



Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

Business Rates Relief Policy

Policy updated January 2025

Revenues and Benefits Team

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1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council understands the importance that local businesses and organisations play in achieving its priorities and ensuring its communities and businesses are able to develop and thrive within the District.
- 1.2 Councils have the power to award relief from the payment of Business Rates to organisations and businesses that meet certain criteria.
- 1.3 This policy is designed to provide guidance to officers and ratepayers on the application of rate relief.
- 1.4 The Local Government Finance Act 1988 provides for two broad forms of relief to be made available to Business Ratepayers:
 - **Mandatory Relief (under Sections 43 and 45)** – this can be granted to occupied or unoccupied properties, which satisfy the necessary criteria. Once an organisation satisfies the relevant criteria, the council has a statutory duty to apply the relief; and
 - **Discretionary Relief (under Sections 44A, 47 and 49)** – since the 1988 Act was introduced, councils have had the discretion to grant additional relief to certain occupiers of properties, which satisfy certain criteria. However, with effect from 2012/13, Clause 69 of the Localism Act 1988 amended Section 47 referred to as hardship relief, to allow councils to reduce the Business Rates of any local ratepayer.
- 1.5 Discretionary relief can be awarded in its own right or as an additional relief if mandatory relief is already being granted. When considering allowing discretionary relief, a council must consider the benefit of a business to the local community having regard to the interests of its council tax payers.
- 1.6 The financial impact on the council's finances is different depending on whether mandatory or discretionary relief is granted. The granting of discretionary relief can include a cost to the council under the Business Rates Retention Scheme. Under the scheme, the council retains a 40% share of Business Rates income, reduced by a system of tariffs and levies, meaning that the cost of the discretionary relief, is between 15-20%. The remainder of the cost impacts central government, the County Council, and the Fire Authority. Where discretionary reliefs are initiated by central government, the cost to the council is reimbursed in full through a 'Section 31' grant. The cost of mandatory relief is met in full by central government.
- 1.7 Although the Localism Act has extended the council's ability to grant discretionary relief, it does so within strictly finite resources. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to business rate payers, of the specific and limited circumstances in which relief will be granted.

2 Summary of available reliefs

2.1 Relief is available to the following types of business rate payer:

- Charities and other non-profit making organisations
- Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASC)
- Businesses located in rural areas
- Small businesses
- Retail relief
- Empty and partly occupied properties (Sect 44a)
- Supporting Small Businesses Relief
- Transitional Relief
- Local Newspaper Rate Relief
- Public Convenience Relief
- Any other business in exceptional circumstances (under Clause 69 of the Localism Act 2011)
- Heat Network Relief
- Improvement Relief
- Hardship Relief

2.2 The following sections deal with the qualifying conditions of each type of relief in more detail.

2.3 In 2005, community interest companies were introduced as a new type of company intended for social enterprises who use their profits and assets for the public good. These are not eligible for mandatory relief but can be considered for discretionary relief.

3 Charities and Other Non-Profit Making Organisations

3.1 Relief is available to charitable and non-profit making organisations in certain circumstances. Relief varies dependent upon the type of organisation and the purpose for which the property is used.

3.2 Mandatory relief is awarded in the following circumstances:

- i. The Ratepayer of an occupied property is a charity or trustee for a charity and where the property is wholly or mainly used for charitable purposes. In such circumstances, mandatory relief of 80% will be awarded (it may also be possible to qualify for up to 20% discretionary relief on such properties); and
- ii. The owner of an unoccupied property is a charity or trustee for a charity, and it appears, when next in use, the property will be wholly or mainly used for charitable purposes. In such circumstances an exemption will be granted.

- 3.3 Registration under the Charities Act 1993 is conclusive evidence of charitable status. Bodies which are exempt charities are also eligible for mandatory relief.

Discretionary relief may be awarded where:

i. The property is not an “excepted hereditament” (property) and all or part of it is occupied by one or more institution or organisation which are:

- Not established or conducted for profit; and
- Whose aims should be charitable or otherwise philanthropic, or concerned with the promotion of social welfare, education, science, literature or the fine arts. In such circumstances discretionary relief of up to 100% can be awarded.

ii. Where the rate payer is a charity or trustee for a charity and where the property is wholly or mainly used for charitable purposes. In such circumstances, mandatory relief of 80% will already have been awarded. Therefore, discretionary relief of up to 20% can be awarded.

- 3.4 The Council will determine each case on its own merits. The guidelines are:

i. In respect of Charitable Properties:

- Applications are required in writing and will be reviewed on a regular basis; and
- Confirmation of charitable status is necessary.

ii. In respect of Non-Profit Making Organisations, the following factors will be considered:

- Is membership available to all of the community and is it actively promoted?
- Are the facilities available to non-members?
- Are the facilities ones that the council is unable to provide and wishes to promote?
- Have the facilities available been provided by self-help or grant aid?
- Are the facilities competing with or ancillary to the facilities currently offered by the council? (applications will not be refused on the grounds that an organisation is in competition with the council if the broader needs of the community are being met)
- Does the organisation provide training and education for its members, non-members, minority or special need groups?
- Is membership drawn from local residents and taxpayers?
- What are the financial circumstances of the organisation - do they raise finance to support their activities?

- 3.5 Government has introduced primary legislation on the 13 November 2024 to amend the Local Government Finance Act 1988, to end charity rate relief eligibility for private schools. This change is intended to take effect from April 2025, subject to Parliamentary process. Private schools which are 'wholly or mainly' concerned with providing full time education to pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan will remain eligible for relief. Government have asked local authorities to ensure that bills issued for the 2025/26 tax year reflect the changes announced at the Autumn Statement, including identifying those school properties affected by the removal of charity rate relief ahead of annual billing in 2025/26.

4 Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs)

- 4.1 With effect from April 2002, many local amateur sports clubs were able to register with the Inland Revenue as Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) and benefit from a range of tax relief, including Gift Aid. The detail of the legislation is contained within Schedule 18 of the Finance Act 2002.
- 4.2 Provided a club is registered with the Inland Revenue, they will automatically qualify for mandatory relief of 80%.
- 4.3 The Council has discretion to consider awarding up to an additional 20% in discretionary relief.
- 4.4 The Council will determine each case on its own merits. The guidelines are:
In order to qualify for mandatory relief:
- An application is required; and
 - Confirmation of CASC status is necessary.
- 4.5 In order to consider awarding discretionary relief of up to 20%, consideration will be given as follows:
- **Membership** – Is membership open to all sections of the community within the District? Membership fees must not be at a level where they exclude the general community. Membership of the organisation should be mainly resident in the District.
 - **Education** – the organisation will provide training, education or learning to its members. The organisation will be treated favourably where the training delivered supports and reduces the Council's need to do so.
 - **Direct benefit to local residents** – the organisation should directly benefit the needs of the local residents of the District. The organisation must show how it benefits the residents of the District. Examples could include the creation of job opportunities within the area.

- **Provision of facilities** – does the organisation provide facilities which would not otherwise be available to the local community?

5 Rural Relief

5.1 Relief from Business Rates is available for public houses, petrol filling stations, general stores, and post offices if they are the only business of its type within a Rural Settlement area listed below. Rural relief may also be granted to qualifying rural food shops. Such relief is applicable to occupied properties only.

5.2 In order to qualify for mandatory relief the property will have to:

- be in a Rural Settlement Area of 3,000 people or less; and
be a post office or general store with a rateable value of £8,500 or less, and be the only such property within a settlement area; or
- be a public house or petrol filling station with a rateable value of £12,500 or less, and be the only such property within a settlement area; or
- be a village shop selling mainly food for human consumption with a rateable value of £8,500 or less.

5.3 Prior to April 2017, the mandatory award of rural rate relief was 50%. From 1 April 2017, The Government expected local authorities to increase relief to 100%, (50% mandatory and 50% discretionary). From 1 April 2024, the mandatory award of rural rate relief has been increased to 100%.

5.4 Where a property meets either of the above criteria, but the rateable value exceeds the set limits, the Council has discretion to award discretionary relief where:

- has a rateable value of less than £16,500; and is of benefit to the local community.
- The award of the relief is in the interests of the council's taxpayers.

5.5 For claiming rural relief an application form is required.

If applying for the discretionary element of rural relief, audited accounts for the last two years must be provided; and each application is considered on its own merits.

5.6 Rural Settlement areas within Staffordshire Moorlands

In accordance with the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 (LGRA 1997), a total of 46 Rural Settlement Areas (RSAs) have been designated within the Staffordshire Moorlands as follows:

Alstonfield	Alton	Bagnall	Blore
Bradnop	Brown Edge	Butterton	Caverswall
Consall	Cotton	Dilhorne	Draycott
Farley	Fawfieldhead	Grindon	Heathylea
Heaton	Hollinsclough	Horton	Ilam
Ipstones	Leekfrith	Longnor	Longsdon
Oakamoor	Onecote	Quarnford	Rushton
Sheen Wetton	Tittesworth	Warslow	Waterhouses

Biddulph Moor, within the parish of Biddulph
 Freehay, within the parish of Cheadle
 Checkley, within the parish of Checkley
 Hollington, within the parish of Checkley
 Wetley Rocks, within the parish of Cheddleton
 Cellarhead, within the parish of Cheddleton
 Whiston, within the parish of Kingsley
 Kingsley, within the parish of Kingsley
 Stanley, within the parish of Endon
 Stockton Brook, within the parish of Endon
 Endon, within the parish of Endon
 Foxt, within the parish of Ipstones
 Leekbrook, within the parish of Leek

6. Small Businesses

- 6.1 Small business rate relief is available at 100% for business ratepayers occupying single properties with a rateable value of up to £12,000 (previously £6,000 prior to 1 April 2017), with relief declining on percentage terms on a sliding scale until it is 0% at a rateable value of £15,000 (£12,000 prior to 1 April 2017).
- 6.2 Ratepayers of eligible business properties with rateable values between £15,000 and £51,000 (previously £12,000 and £18,000 prior to 1 April 2017) have their bills calculated using the lower (small business) Non-Domestic Rating Multiplier.
- 6.3 The relief is only available to ratepayers with either:
- One property; or
 - One main property and other additional properties with rateable values less than £2,899 (£2,600 prior to 1 April 2017).
- 6.4 The rateable value of the one property or the aggregate rateable value of all properties must be under £20,000 (£18,000 prior to 1 April 2017).

7 Retail Relief

- 7.1 The following relief will be available for the financial year 2025/26.
- 7.2 In the Autumn Statement on 30 October 2024, the Chancellor announced changes to Business Rates relief scheme for retail, hospitality and leisure properties. These changes will take place from the 1 April 2025. This will support the businesses that make our high streets and town centres a success and help them to evolve and adapt to changing consumer demands.
- 7.3 In order to qualify, properties that meet the eligibility for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Scheme will be occupied hereditaments which meet all the following conditions for the chargeable day:

Where they are wholly or mainly being used:

- i. as shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas or live music venues,
 - ii. for assembly and leisure; or
 - iii. as hotels, guest & boarding premises or self-catering accommodation.
- 7.4 We consider shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas and live music venues to mean:

i. 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)

ii. 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

iii. 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

iv. Hereditaments (properties) which are being used as cinemas

v. Hereditaments (properties) 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.

7.5 We consider assembly and leisure to mean:

i. Hereditaments (properties) 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

ii. Hereditaments (properties) that are being used for the assembly of visiting members of the public.

- Public halls
- Clubhouses, clubs and institutions

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

i. Hereditaments (properties) 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

7.7 The following list sets out those properties that would not be eligible for the discount: Financial services e.g. banks, building societies, cash points, bureaux de changes, payday lenders, betting shops, pawn brokers; Other services e.g. Estate agents, letting agents, employment agencies; Medical services e.g. Vets, dentists, doctors, osteopaths, chiropractors and Post Office sorting offices.

- 7.8 These lists are not exhaustive, and any properties used for other purposes will be considered on an individual basis. Where it is clear that a property is used wholly or mainly for one of the uses detailed in the first list, the relief will be automatically applied. Where it is not clear, ratepayers may wish to contact the Council to discuss eligibility.
- 7.9 The amount of relief awarded in 2025/26 will be equivalent to 40% of the bill (previously 75% for 2024/25), after other reliefs and exemptions are applied.
- 7.10 In line with the conditions set by the Government, a ratepayer may only claim up to £110,000 of support under the 2025/26 Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief Scheme for all of their eligible hereditaments. This cash cap applies at a Group company level (so holding companies and subsidiaries cannot claim up to the cash cap for each company) and to organisations which, although not a company, have such an interest in a company that they would, if they were a company, result in its being the holding company.
- 7.11 Furthermore, the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief Scheme is subject to the Minimal Financial Assistance limits under the Subsidy Control Act. This means no recipient can receive over £315,000 over a 3-year period (consisting of the current financial year and the 2 previous financial years). Extended Retail Discounts granted in 2021/22 do not count towards the limit. Covid business grants received from local government and any other subsidy claimed under the Minimal Financial Assistance or Small Amounts of Financial Assistance limit over the 3-year period should be counted.
- 7.12 Therefore, to claim the retail, hospitality and leisure relief you must not have exceeded either the £110,000 cash cap for 2025/26 or the Minimal Financial Assistance limit of £315,000 over 3 years (including 2025/256). Further details of the cash cap and subsidy control can be found at:
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/business-rates-relief-202425-retail-hospitality-andleisure-scheme>.
- 7.13 The relief will be applied for the financial year 2025/26, but can be backdated, to 1 April 2023 at the Council's discretion provided that the properties are used wholly or mainly for a qualifying purpose throughout.
- 7.14 Local authorities will be expected to use their discretionary relief powers (under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988) to grant Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief in line with the relevant eligibility criteria. Authorities will be compensated for the cost of granting these reliefs via a section 31 grant from the government. No new legislation will be required to deliver this scheme.

8 Empty Property Relief

8.1 Mandatory relief will be granted in the first 3 months that a business property is empty. This is extended to 6 months in the case of certain industrial properties.

8.2 After these periods have expired, Business Rates are payable in full unless the unoccupied property rate has been reduced by Government Order. In most cases, the unoccupied property rate is zero for properties owned by Charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs.

8.3 There are several exemptions from the empty property rate as follows:

- Where an owner is prohibited by law from occupying a business property or allowing a business property to be occupied;
- Where a business property is kept vacant by reason of action taken by or on behalf of the Crown or any local or public authority with a view to prohibiting occupation or to acquiring it;
- Where a business property is the subject of a building preservation notice, or is a listed building;
- Ancient monuments;
- Business properties with a rateable value less than £2,900;
- Where an owner is entitled to business property only in their capacity as the personal representative of a deceased person; and
- In certain instances of insolvency and debt administration.

8.4 Partly Occupied – Sect 44a.

8.5 There may be times where a property is only partly occupied for a short period of time. This may be due to a business relocating to a new property. In certain circumstances,

the council may use its discretion to award partly occupied relief which is also known as Section 44a (Section 44a of the Local Government Finance Act 1988).

8.6 In these circumstances, the Council may request that the Valuation Office Agency apportions the rateable value of the property between occupied and unoccupied parts.

8.7 Section 44a relief may be awarded in the following circumstances:

- Where the occupied and unoccupied parts of the property can easily be separately assessed; or
- Where there are short term practical or financial difficulties in either occupying or vacating the premises.

8.8 The part occupation must be for a temporary period only. Rate relief will not be awarded where the partial occupation is due to the normal day to day operation of the business, for example where a warehouse has despatched a large order and no longer needs to store stock.

8.9 For the purposes of this policy, a period of up to 6 months will be considered temporary. Periods of time exceeding 6 months will be treated as a permanent change and will not be eligible for partly occupied relief.

8.10 Relief will not be awarded where it appears to the council that part of the property is being kept empty for the sole purpose of claiming rate relief.

8.11 Prior to an award being made, a visit to the premises may be made by a Council Officer to establish the exact area of the property that is empty. The application must be supported by a plan of the property which clearly marks the boundary of the occupied and unoccupied parts. This plan will be given to the Valuation Office Agency to apportion the rateable value. Further visits may be made to the property throughout the duration of the relief to establish that the property is still partly occupied.

8.12 Part occupied relief will end if one of the following applies:

- The financial year comes to an end;
- The end of the award;
- Where part or all the unoccupied parts become occupied;
- Where the whole of the property becomes unoccupied; or
- Where the liability for the property changes.

9. 2023 Revaluation Reliefs – Small businesses

9.1 Supporting Small Businesses Relief (temporary from 1 April 2023)

At the 2022 Autumn Statement the Chancellor announced that the 2023 Supporting Small Business (SSB) scheme will cap bill increases at £600 per year for any business losing eligibility for some or all Small Business Rate Relief or Rural Rate Relief at the 2023 revaluation. SSB was first introduced at the 2017 revaluation to support ratepayers facing bill increases greater than the transitional relief caps due to loss of small business rate relief or rural rate relief.

9.2 2023 SSBR will help those ratepayers who as a result of the change in their rateable value at the revaluation are losing some or all of their small business, rural rate relief or 2017 SSBR and, as a result, are facing large

increases in their bills. Charities and community amateur sports clubs, who are already entitled to mandatory 80% relief, are not eligible for 2023 SSBR.

- 9.3 To support these ratepayers, 2023 SSBR will ensure that the increase in the bills of these ratepayers is limited to a cash value of £600 per year. This cash maximum increase ensures that ratepayers do not face large bill increases after transitional relief and small business rate relief (as applicable) have been applied. In order to simplify the scheme, the 2023 SSBR will not include minimum percentage bill increases (unlike the 2017 scheme).
- 9.4 Businesses in receipt of 2023 supporting small business relief who have a rateable value of £51,000 will have their bills calculated using the small business multiplier whilst they are in receipt of the relief.
- 9.5 The 2017 SSBR scheme was provided to support small and medium ratepayers who had seen large increases in their bills at the 2017 revaluation. They have, therefore, had 6 years of support to allow them to adjust to their full 2017 bills. Therefore, for those ratepayers receiving 2017 SSB relief in 2022/23, any eligibility for 2023 SSBR will end on 31 March 2024. Authorities should ensure this eligibility criteria is clear in the scheme approved by their council and that relief for these ratepayers is awarded for one year only so that the relief can then be withdrawn on 31 March 2024 without further notice. All other eligible ratepayers remain in 2023 SSBR for either 3 years or until they reach the bill they would have paid without the scheme. A change of ratepayers will not affect eligibility for the Supporting Small Business scheme but eligibility will be lost if the property falls vacant or becomes occupied by a charity or Community Amateur Sports Club.
- 9.6 There is no second property test for eligibility for the 2023 SSBR scheme. However, those ratepayers who during 2022/23 lost entitlement to Small Business Rate Relief (because they failed the second property test) but have, under the rules for Small Business Rate Relief, been given a 12 month period of grace before their relief ended - can continue.
- 9.7 The 2023 SSBR is likely to amount to a subsidy. Therefore, any relief provided by Local Authorities under this scheme will need to comply with the UK's domestic and international subsidy control obligations.
- 9.8 To the extent that a local authority is seeking to provide relief that falls below the Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) thresholds, the Subsidy Control Act allows an economic actor (e.g. a holding company and its subsidiaries) to receive up to £315,000 in a three-year period (consisting of the 2023/24 year and the two previous financial years). MFA subsidies cumulate with each other and with other subsidies that fall within the category of 'Minimal or SPEI financial assistance'. BEIS COVID-19 business grants and any other subsidies claimed under the Small Amounts of Financial Assistance limit of the Trade

and Cooperation Agreement should be counted under the £315,000 allowance.

9.9 In those cases where it is clear to the local authority that the ratepayer is likely to breach the MFA limit, then the authority should automatically withhold the relief. Otherwise, local authorities may include the relief in bills and ask the ratepayers, on a self-assessment basis, to inform the authority if they are in breach of the MFA limit.

9.10 The Council will be applying this relief in accordance with Government guidelines and confirming in writing to those eligible businesses. Those businesses that feel they may be eligible but have not received a letter and revised bill need to contact the Council.

10 Transitional Relief 2023

A transitional relief scheme will be introduced in April 2023 to lessen the impact of any rates increases and will run for three years.

Rateable Value		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Small	RV up to £20,000	5%	10%	25%
Medium	RV £20,001 to £100,000	15%	25%	40%
Large	RV over £100,000	30%	40%	55%

10.1 These caps will be applied **before** other reliefs, for example, supplements, and, in years two and three, inflation.

Properties that have had a rateable value reduction will benefit from the reduction straight away, rather than having the reduction phased in gradually.

11 Local Newspaper Rate Relief (From 1 April 2020 until 31 March 2025)

11.1 The Government has committed to providing funding to local authorities so that they can provide a discount worth up to £1,500 a year for 2 years from 1st April 2020, to office space occupied by local newspapers. This is up to a maximum of one discount per local newspaper title and per hereditament, and up to state aid limits. The relief will be delivered through local authority discretionary discount powers (under section 47(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988).

11.2 The Council will grant in accordance with Government guidelines.

12 Public Convenience Relief

12.1 In 2021, the Non-Domestic Rating (Public Lavatories) Bill came into force which gives public lavatories 100% relief from Business Rates, it would apply retrospectively from 1 April 2020.

12.2 The relief will not apply to toilets of a larger unit of rateable property (a “hereditament”), for example, toilets in public libraries. It amends Part 3 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to ensure that, in relation to an eligible hereditament which consists wholly or mainly of a public lavatory, the chargeable amount will be zero. This provides, in effect, a 100% mandatory relief for eligible public lavatories in England and Wales.

13 Other Businesses

13.1 Discretionary rate relief of up to 100% may be awarded to any other ratepayer in exceptional circumstances under Clause 69 of the Localism Act 2011, where it is in the Council’s strategic or operational interests to do so.

14 Heat Network Relief

14.1 At the Spring Statement 2022, the Chancellor announced that a new heat network relief will apply from Friday 1 April 2022 for hereditaments being used wholly or mainly as a heat network which have their own rating assessment.

14.2 Heat networks take heat or cooling from a central source(s) and deliver it to a variety of different customers such as public buildings, shops, offices, hospitals, universities and homes.

14.3 By supplying multiple buildings, they avoid the need for individual boilers or electric heaters in every building. Heat networks have the potential to reduce bills, support local regeneration and be a cost-effective way of reducing carbon emissions from heating.

14.4 Eligibility

To be eligible for heat network relief the hereditament must:

- Have their own Business Rates assessment
- Be wholly or mainly used for the purpose of a heat network, and

- The heat, over the next 12 months, is expected to be generated from a low carbon source (irrespective of whether that source is located on the hereditament or on a different hereditament)
- 14.5 Full details for this relief and the eligibility rules can be found on the government website at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-business-rate-relief/heat-networks-relief>
- 14.6 **How much relief will be available?**
- Relief is available at 100% of the chargeable amount for the hereditament for any day on which the eligibility criteria are met.
- 14.7 As this is a discretionary relief, it will be applied after any applicable mandatory reliefs but before any other discretionary reliefs.
- 14.8 **Subsidy compliance**
- The Heat Network relief is subject to the UK's domestic and international subsidy control obligations. Businesses eligible for relief will need to fulfil any requirements in place to ensure compliance with those obligations in advance of, during, and after claiming relief.
- 15 Improvement Relief**
- 15.1 Improvement relief will support businesses wishing to invest in their property. It will ensure that no ratepayer will face higher Business Rates bills for 12 months as a result of qualifying improvements to a property they occupy.
- 15.2 In order to qualify, the works should increase the area of any building, otherwise improve the physical state of the property or add to it rateable plant and machinery.
- 15.3 Neither a newly constructed property nor a refurbished property which has been removed from the rating list temporarily during the works will qualify.
- 15.4 A change of use alone or the addition of land will not qualify.
- 15.5 The same ratepayer must have been in occupation of the property on each day since the qualifying works commenced.
- 15.6 The relief will commence from 1 April 2024 and apply to works completed by 31 March 2028 (with qualifying works completed by that date benefitting from 12 months of relief).
- 15.7 Once the Valuation Office Agency is satisfied that the qualifying works condition has been met, then it will issue a certificate of the increase in rateable value which is attributable to any works falling within the meaning of qualifying works.

15.8 The billing authority will then apply the relief using the certificate provided the occupation condition has been met.

16 Hardship Relief

16.1 The Council may remit payment of Business Rates in part or in full in certain cases of hardship.

16.2 An application for reduction must consider:

- That the ratepayer would sustain hardship if remission of rates was not granted; and
- That it is reasonable to grant remission, having regard to the interests of the council taxpayer.

16.3 The circumstances where the Council would consider for the granting of Hardship Relief are:

- The potential threat of closure of a business, and the loss of employment to local people; and
- Preserving the local community and fabric of village life.

16.4 For claiming Hardship Relief the following conditions apply:

- An application must be made;
- Remission should be the exception rather than the rule; and
- All factors relating to the business should be taken into account; and each case should be decided on its own merits.

16.5 The following evidence will be taken into consideration when assessing an application for Hardship Relief:

- The current year's accounts should be compared with previous years' accounts; and
- Explanation of how the hardship has arisen; and steps taken to try to remedy the situation.

16.6 Applications for relief must be made by completing an application form and submitting the relevant supporting information which includes:

- Details of the applicant's main purposes and objectives (where applicable) as set out in a written constitution, a memorandum of association or membership rules; and
- A full set of audited accounts relating to the last two financial years. Where audited accounts are not available projections should be provided instead, along with bank statements;

16.7 Details of how the organisation meets the relevant criteria detailed in these guidelines.

17 Application process for reliefs

17.1 Applications for relief can be made by completing an application form on the Council's website at <https://www.staffs Moorlands.gov.uk/Reliefs-discounts-andexemptions> and submitting the relevant supporting information which may include:

- Details of the applicant's main purposes and objectives (where applicable) as set out in a written constitution, a memorandum of association or membership rules;
- A full set of audited accounts relating to the last two financial years. Where audited accounts are not available projections should be provided instead, along with bank statements; and
- Details of how the organisation meets the relevant criteria detailed in these guidelines.

17.2 Any applications which are made without the supporting documentation will be subject to a decision being made solely on the information that is available at the time of the decision.

18 Summary of award and refusal of discretionary relief

18.1 In all cases, the Council will endeavour to make a decision within 28 days of receiving an application for relief and notify the ratepayer of decisions made. Decisions on the award of discretionary rate relief up to £5,000 will be considered by the Head of Revenues and Benefits in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer.

18.2 Those applications where the decision on the award is £5,001 or more will be considered by the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Member who has responsibility for Finance.

18.3 Ratepayers are required to continue to pay Business Rates whilst their application is being considered. Failure to make payment will result in the Council pursuing collection through the usual enforcement procedures which could result in Court action.

18.4 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;
- The details of any planned review dates and the notice that will be given in advance of a change to the level of relief granted; and
- A requirement that the applicant should notify the Council of any change in circumstances that may affect entitlement to relief.

18.5 Where relief is not granted then the following information is provided, again in writing:

- An explanation of the decision within the context of each councils' statutory duty; and
- An explanation of the appeal rights (see below).

18.6 The Council will consider backdating discretionary relief for 12 months where a property already exists in the valuation list. Where a property is brought into the valuation list and backdated, the Council will consider backdating to the date it was brought into the list.

18.7 A decision to award discretionary relief and how much relief is given is normally only applicable to the financial year for which the application is made. However, the Council reserves the right to grant relief for any other period as appropriate. In relation to the Discretionary Business Rate Relief scheme, awards will, in the main, be granted from 1 April.

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

18.9 **Variation of a decision**

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 the council made the decision as appropriate;
- Where the amount is to increase for any other reason, it will take effect at the expiry of a financial year, and so that at least one year's notice is given;
- 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, and so that at least one year's notice is given.

18.10 A decision may be revoked at any time; however, a one year period of notice will be given, and the change will take effect at the expiry of a financial year.

19 Appeals

- 19.1 There is no statutory right of appeal against a decision of discretionary relief other than by way of Judicial Review. An unsuccessful applicant may make a request for the Council to review its decision, but only where:
- i. Additional information relevant to the application that was not made available at the time the decision was made becomes available.
 - ii. There are grounds to believe the application or supporting information was not interpreted correctly at the time the decision was made.
- 19.2 A request for a review must be made within one calendar month of notification of the decision and must set out the reasons for the request and any supporting information. Cases will be reviewed by the Head of Service, Chief Finance Officer and involve the Member with responsibility for Finance if the amount of relief applied for is over £5,001.
- 19.3 Appeal against a refusal to grant mandatory relief is to the Magistrates Court at a liability order hearing if the decision is whether a property falls into one of the necessary categories.
- 19.3 The appeal will be by way of Judicial Review if the appeal is in respect of a village not being designated as a Rural Settlement.
- 19.4 An appeal against a refusal to grant Discretionary Relief will be by way of Judicial Review.

20 Subsidy

- 20.1 The schemes provided for in this policy could amount to subsidy and need to comply with the UK's domestic and international subsidy control obligations.
- 20.2 Where it is clear to the Council that a ratepayer is likely to breach the UK's domestic and international subsidy control obligations the relief will be automatically withheld. Otherwise relief will be awarded, and ratepayers are required on a self-assessment basis to inform the Council if they are in breach of the UK's domestic and international subsidy control obligations.

21 Reviewing reliefs and the policy

- 21.1 Reliefs will be reviewed on an annual basis.

21.2 The policy for granting relief will be reviewed annually or sooner where there is a substantial change to the legislation or funding rules. At such time, a revised policy will be brought before the relevant committee of the Council.