



## **Joint ECO Flexible Eligibility Statement of Intent of:**

**Mendip District Council**

**Sedgemoor District Council**

**Somerset West and Taunton Council**

**South Somerset District Council**

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**Published URL's:**

**Mendip District Council**

<https://www.mendip.gov.uk/housingpolicies>

**Sedgemoor District Council**

<https://www.sedgemoor.gov.uk/article/4645/EcoFlex-Statement>

**Somerset West and Taunton Council**

<https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/housing/private-sector-housing/saving-energy/>

**South Somerset District Council**

<https://www.sedgemoor.gov.uk/article/4645/EcoFlex-Statement>

<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/services/environmental-health/property/supporting-tenants> see EcoFlex Statement download link

## **1 Background**

- 1.1 Energy Company Obligation (ECO) - is a requirement placed on energy suppliers over a certain size to help improve domestic energy performance of the homes of those on low incomes and vulnerable to the cold. In the new ECO4 phase, as before, there is Flexible Eligibility enabling councils to direct assistance towards local private sector homes at risk of fuel poverty but falling outside of the eligibility based on qualifying benefits.

- 1.2 This joint Statement of Intent (Sol) sets out the Flexible Eligibility criteria for Somerset, and the four Somerset district councils – Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset West and Taunton Council, and South Somerset District Council (“the Councils”) for the ECO4 scheme. Residents meeting these agreed criteria, subject to the appropriate Council issuing a signed Declaration and a favourable survey report (para 2.7 below) may be assumed eligible by energy suppliers for ECO funded energy efficiency improvements.
- 1.3 On 1 April 2023 the obligations and responsibilities of all of the district councils in Somerset shall automatically transfer to the new Somerset Council

## 2 Fuel poverty in Somerset

- 2.1 Fuel poverty can cause low-income households to live in cold homes which have a negative impact on their health and wellbeing. This is particularly the case for vulnerable households with a cold related illness. In 2020, there were 28,651 fuel poor households in Somerset (using the low-income low energy efficiency (LILEE) definition). The table below shows the split between the four district local authorities in 2020<sup>1</sup>.

LA Name	Estimated number of households	Estimated number of fuel poor households	Proportion of household's fuel poor (%)
Mendip	51,304	5,692	11.1%
Sedgemoor	54,216	6,198	11.4%
Somerset West and Taunton	69,773	8,023	11.5%
South Somerset	77,355	8,738	11.3%

- 2.2 Those most affected by cold homes: households where somebody is older, has a disability and whose health conditions are worsened by cold or damp homes. Somerset has an aging population and higher proportion of people with disabilities. Amongst the 65-74 age group, the annual rate of growth is estimated at 3.4%, five times the average growth rate. One in six of the population identified themselves as having a long-term health problem or disability, which limited their day-to-day activity (2011 Census).

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-sub-regional-statistics>

- 2.3 Many parts of Somerset rank amongst England's lowest population density, meaning that vulnerable households living in these very rural areas (often in homes without access to gas) have even less mainstream support than households living elsewhere. In addition, the Centre for Sustainable Energy estimates that 84% of households in Somerset have an EPC rating of D or below.
- 2.4 ECO Flexible Eligibility will improve the least energy efficient homes helping to meet the Government's fuel poverty and net zero commitments. It will also help deliver the aims of the Somerset Strategic Housing Framework and the Memorandum of Understanding on Improving Health and Care Through the Home in Somerset, both of which facilitate a partnership approach to the delivery of sustainable, warm and healthy homes for all Somerset residents.
- 2.5 The Councils each have a legal duty to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and to reduce the differences in health outcomes between the populations they serve. Housing is a key factor that affects people's health. Evidence shows that poor housing conditions cause accidental injury, make existing health conditions worse, make treating health conditions difficult and have a huge social impact upon the ability of individuals to achieve their potential in education or employment.

### **3 ECO Flexible Eligibility criteria**

- 3.1 ECO Flexible Eligibility is available to private sector households, including owner occupiers and private tenants, and for social housing, in line with the Government's ECO guidance. All potentially eligible households will need to apply through the Home Energy Team at the Centre for Sustainable Energy in order to be assessed (0800 082 2234 or [home.energy@cse.org.uk](mailto:home.energy@cse.org.uk)).
- 3.2 The Home Energy Team will check eligibility in their initial conversation with the resident; they will also check that the resident is happy for their data to be stored and shared with a third party. The eligibility information will be recorded on a secure customer record management system (CRM). The Councils will issue Declarations to the Home Energy Team its installer partners setting out those households that are eligible. The installer partner will pass this information onto their ECO supplier according to the ECO application process.

3.3 The four available Flexible Eligibility routes are set out below.

### **Eligibility route 1: Low Income**

Households with an EPC rating of D to G and a combined gross annual income of less than £31,000. This income cap applies irrespective of the property size, composition, or region, but using this single figure it is intended to reach other low-income households who may not be claiming benefits or are just above the benefits threshold.

### **Eligibility route 2: Income and health**

Households with an EPC rating of E to G and someone in the household meets any two proxies as defined below.

**Proxy 1\***: Home is in Lower-layer Super Output Area 1-3 (LSOA) in [The English Indices of Deprivation 2019](#).

**Proxy 2**: A householder receives a Council Tax rebate – (rebates based on low income only, excludes single person rebates)

**Proxy 3\***: A householder is vulnerable to living in a cold home as identified in the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guidance\*. Only one from the list can be used, excludes the proxy 'low income'.

**Proxy 4**: A householder receives free school meals due to low-income.

**Proxy 5\***: A householder is referred through a local authority run scheme such as Safe and Warm Somerset or the Somerset Home Upgrade Grant, which support low income and vulnerable households for the purposes of NICE Guidance.

**Proxy 6**: Household identified as struggling with sustained debt on utility bills or mortgage payments and has been referred to the Local Authority for support by Citizens Advice, their energy supplier [or their mortgage lender].

*\*LSOA and NICE guidance can't be combined. They must be used in combination with another one of the proxies.*

*\*<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs117/chapter/quality-statement-2-identifying-people-vulnerable-to-health-problems-associated-with-a-cold-home>*

### **Eligibility route 3: NHS Referrals**

Households with EPC rating of D to G and where a member of the household has been referred by the NHS because they are suffering from a severe and/or long-term health condition that could be severely impacted by living in a cold home. The conditions that would fall under this route are respiratory, cardiovascular, limited mobility or immune

suppressed conditions. A signed letter from an NHS foundation trust, an NHS Trust, a Health Board, a Local Health Board, or a general medical practitioner provider can demonstrate eligibility under Route 3.

#### **Eligibility route 4 – Innovation**

BEIS has implemented an innovation route for households with EPC rating of D to G that are not eligible under Routes 1-3. Councils can develop their own innovation plan and then submit this to BEIS for approval. If a group of fuel poor households fall outside the scope of the existing eligibility criteria, the council will work with partners to develop a plan for the innovation route to help target these households.

#### **4 Installer requirements**

- 4.1 Installers will need to demonstrate that they are PAS2030:20192035 or Trustmark certified.
- 4.2 If you are an installer or managing agent and you wish to obtain ECO Flexible Eligibility Declarations then you will need to contact the Centre for Sustainable Energy to go through onboarding checks, including signing their Code of Conduct.
- 4.3 Upon approval installers will be required to purchase credits for their future Declarations and maintain a minimum credit balance of at least the value of a dual measure. There is an administration fee of £60 + VAT for each measure per property for all Declarations (to be paid by the installer or energy supplier installing the measure) at no cost to the householder. Further details will be provided to installers on approval.
- 4.4 The Centre for Sustainable Energy will process the applications in line with the Government's ECO guidance, including contacting the household to check their eligibility and then preparing the Declarations for sign-off.

## **5 Acting on behalf of another local authority**

5.1 For the ECO Flexible Eligibility scheme in Somerset, Sedgemoor District Council will be acting on behalf of Mendip District Council, Somerset West and Taunton Council, and South Somerset District Council and will provide signed Declarations for households in all four local authority areas. However, Sedgemoor District Council has not been granted delegated authority to consider and sign Declarations on behalf of any other Council outside of Somerset.

5.2 On 1 April 2023 the obligations and responsibilities of all of the district councils in Somerset shall automatically transfer to the new Somerset Council

## **6 Governance**

6.1 As noted in 5.1, Sedgemoor District Council, who host Somerset Independence Plus, are the lead authority for this consortia Sol. The Declarations for households who meet the relevant Council's Flexible Eligibility criteria within Somerset will be signed off by an authorised officer of Sedgemoor District Council. The signing officer will check and verify that Declarations have been issued for households that match the criteria in this Sol.

## **7 Referrals**

7.1 As highlighted above (see 3.2) all potentially eligible households will need to apply for ECO Flexible Eligibility funding for energy efficiency measures through the Home Energy Team at the Centre for Sustainable Energy. A referral will then be made to an approved installer who, following confirmation of eligibility and a survey to determine measures, will submit an application to the Centre for Sustainable Energy.

7.2 Referrals made under ECO Flexible Eligibility will be subject to the same market conditions as wider ECO energy efficiency work; as such a local authority Declaration does not guarantee that the measure(s) will be viable. The final decision will depend upon: i) the survey carried out by installers or obligated energy suppliers and installation costs calculated; ii) the energy savings that can be achieved for a property; and iii) whether suppliers have achieved their ECO targets or require further measures to meet these.

7.3 Households that are eligible under Flexible Eligibility may be identified through a number of referral routes and partners. The Home Energy Team provides impartial energy advice to residents of Somerset. Organisations who work with vulnerable low-income households will be able to refer households to the service for assessment. The following details the types of organisations and front-line staff who actively make referrals in Somerset:

- Somerset Independence Plus
- Arm's Length Management Organisation operating in each of the Councils served. For example, for Sedgemoor District Council this is Homes in Sedgemoor
- Lendology CIC
- Third sector organisations i.e. the voluntary and community sector. Including Community Council for Somerset, Age UK
- Citizens Advice
- Red Cross Home from Hospital and handy man services
- Credit Unions
- GP practices and frontline health staff
- Fire Service
- Parish & Town Councils
- Village & Community agents
- Housing Associations
- Social Care
- The Somerset Local Housing Authorities

## 8 Evidence, monitoring and reporting

8.1 The Home Energy Team will use its secure CRM to collate information on households which are eligible for Flexible Eligibility. The service will provide progress reports on request. The following summarises the information to be collected to confirm eligibility:

- If already present, the EPC for the property
- A self-declaration form signed by the householder confirming their eligibility based on the eligibility routes set out above
- [Household income evidence]
- [Evidence of occupancy i.e. bank statement, utility bill, council tax letter, tenancy agreement or extract from the electoral role.]
- [Identification of ownership via the land registry]

8.2 The self-declaration form will be designed to prevent fraud. The data protection authority form will inform applicants that the Councils may carry out further checks with HMRC to confirm their eligibility.

8.3 The energy supplier that provides ECO funding is still required to collect all evidence associated with the necessity for a measure e.g. that the cavity wall is appropriate, the boiler is broken etc. The declaration of eligibility is not a substitute for this evidence and the Councils would expect this information to be collected and made available to Ofgem on request.



## **9 Data Protection**

9.1 The Councils are committed to working within the bounds of the Data Protection Act 2018 (the DPA 2018) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

9.2 Residents should note that:

9.2.1 In order to fully assess eligibility and deliver the services described in this Sol, the written consent to the sharing of personal, financial and health details will be required at the outset from both the resident, the parent or guardian of all residents under the age of 18 living with them and from all other persons over the age of 18 in the same household.

9.2.2 The delivery of the services described may necessarily require the sharing of personal, financial and health information between the Councils, the Centre for Sustainable Energy and/or with the other agencies referred to paragraph 7.3 above.

9.2.3 Installers undertaking works at a residence are only provided with the information that is relevant to the referral or the assessment of suitability i.e. eligibility, property type.

9.2.4 Anonymised information will be provided by each Council to the Government/Ofgem as required.

9.2.5 The Councils are legally obliged to comply with the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations.

## **10 Fraud and Bribery**





10.1 The Councils each have a clear commitment and responsibility to minimise the possibility of fraud or other misuse of public money and assets. They pledge to take all action necessary to identify such cases and pursue the recovery of losses and the punishment of those responsible.

10.2 An applicant who tries to fraudulently claim support by falsely declaring their circumstances, providing a false statement or evidence in support of their application, may have committed an offence.

## 11 Safeguarding

11.1 The Councils are committed to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, by promoting the rights of people who use its services and safeguarding them from harm or neglect.

## 12 Signature

Participating Council	Signature
Mendip District Council	 Title: Deputy Chief Executive
Sedgemoor District Council	 Title: Assistant Director - Housing, Communities & Wellbeing
Somerset West and Taunton Council	 Simon Lewis Title: Assistant Director, Housing and Communities
South Somerset District Council	 Kirsty Larkins Title: Service Delivery Director