

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Resources	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	24 <sup>th</sup> January 2022	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3343
TITLE:	Additional Restrictions Grants Policy January 2022	
WARD:	All	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>		
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b> Annex 1 – Revised Additional Restrictions Grants Policy (January 2022)		

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 During the COVID 19 Pandemic the Government introduced funding for several Business Grants which local authorities were responsible for administering on their behalf.
- 1.2 In December 2021 the Government announced the funding for two further grants. The Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant was mandated with strict eligibility criteria, and a top up to the discretionary Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). Guidance was published for both grants on the 30th December 2021.
- 1.3 Local authorities were asked to further develop local discretionary criteria for the payment of the ARG
- 1.4 This report requests approval of a revised ARG Policy and criteria for local businesses eligibility and grant payment levels

### 2 RECOMMENDATION

#### The Member is asked to;

- 2.1 Approve the Additional Restrictions Grant revised policy as set out in Annex 1
- 2.2 To delegate the application of the grant fund to the Chief Financial Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources, the CX, and the Monitoring

Officer to ensure the grant is distributed within the £366k ARG funding allocation, with fair distribution across the eligible business groups

### **3 THE REPORT**

- 3.1 During the COVID pandemic, a package of business support grants was announced by the government to support businesses impacted by the measures introduced to prevent the spread of Covid 19. This was a combination of both mandatory and discretionary grants.
- 3.2 Local Authorities were given the role of both administering and paying the grants to local business following detailed guidance and reporting requirements. This payment and administration had ceased in the summer of 2021. The council is currently completing the audit work and financial returns required to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
- 3.3 However, with the increase in case numbers of the Omicron variant the Government introduced Plan B. In order to help businesses the government also announced on the 21<sup>st</sup> December two new grants were to be awarded to eligible business: -
  - (1) Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant
  - (2) Additional Restrictions Grant (top up)
- 3.4 Local Authorities have again been asked to administer and pay the grants. The guidance for these grants was published on the 30<sup>th</sup> December with strict eligibility criteria for the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant. Local authorities have again been asked to develop their own ARG policies and have discretion on who and how much to pay.
- 3.5 The Council has been given £3.06m for the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant and £366k for the ARG to distribute to local businesses.
- 3.6 All grants must be applied for by the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and the last payment made by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.
- 3.7 The West of England unitary authorities (Bath & North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council) and North Somerset Council developed a regional policy in the first round of the ARG to provide some consistency in the additional support available to businesses across the wider region
- 3.8 The Council proposes to revise this ARG joint policy, albeit with reduced rates payable due to the level of funding made available to Local Government. The policy indicates a maximum value “up to” for each grant but the actual amount of each grant cannot be determined until the number of eligible applications received is matched against the funding available.

## **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 4.1 Local Authorities will be responsible for delivering grants to eligible businesses. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides all local authorities with the vires to make these payments.
- 4.2 Subsidy Allowance rules will apply, and these are documented in the policy Annex 1.
- 4.3 This decision is to be made under part 4C Rule 4 and Part 4B Rule 16 of the council's constitution as an urgent decision. This matter is urgent because the council needs to implement the Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme at pace to allow the grant application process to be opened as soon as possible. This will allow support to businesses impacted by the rise in case numbers of the Omicron Covid 19 variant to be provided as quickly as possible.

## **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

- 5.1 The Council's confirmed ARG top up allocation is £366k. There is also an unallocated balance of £199k from the previous round of ARG bringing the total funding available to £565k.
- 5.2 This funding must be administered, and all payments made by the local authority by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. All funding must be accounted for, monitored and financial returns completed to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)

## **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.
- 6.2 Due to the uncertainty around the numbers of claims for support under the proposed scheme it is proposed to delegate the application of the grant fund to the Chief Financial Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources, the CX, and the Monitoring Officer to ensure the grant is distributed within the funding envelope with fair distribution across the eligible business groups

## **7 EQUALITIES**

- 7.1 The revised policy has been developed to ensure that as many eligible businesses as possible can apply for the ARG. The local authorities does have discretion within the policy and will be aiming to distribute the grant to as many businesses as possible within the funding available.

## **8 CLIMATE CHANGE**

- 8.1 This grant scheme aims to provide access to support to businesses who are severely impacted by the national restrictions put in place to reduce the spread of Covid-19. The proposed eligibility criteria is in line with government guidance

which does not include climate change impacts as a basis on which to award grants under this scheme

## 9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 Various grant levels and different policy options were considered across the eligible businesses. A limit on individual grants of up to £2,000 is proposed to enable the Council to support as many businesses as possible within the funding available.

## 10 CONSULTATION

The report has been cleared by the S151 Officer, the CX and Monitoring Officer.

<b>Contact person</b>	<i>Andy Rothery, Chief Financial Officer (S151)</i> <i>Steve Harman, Head of Corporate Governance</i>
<b>Background papers</b>	Additional Restrictions Grant Guidance for Local Authorities (updated 30 December 2021)  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-restrictions-support-grants-lrsg-and-additional-restrictions-grant-arg-guidance-for-local-authorities">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-restrictions-support-grants-lrsg-and-additional-restrictions-grant-arg-guidance-for-local-authorities</a>
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