council Tax Reduction incorporate a benefits maximization check.
- Ensure the applicant does not have income or capital which should be used to meet the liability.
- Signpost customers who do not meet the criteria to appropriate alternative advice services
- Conduct a regular review of the policy to ensure it is fit for purpose.
- Ensure a robust review procedure is in place to ensure decisions are independent, fair and consistent.
- Ensure publicity is available to encourage customers to claim other benefits they are entitled to and where to access debt advice and money management tools.
- Ensure other sums owed to the Council (e.g. sundry debts, Housing Benefit overpayments) are reviewed and reduced repayments agreed where appropriate
- Ensure a Discretionary Housing Payment for Housing Benefit is awarded if appropriate
- Ensure recovery action is delayed where appropriate
- Awards will be tailored to match need. The period and amount of an award will be determined based upon the circumstances in each case.
- Awards will only be made for a period relating to the financial year in which the application is made.

- Awards may be reviewed at any time and may be revised, reduced or withdrawn if it is found that the circumstances of the applicant have changed and the award is no longer appropriate.

Objective 3: To monitor and evaluate the administration of the policy to ensure that the service reflects the needs of the community

- Monitor of fund spending by monthly recording and reporting of expenditure provided to Senior Management.
- Conduct a regular review of income and expenditure forms used.
- Conduct a regular review of the policy.
- Review the outcome of requests for reconsideration to improve guidance and methodology.
- Respond to feedback on processes and procedures from partners and stakeholders.

3. Discretionary Discount - Customers in receipt of local Council Tax Reduction (Hardship Fund)

Fylde Borough Council adopted a local Council Tax Reduction Scheme which is effective from 1st April 2013. During the development of the scheme the Councils' Equality Analysis identified that certain groups affected by the reduction in support would be unlikely to be able to increase their income.

For an award of this type of discretionary discount to be considered, the applicant must be:

- In receipt of Council Tax Reduction; and
- Have a shortfall between the level of Council Tax Reduction and their council tax liability; and
- In the opinion of the Council, be in need of further assistance with Council Tax in accordance with the qualifying criteria.

Requests for further reductions in Council Tax liability will be required in writing from the customer, their advocate / appointee or a recognised third party acting on their behalf.

Each case will be considered on 'its merits' however all of the following criteria should be met:

- There must be evidence of hardship or personal circumstance that justifies a further reduction in Council Tax liability.
- The Council must be satisfied that the customer has taken reasonable steps to resolve their situation prior to application.
- The customer does not have access to other assets that could be realised and used to pay the Council Tax.
- All other eligible discounts/reliefs have been awarded to the customer.

Responsible officer

The responsibility for making discretionary discount decisions will rest with the Chief Financial Officer, who will discharge this responsibility by the following process:

Decision making process

Stage 1: The initial request will be dealt with by a decision maker (Senior Benefits Assistant, Senior Benefit Specialist or Team Manager) who will consider the application against the criteria set out in this policy, based upon the information provided by the applicant and known to the Council.

Stage 2: A Senior Benefits Manager will authorise the decision.

Notification of decision

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Review of decision/re-determination requests

The Council will accept an applicant's written request for a redetermination of its decision. The process will be as follows:

Stage 1: The original decision and any additional information provided will be reviewed by a different decision maker who will recommend either confirming or amending the original decision.

Stage 2: The Head of Benefits and Customer Services will consider the application for review and the recommendation and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of review/re-determination decision

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-determination.

A discretionary reduction made under section 13A (1)(a) or (c) of the Local Government Finance Act (LGFA) 1992 can be the subject of an appeal to the Valuation Tribunal under section 16 of the LGFA 1992.

4. Discretionary Discounts – Customers not in receipt of local Council Tax Reduction

Requests for reductions in Council tax liability will be required in writing from the customer, their advocate / appointee or a recognised third party acting on their behalf

Each case will be considered on 'its merits' however all of the following criteria should be met:

- There must be evidence of hardship or personal circumstance that justifies a reduction in Council Tax Liability.
- The Council must be satisfied that the customer has taken reasonable steps to resolve their situation prior to application.
- The customer does not have access to other assets that could be realised and used to pay the Council Tax.
- The customer is not entitled to an award under the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- All other eligible discounts/reliefs have been awarded to the customer.

Responsible officer

The responsibility for making discretionary decisions will rest with the Chief Financial Officer, who will discharge this responsibility by the following process:

A Revenues Manager will liaise with the applicant in each case to request sufficient information in order that a decision can be made

Decision making process

Stage 1: The initial request will be dealt with by a Revenues Manager who will consider the application against the criteria set out in this policy, based upon the information provided by the applicant and known to the Council.

Stage 2: A different Revenues Manager will authorise the decision.

Notification of decision

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Review of decision/re-determination requests

Council will accept an applicant's written request for a redetermination of its decision.

Stage 1: The original decision and any additional information provided will be reviewed by a different decision maker who will recommend either confirming or amending the original decision.

Stage 2: Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services, will consider the application for review and the recommendation and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of review/re-determination decision

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-determination.

A discretionary reduction made under section 13A (1) (a) or (c) of the Local Government Finance Act (LGFA) 1992 can be the subject of an appeal to the Valuation Tribunal under section 16 of the LGFA 1992.

5. Discretionary Discounts – Rate Relief Policy relating to organisations established for Charitable, Sporting and Community Purposes.

Each case will be considered on its merits however all of the following criteria should be met:

- Requests for reductions in Business Rates will be required in writing from the ratepayer or a recognised third party acting on their behalf.
- It must be in the interest of Council Tax payers for the local authority to grant a reduction.
- All other eligible discounts/reliefs have been awarded to the ratepayer.

In addition to the above, the Council has determined the following guidelines for the granting of discretionary rate relief.

- a) The organisation is small in stature in that it occupies a hereditament with a Rateable Value of less than £13,000 in the National Non-Domestic Rating List effective from 1 April 2017. *(the premise is that larger organizations are generally well established and can, to a certain extent, exist without any external aid at all), and*
- b) The organisation is not part of a charging or precepting authority, **and**
- c) The organisation has been specifically set up for the benefit of the young, the aged, the disabled or for ethnic minorities. *(sports organisations that allow or promote junior or senior citizen membership would not necessarily fall under the jurisdiction of this rule. The organisation must have been created or is in being for the sole or main purpose of aiding any one of these sections of the community), or*
- d) The property is for the general use of the local community without any membership and/or subscription requirements and has no specific use except for the general benefit of the community, **or**
- e) The property is used for the housing of vehicles used only for offshore emergency purpose, **or**
- f) The aims of the organisation are to educate volunteers in emergency training for the benefit of the local community.

Discretionary Relief of the remaining balance (taking into account 80% mandatory relief granted to all charitable bodies) may be granted to any non-profit making organisations that meet the above criteria.

The above is intended only as a guide when considering applications for discretionary rate relief. All applications will be considered on their merits and it might be found that it is only right and proper to approve applications which do not conform exactly to the above.

- g) The Council will continue with its current policy regarding granting discretionary rate relief, each application be considered on its merits and favourable consideration be given to applications from qualifying organisations in instances when the non-granting of relief could seriously jeopardize the financial viability of the organisation.
- h) One factor to be taken into account in determining discretionary rate relief shall be the training or coaching provided by sports clubs for the youth of the Borough.

In addition, organisations with charitable status and not being Limited Companies, and set up for recreational purposes:

- Whose membership is open to all sections of the community.
- Do not restrict membership on the grounds of ability or the availability of their facilities,
- Whose membership levels are not set at such a rate to preclude membership by all sections

- of the community,
- Who provide outside sporting activities,
- Who actively encourage participation by young people,
- Make their facilities available to people other than members e.g. to schools or casual public sessions,
- Whose main aim is sporting rather than social,
- Whose members are mainly from Fylde Borough.

May be given discretionary relief of 100% based on the Rateable Value of the outside playing area and changing areas only.

- Retail premises operated by a registered charity which have been granted mandatory rate relief may, in exceptional circumstances, receive a further discretionary award. The Council will consider the merits of each case but such an award is likely to be the exception rather than the rule.

Responsible officer

The responsibility for making discretionary decisions will rest with the Chief Financial Officer, who will discharge this responsibility by the following process:

Decision making process

Stage 1: The decision making process will involve the Principal Revenues Manager making a recommendation to the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services, considering the application against the criteria set out in this policy, based upon the information provided by the applicant and known to the Council.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application and the recommendation of the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of decision

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Review of decision/re-determination requests

The Council will accept an applicant's written request for a redetermination of its decision. The process will be as follows:

Stage 1: The original decision and any additional information provided will be reviewed and a recommendation made to either confirm or amend the original decision.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application for review and the recommendation and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of review/re-determination decision

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-

determination.

Following the redetermination of a request for discretionary discount, there is no further right of appeal.

6. Other Discretionary Discounts

The Council may award Business Rates relief on any cases where it has been asked to do so, and where the award would be clearly in the interest of the local Council Tax payer.

The relief is available pursuant to s.47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, as amended by s.69 of the Localism Act 2011, and decisions are to be made on a case by case basis and dependent on the individual facts. This is often referred to as 'Localism Relief'.

Under the arrangements by which Business Rates income is shared by a number of public sector bodies, any award of a discount or relief will be funded in part by: Fylde Council, Central Government, Lancashire County Council and the Lancashire Fire Authority.

Each case will be considered on its merits however all of the following criteria should be met:

- it must be in the interest of the Council and community for the local authority to grant a reduction, **and**
- all other eligible discounts/reliefs have been awarded to the ratepayer.

Responsible officer

The responsibility for making discretionary decisions will rest with the Chief Financial Officer, who will discharge this responsibility by the following process:

Decision making process

Stage 1: The decision making process will involve the Principal Revenues Manager making a recommendation to the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services, considering the application against the criteria set out in this policy, based upon the information provided by the applicant and known to the Council.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application and the recommendation of the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of decision

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Review of decision/re-determination requests

The Council will accept an applicant's written request for a redetermination of its decision. The process will be as follows:

Stage 1: The original decision and any additional information provided will be reviewed and a recommendation made to confirm or amend the original decision.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application for review and the recommendation and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of review/re-determination decision

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-determination.

Following the redetermination of a request for discretionary discount, there is no further right of appeal.

7. Hardship Relief

In exceptional circumstances the Council may award relief where it is satisfied payment of the bill will cause a business severe financial hardship.

This will only be considered where it is evident that doing so would be in the interests of the wider community. This can be because failure to grant the relief would result in the loss of a unique and regularly required service, and/or because the failure to grant relief would directly result in a significant loss of jobs in the local community.

Hardship Relief is available pursuant to s.49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The relief is designed for a local authority to provide discretionary assistance in exceptional and/or unexpected circumstance, but not to prop up a fundamentally failing business. Decisions are to be made on a case by case basis and dependent on the individual facts.

The Council may award hardship relief as a percentage of the total amount due, or as a single monetary value.

There are no time limits to the award of hardship relief, but the relief is considered to be a 'one-time' award. There is no requirement for the Council to award this relief periodically.

In order to consider an award the applicants shall provide the following:

- Details of the unique and regularly required service provided.
- Details of how much is outstanding.
- Details of their current financial circumstance, including details of any assets or security held, and including details of debts owed to other creditors.
- Copies of their latest audited accounts, or if the business has not yet submitted accounts then an up to date income statement and/or balance sheet will be required.
- Details of the company, such as the product sold, the customer base, numbers in the workforce.
- The reason why they cannot pay their bill.
- How much relief they require.
- An assumption of what would happen if no assistance was provided by the Council.

Responsible officer

The responsibility for making discretionary decisions will rest with the Chief Financial Officer, who will discharge this responsibility by the following process:

Decision making process

Stage 1: The decision making process will involve the Principal Revenues Manager making a recommendation to the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services, considering the application against the criteria set out in this policy, based upon the information provided by the applicant and known to the Council.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application and the recommendation of the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of decision

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Review of decision/re-determination requests

The Council will accept an applicant's written request for a redetermination of its decision. The process will be as follows:

Stage 1: The original decision and any additional information provided will be reviewed and a recommendation made to either confirm or amend the original decision.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application for review and the recommendation and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of review/re-determination decision

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-determination.

Following the redetermination of a request for discretionary discount, there is no further right of appeal.

8. Rural Rate Relief

Relief of up to 100% can be granted to the occupier of a general store, post office, pub or petrol station if it is the only such business in the authority's rural settlement list. Each case will be dealt with on its own set of circumstances and ratable value limits will apply.

Responsible officer

The responsibility for making discretionary decisions will rest with the Chief Financial Officer, who will discharge this responsibility by the following process:

Decision making process

Stage 1: The decision making process will involve the Principal Revenues Manager making a recommendation to the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services, considering the application against the criteria set out in this policy, based upon the information provided by the applicant and known to the Council.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application and the recommendation of the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of decision

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Review of decision/re-determination requests

The Council will accept an applicant's written request for a redetermination of its decision. The process will be as follows:

Stage 1: The original decision and any additional information provided will be reviewed and a recommendation made to either confirm or amend the original decision.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application for review and the recommendation and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of review/re-determination decision

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-determination.

Following the redetermination of a request for discretionary discount, there is no further right of appeal.

9. Temporary Part Occupation Relief

The Ratepayer is liable for the full non-domestic rate whether a property is wholly occupied or only partly occupied. Under s44A of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, where a property is partly occupied for a short time the Council has discretion to request that the Valuation Office apportion the rateable value of a property between the occupied and unoccupied parts and apply an unoccupied property exemption on the unoccupied part; thereby reducing the amount payable.

Applications must be made in writing and supported by:

- a completed application form, **and**
- detailed scaled plans which outline the whole property and indicate the partly occupied/unoccupied parts, **and**
- details of the planned period of time for the part occupation, **and**
- details of future intentions, **and**
- details of the cause for the part occupation.

A site visit will be required. Where necessary the ratepayer may be required to provide additional information to support their application.

Responsible officer

The responsibility for making discretionary relief decisions will rest with the Chief Financial Officer, who will discharge this responsibility by the following process:

Decision making process

Stage 1: The decision making process will involve the Principal Revenues Manager making a recommendation to the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services, considering the application against the criteria set out in this policy, based upon the information provided by the applicant and known to the Council.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application and the recommendation of the Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of decision

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Review of decision/re-determination requests

The Council will accept an applicant's written request for a redetermination of its decision. The process will be as follows:

Stage 1: The original decision and any additional information provided will be reviewed and a recommendation made to either confirm or amend the original decision.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application for review and the recommendation and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of review/re-determination decision

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-determination.

Following the redetermination of a request for discretionary discount, there is no further right of appeal.

10. Retail Discount (includes 2020/21 Expanded Retail Discount)

The Government announced in the 2018 Budget that it will provide a Business Rates Retail Discount scheme for occupied retail properties in each of the years 2019-20 and 2020-21. The value of discount was one third of the bill in 2019/20 and, at the time of sending the annual bills for 2020/21 this was half of the bill. However, during the COVID19 pandemic the scheme changed significantly.

For 2020/21 and following the COVID19 pandemic the retail discount was re-labelled as the 'expanded retail discount' and the amount of relief increased to a full award, irrespective of rateable value and the normal rules of state aid were to be disregarded. The new expanded scheme included the leisure and hospitality sectors.

The discount is to be applied once mandatory reliefs and other discretionary reliefs have been applied.

Which properties will benefit from relief?

Properties that will benefit from the relief will be occupied hereditaments that are wholly or mainly being used:

- as shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas and live music venues,
- for assembly and leisure; or
- as hotels, guest & boarding premises and self-catering accommodation.

We consider shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas and live music venues to mean:

Hereditaments that are being used for the sale of goods to visiting members of the public:

- Shops (such as: florists, bakers, butchers, grocers, greengrocers, jewellers, stationers, off licences, chemists, newsagents, hardware stores, supermarkets, etc)
- Charity shops
- Opticians
- Post offices
- Furnishing shops/ display rooms (such as: carpet shops, double glazing, garage doors)
- Car/caravan show rooms
- Second-hand car lots
- Markets
- Petrol stations
- Garden centres
- Art galleries (where art is for sale/hire)

Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of the following services to visiting members of the public:

- Hair and beauty services (such as: hairdressers, nail bars, beauty salons, tanning shops, etc)
- Shoe repairs/key cutting
- Travel agents
- Ticket offices e.g. for theatre
- Dry cleaners

- Launderettes
- PC/TV/domestic appliance repair
- Funeral directors
- Photo processing
- Tool hire
- Car hire
- Employment agencies
- Estate agents and letting agents
- Betting shops

Hereditaments that are being used for the sale of food and/or drink to visiting members of the public:

- Restaurants
- Takeaways
- Sandwich shops
- Coffee shops
- Pubs
- Bars

Hereditaments which are being used as cinemas

Hereditaments that are being used as live music venues:

- Live music venues are hereditaments wholly or mainly used for the performance of live music for the purpose of entertaining an audience. Hereditaments cannot be considered a live music venue for the purpose of business rates relief where a venue is wholly or mainly used as a nightclub or a theatre, for the purposes of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended).
- Hereditaments can be a live music venue even if used for other activities, but only if those other activities (i) are merely ancillary or incidental to the performance of live music (e.g. the sale/supply of alcohol to audience members) or (ii) do not affect the fact that the primary activity for the premises is the performance of live music (e.g. because those other activities are insufficiently regular or frequent, such as a polling station or a fortnightly community event).
- There may be circumstances in which it is difficult to tell whether an activity is a performance of live music or, instead, the playing of recorded music. Although we would expect this would be clear in most circumstances, guidance on this may be found in Chapter 16 of the statutory guidance issued in April 2018 under section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003.

We consider assembly and leisure to mean:

Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of sport, leisure and facilities to visiting members of the public (including for the viewing of such activities).

- Sports grounds and clubs
- Museums and art galleries
- Nightclubs
- Sport and leisure facilities
- Stately homes and historic houses
- Theatres
- Tourist attractions

- Gyms
- Wellness centres, spas, massage parlours
- Casinos, gambling clubs and bingo halls

Hereditaments that are being used for the assembly of visiting members of the public.

- Public halls
- Clubhouses, clubs and institutions

We consider hotels, guest and boarding premises and self-catering accommodation to mean:

Hereditaments where the non-domestic part is being used for the provision of living accommodation as a business:

- Hotels, Guest and Boarding Houses
- Holiday homes
- Caravan parks and sites

This is a test on use rather than occupation, therefore hereditaments which are occupied but not wholly or mainly used for the qualifying purpose will not qualify for the relief.

What does not constitute retail, leisure or hospitality usage

The list below sets out the types of uses which we **do not** consider as being eligible for the purpose of this discount, and will therefore not qualify under this scheme.

Hereditaments that are being used for the provision of the following services to visiting members of the public

- Financial services (e.g. banks, building societies, cash points, bureaux de change, short-term loan providers)
- Medical services (e.g. vets, dentists, doctors, osteopaths, chiropractors)
- Professional services (e.g. solicitors, accountants, insurance agents/financial advisers)
- Post office sorting offices

Hereditaments which are not reasonably accessible to visiting members of the public

- Premises where membership is required to gain entry (e.g. affiliated social clubs)
- Premises where payment is required to gain entry

The total amount of government-funded relief available for each property under this scheme for 2019-20 is one third of the bill, and for 2020-21 is the full bill, after mandatory reliefs and other discretionary reliefs funded by section 31 grants have been applied. There is no relief available under this scheme for unoccupied properties.

A new hereditament created as a result of a split or merger during the financial year, or where there is a change of use, should be considered afresh for the relief on that day.

Responsible officer

Decision making process

The expanded retail discount was introduced as a financial package to assist those ratepayers who were expected to be adversely affected by the COVID19 pandemic, meaning awards were to be swift

and without the normal requirement to complete forms and submit supplementary information in support of their application. With this in mind it was decided that:

- Where the property is occupied and the ratepayer clearly meets at least one of the above criteria for retail, hospitality and leisure sectors then the relief will be paid automatically.
- Where the ratepayer does not clearly meet at least one of the above criteria for retail, hospitality and leisure, or where the property is believed to be unoccupied, then the details will be passed to a Revenues Manager to determine whether the ratepayer is eligible for this relief.

Responsible officer

The responsibility for making discretionary relief decisions will rest with the Chief Financial Officer, who will discharge this responsibility by the following process:

Notification of decision

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Review of decision/re-determination requests

The Council will accept an applicant's written request for a redetermination of its decision. The process will be as follows:

Stage 1: The original decision and any additional information provided will be reviewed and a recommendation made to either confirm or amend the original decision.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application for review and the recommendation and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of review/re-determination decision

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-determination.

Following the redetermination of a request for discretionary discount, there is no further right of appeal.

11. Nursery Discount

As an extraordinary response to the coronavirus, the Government announced a business rates Nursery Discount on 18 March 2020.

This relief will apply to hereditaments occupied by providers on Ofsted's Early Years Register and wholly or mainly used for the provision of the Early Years Foundation Stage and which are subject to business rates in the year 2020/21.

The discount will be 100% and there will be no rateable value limit.

Responsible officer

The responsibility for making discretionary decisions will rest with the Director of Resources.

Decision making process

The nursery discount scheme was introduced as a financial package to assist those ratepayers who were expected to be adversely affected by the COVID19 pandemic, meaning awards were to be swift and without the normal requirement to complete forms and submit supplementary information in support of their application. With this in mind it was decided that:

- Where the property is occupied and the ratepayer clearly meets the above criteria then the relief will be paid automatically.
- Where the ratepayer does not clearly meet the criteria then the details will be passed to a Revenues Manager to determine whether the ratepayer is eligible for this relief.

Notification of decision

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Review of decision/re-determination requests

The Council will accept an applicant's written request for a redetermination of its decision where there is new information available on which to reconsider the original decision.

Notification of review/re-determination decision

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-determination. Following the re-determination of a request for a discretionary award there is no further right of appeal.

12. Local Newspaper Relief

The Government introduced a £1,500 Business Rate discount for office space occupied by local newspapers in England, up to a maximum of one discount per local newspaper title and per hereditament, and up to state aid limits, for 2 years from 1 April 2017. This was extended in 2018 and 2020 and will now apply until 31st March 2025.

The relief is to be specifically for local newspapers and by that we mean what would be considered to be a “traditional local newspaper.” The relief will not be available to magazines.

Responsible officer

The responsibility for making discretionary relief decisions will rest with the Chief Financial Officer, who will discharge this responsibility by the following process:

Decision making process

In accordance with Government Guidance for the administration of the scheme, and to assist local businesses, the s151 Officer has agreed that the Council may make a number of assumptions with regard to eligibility to ensure relief is awarded to qualifying businesses as soon as possible.

Businesses awarded relief will be advised to inform the Council if they do not qualify for relief as a result of exceeding State Aid limits. Should a ratepayer believe they are entitled to the relief and it has not been awarded, an application form will be provided and relevant enquiries undertaken to determine eligibility.

Where an application form is sent and a response is received, a Revenues Manager will confirm eligibility and seek a decision from the Chief Financial Officer.

Notification of decision

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

Review of decision/re-determination requests

The Council will accept an applicant’s written request for a redetermination of its decision. The process will be as follows:

Stage 1: The original decision and any additional information provided will be reviewed and a recommendation made to either confirm or amend the original decision.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application for review and the recommendation and determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

Notification of review/re-determination decision

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-determination.

Following the redetermination of a request for discretionary discount, there is no further right of appeal.

13. Enterprise Zone Relief

The Council's Executive approved the joint Enterprise Zone Business Rates Relief Policy on Monday 20th June 2016. The policy allows for relief to be applied (up to state aid limits) where business moves into the designated Enterprise Zone before 2022, subject to qualifying criteria. The policy is published on our website at www.fylde.gov.uk.

This is a joint policy between Blackpool Council, Fylde Borough Council and Wyre Borough Council.

14. Revaluation Relief

Central Government is keen that in certain cases, assistance should be provided to businesses which have had increases in their rate liability due to the revaluation of premises in April 2017. In these cases, and where the Council meets Central Government guidelines, grants are available under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

The following sections cover all aspects of the Discretionary Business Rates Relief scheme “Revaluation Relief” which is available from 1st April 2017. Where businesses apply for relief they will be granted (or not granted) relief in line with the following policy.

Legislative Background

To be considered for the following discretionary relief schemes ratepayers are obliged to make a written application to the Council. The Council will expect all businesses to make applications in such a format as is required (which may vary from time to time) and for the business to provide such information, evidence, certificates etc. as required in order to determine whether relief should be awarded.

The Council will consider carefully every application on its merits. There is no statutory appeal process or Tribunal against any decision made by the Council. The authority will however, upon request, review decisions made. Details of the internal review process are given within this policy.

This policy document covers the granting of awards under the Revaluation Relief which covers a period of 12 months from 1st April 2019. The decision to grant or not to grant discretionary relief is a matter purely for the Council.

The Council’s approach to granting Government led Discretionary Relief schemes

Over the past few years, a number of schemes have been led by Central Government but without specific legislative changes. These are administered under s47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and guidance is often provided. The Council is keen to support such initiatives especially where they are designed to help local businesses and will look to maximise both the reliefs given as well as maximising any grants receivable. However, the Council reserves the right to vary its approach where thought appropriate.

In the case of Revaluation Relief, Central Government is keen that individual Councils develop their own scheme to meet local needs. Government has allocated funds to the Council using a particular methodology, but it has been keen to point out that this should have no bearing on the actual scheme adopted by the Council.

Effect on the Council’s Finances

In March 2017, Central Government announced that it would make available a discretionary fund of £300 million over four years from 2017-18 to support those businesses that face the steepest increases in their business rates bills as a result of the revaluation, known as Revaluation Relief. Government determined that Councils would be best placed to determine how this fund should be targeted and administered to support those businesses and locations within their area that are in the greatest need.

Every authority within England is to be provided with a share of the fund to support their local businesses. This is to be administered through billing authorities' discretionary relief powers under s47 of the Local Government Act 1988. The full effects of the financial allocation are shown below.

The allocation of monies to authorities and the methodology of the funding award is completely separate to the scheme itself and Government believes that local authorities are best placed to judge the particular circumstances of local ratepayers and direct the funding where it is most needed to support local economies.

Councils will be compensated for any relief granted under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. The Government has decided that any underspend cannot be transferred from one year to the next.

A key criteria of reimbursement will be that the Council will consult with its major precepting authority when formulating its scheme.

The level of funding allocations in respect of the Discretionary Business Rates Relief Scheme are shown in the following table:

Amount of discretionary fund awarded (£000s) – Fylde Council

2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
126	61	25	4

Discretionary Relief – EU State Aid requirements

European Union competition rules generally prohibit Government subsidies to businesses. Relief from taxes, including non-domestic rates, can constitute state aid. The Council must bear this in mind when granting discretionary rate relief.

Rate relief for charities and non-profit making bodies is not generally considered to be state aid, because the recipients are not in market competition with other businesses. However, where other bodies receive relief and are engaged in commercial activities or if they are displacing an economic operator or if they have a commercial partner, rate relief could constitute state aid.

Relief will be State Aid compliant where it is provided in accordance with the De Minimis Regulations (1407/2013)¹. The De Minimis Regulations allow an undertaking to receive up to €200,000 of De Minimis aid in a three-year period (consisting of the current financial year and the two previous financial years).

Where the relief to any one business is greater than the De Minimis level, then permission will need to be obtained from the European Commission. In such cases the matter will be referred to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for advice and then referred back to the Council for consideration. It will be for the ratepayer to provide confirmation as to whether the State Aid provisions apply to them.

In all cases, where discretionary relief is to be granted or where liability is to be reduced, when

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:352:0001:0008:EN:PDF>

making an application, ratepayers will be required to provide the Council with sufficient information to determine whether these provisions are applicable in their case.

European Union competition rules regarding state aid requirements may change when the United Kingdom exits the European Union.

Administration of Discretionary Relief – General approach

Applicants may be required to provide a completed application form plus any such evidence, documents, accounts, financial statements etc. necessary to allow the Council to make a decision. Where insufficient information is provided, then no relief will be granted. In some cases, it may be necessary for officers to visit premises and we would expect organisations claiming relief to facilitate this where necessary.

The Council will provide this service and guidance free of charge. Ratepayers are encouraged to approach the Council direct and **NOT** pay for such services through third parties.

Where an application is successful, then the following will be notified to them in writing:

- The amount of relief granted and the date from which it has been granted;
- If relief has been granted for a specified period, the date on which it will end;
- The new chargeable amount.

Where relief is not granted then a notification of the decision will be provided, in writing.

Revaluation Relief is to be granted from the beginning of the financial year in which the decision is made. Decisions can be made up to 6 months after the end of the financial year for which the application was made, but if an application is made after this time it will not be considered.

A fresh application for discretionary relief will be necessary for each financial year or at such time-period as the Council determines.

Variations in any decision will be notified to ratepayers as soon as practicable and will take effect as follows:

- Where the amount is to be increased due to a change in rate charge or a change in the Council's decision which increases the award – this will apply from the date of the increase in rate charge or the date determined by the Council as appropriate;
- Where the amount is to be reduced due to a reduction in the rate charge or liability including any reduction in rateable value, awarding of another relief or exemption this will apply from the date of the decrease in rate charge; **and**
- Where the amount is to be reduced for any other reason, it will take effect at the expiry of a financial year

A decision may be revoked at any time.

Consultation

The Council has consulted with its preceptors in relation to its Revaluation Relief scheme and has taken their comments into account when determining the eligibility criteria.

The grant determination for Revaluation Relief states that a condition of the fund is that consultation is undertaken with 'relevant authorities'. Relevant authorities for the purpose of this

scheme means any major precepting authority.

In the case of Fylde Borough Council the precepting authorities has been consulted, namely the Lancashire County Council and the Lancashire Combined Fire and Rescue Service.

Revaluation Relief

The Council has decided that reliefs under the Revaluation Relief scheme will be awarded using the following criteria:

- a) The scheme is designed to assist ratepayers who have suffered significant increases in rate liability due to the revaluation and the subsequent increase to their Rateable Value;
- b) Relief will not be granted where a hereditament has a rateable value of £500,000 or more at 1st April 2017 and where the increase calculated in section (d) is less than 10%;
- c) Relief will not be awarded where mandatory relief or Supporting Small Businesses Relief are granted or the hereditament is within the Business Rates Relief qualifying area of a designated Enterprise Zone;
- d) In assessing any potential entitlement to an award under this scheme, the Council will compare the following:
 - The rate liability of the ratepayer at 31st March 2017 after any reliefs and reductions; **and**
 - The rate liability of the ratepayer at 1st April 2017 taking into account any transitional relief or discretionary relief within this policy;
- e) Relief will only be given to premises which are liable for occupied rates. No relief within this scheme will be granted for unoccupied premises;
- f) Relief will only be granted to ratepayers who were in occupation at 31st March 2017 and in occupation on 1st April 2017 and for each day subsequently.
- g) Ratepayers taking up occupation after the 1st April 2017 will not be eligible for relief on the basis that new ratepayers would not have suffered from increases due to a revaluation;
- h) Relief may be awarded for more than one premises as long as all other criteria are met;

Relief will **not** be awarded where:

- the ratepayer has been awarded a reduction under s44a of the Local Government Finance Act 1988; **or**
- the hereditament occupied by a Billing or Precepting Authority (known as excepted hereditaments).
- the hereditament has a subsequent increase in Rateable Value after the 1st April 2017 which takes it out of the scope of this scheme; **or**
- the hereditament is used for any of the following purposes:
 - a) hospitals, health centre's or doctors/GP surgeries;
 - b) banks and building societies, including separately rated cash machines and ATM's; **or**
 - c) telecommunications network facilities

The Council will look to simplify the application process wherever possible, but it will expect any ratepayers to provide such information as is required by the Council to support their application.

A standard percentage reduction in the value of the rates payable will be applied to all eligible applicants, that rate to be determined by the level of available funding during the year.

The amount of relief awarded under these schemes will be recalculated in the event of a change of

circumstances. In effect relief is calculated on a daily basis in line with the ratepayer's liability on that day. This will include, for example, a backdated change to the rateable value of the hereditament. This change of circumstances could arise during the year in question or during a later year. Where any award is to be reduced, the Council will look to recover the amount from the date the change of circumstances occurred.

The Non-Domestic Rating (Discretionary Relief) Regulations 1989 (S.I. 1989/1059) requires the Council to provide ratepayers with at least one year's notice in writing before any decision to revoke or vary a decision so as to increase the amount the ratepayer has to pay takes effect. Such a revocation or variation of a decision can only take effect at the end of a financial year. But within these regulations, the Council may still make decisions which are conditional upon eligibility criteria or rules for calculating relief which allow the amount of relief to be amended within the year to reflect changing circumstances.

Where any award is granted to a ratepayer, the Council will require any changes in circumstances which may affect the relief to be reported as soon as possible and in any event not more than 21 days from the happening of the event. This will be important where the change would result in the amount of the award being reduced or cancelled e.g. where the premises comes unoccupied or is used for a purpose other than that determined by the Council as eligible for relief.

Decisions by the Council under this scheme

Any application will be considered against the criteria listed in this document, and it must be in the interest of the Council and community for the local authority to grant a reduction.

The responsibility for making discretionary decisions will rest with the Chief Financial Officer.

Additional information may be required by the Council in order that a decision can be made.

Decision making process:

Stage 1: The Principal Revenues Manager or Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services will make a recommendation to the Chief Financial Officer, considering the application against the criteria set out in this policy, based upon the information provided by the applicant and known to the Council.

Stage 2: The Chief Financial Officer will consider the application and the recommendation to determine whether to award a discretionary discount.

The Council will notify the applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving sufficient information to make a decision.

The Council will accept an applicant's written request for a redetermination of its decision if there is new information available on which to reconsider the original decision.

The Council will notify an applicant of its decision within 28 days of receiving a request for a re-determination.

15. Fraud

Where a ratepayer falsely applies for any relief or where the ratepayer provides false information, makes false representation, or deliberately withholds information in order to gain relief, prosecutions will be considered under the Fraud Act 2006.



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