

CRITERIA TO BE USED IN DETERMINING APPLICATIONS FOR DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF

Part 1 - Non profit-making bodies

Previous awards of discretionary rate relief

The Council wishes to promote equality between organisations when granting discretionary rate relief. Therefore, when considering an application for discretionary rate relief, it will have regard to previous awards of relief to bodies of a similar nature to the applicant body. Unless specific considerations apply, the Council is likely to award relief to the same value as previously awarded to such similar bodies. Previous grants of relief for properties occupied by charities or non profit-making organisations include as follows:

100% discretionary rate relief granted to:

- Sports clubs where community amateur sports club status has been refused

20% top-up relief granted to:

- Sports clubs if registered as community amateur sports clubs
- Recreational facilities, sports grounds and playing fields occupied by charities

Applications where special considerations may apply

Where the applicant body does not fall into one of the categories where relief has been awarded in the past (see above), relief may be granted only if the applicant body:

- caters for special needs (see below for an explanation of this term); or
- supplies facilities that would not otherwise be available in the area; or
- provides a service that supports the Council's key priorities. For the year 2012/15 these priorities are:
 - Continued delivery of priority services and a financially viable Council.
 - Sustainable regeneration of Tonbridge town centre and economic development in communities across the Borough.
 - A continuing supply of homes, including affordable housing to buy and rent, and prevention of homelessness.
 - Children and young people who are safe, involved, with access to positive activities.
 - A clean, smart, well maintained and sustainable Borough.
 - Low levels of crime, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime.

- Healthy living opportunities and community well-being

Meaning of ‘special needs’

Does the organisation cater for a section of the community which the Council considers particularly deserving of support, e.g. persons with disabilities, persons with learning difficulties, the very young or the very old?

Where the applicant body provides such special needs or supplies facilities that would not otherwise be available in the area or supports the Council’s key priorities, the maximum amount of relief will generally be awarded, subject to the following.

Other considerations

In determining awards of relief, the Council will bear in mind all the facts of each case. In particular, the Council may consider the following factors:

- **Membership**
Does the organisation operate a membership scheme?
- **Membership discounts**
Are discounts available for members (for example elderly/disabled etc.)?
- **Key priorities**
Do the organisation’s objectives meet at least one of the Council’s key priorities?
- **Sole facility**
Is the organisation’s property the sole facility in its area of operation?
- **Fees, charges etc**
Is the cost of membership such that it would exclude a large section of the community?
- **Access to facilities**
Are the organisation’s facilities available generally or at certain times to non-members?
- **Provision of facilities**
Have the facilities been provided by self-help or grant aid from the Borough Council, local or public authorities or others?
- **Development of skills**
Does the organisation provide training or education for its members? Are there schemes for particular groups, e.g. young people, the disabled, the retired, the unemployed etc?

Restrictions on the granting of relief

In determining whether relief should be awarded, the Council will be inclined not to grant relief or to limit the amount of relief awarded in the following cases.

- **National charities**
As a general rule, the Council is unlikely to grant relief to national charities located within the Council’s area unless there is some specific benefit to the residents of Tonbridge and Malling over and above the benefit to the residents of other areas in which the charity operates.

- **Charity shops and other premises operated by trading arms of charities**

The Council is unlikely to grant relief to charity shops and other premises operated by the trading arms of charities.

- **Bodies operating in only part of the Council's area**

Where an applicant body is a national organisation but operates only in part of the Council's area, any relief that may be awarded will generally be reduced pro rata the population of the area of the Borough that receives benefit from that organisation. This restriction will not generally apply if the body is not a national body and has been established to benefit only a part of the Council's area.

- **Bodies operating a restrictive membership policy**

It is not the Council's general policy to grant relief to bodies that operate a restrictive membership policy unless such restrictions are necessary because of the size of the property occupied by the body or in order to ensure a pre-determined level of ability or required standard of achievement for a particular sport or activity.

- **Bodies occupying premises with high rateable values**

The Council, when determining an application for relief will consider the rateable value and location of the applicant's premises. Are the premises of a size, and their location, appropriate to the organisation?

Special cases

The Council recognises that there will be occasions when an applicant body does not satisfy the above criteria. Nothing in these criteria shall be taken as restricting the Council's ability to depart from its general policy as to the granting of relief if it sees fit to do so bearing in mind the facts of the case.

Affordability

Applicants for discretionary rate relief should note that the cost of discretionary relief falls partly on the Council. As such, in determining the level of relief to be granted, the Council must have regard to its budgetary position.

Part 2 – Applications not falling within Part 1

From 1 April 2012, the Council may also award relief to any local ratepayer to encourage new business and investment as well as to support local shops or community services.

Businesses located in rural settlements can currently apply for relief and these applications are considered using the criteria listed in the Council's policy in respect of Rural Rate Relief.

For all other applications (either not falling within Part 1 of these criteria or within the criteria for rural businesses), a decision on whether relief should be granted in any particular case should only be considered once the Borough Council has sought the views of the appropriate parish council, local members and the county council. Members should also consider if the other precepting authorities are willing to fund (partly or otherwise) the cost of relief awarded.

Affordability

Applicants for discretionary rate relief should note that the cost of awards of such relief is borne by the Council. For awards of discretionary relief falling within Part 2 of these criteria (and excluding rural businesses), the Council is liable to fund 100% of the amount awarded.

Part 3 - General

In determining the level of relief to be granted, the Council must have regard to its budgetary position. Although the Council will aim to achieve equality between applicants in terms of the level of relief that it grants, this might not always be possible. The Council has the right, subject to giving the requisite notice required by law, to vary or terminate the level of relief that it has previously granted either in respect of a particular organisation/business or in respect of a class of organisation/business or to all organisations/businesses in receipt of relief.