

Record of Decision taken by Chief Executive/Director

Decision title: Extension of Budget for Somerset West and Taunton Council's Additional Restrictions Grant scheme (Discretionary Covid Business Grants Fund)

Chief Executive/Director making the decision: James Hassett

Author Contact Details: Gordon Dwyer
Tel: 07881 218 674
e-mail: g.dwyer@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk

Date of Decision: 16 March 2021

Details of decision:

The Chief Executive has agreed to include the further amount of £1,377,895 Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) funding received from Government in January 2021 within the scope of the Council's ARG scheme and process, which was presented to and agreed by Council on 15 Dec 2020.

This decision has been taken in accordance with the urgent decisions provision contained in paragraph 5 of the Budget and Policy Framework of the Council's Constitution because it is not practical to convene a quorate Full Council meeting within the required timeframe.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Wren, has been consulted and agrees that this decision is required as a matter of urgency and that it is appropriate for it to be made under the urgency provisions. A report will be made to the next available Full Council meeting to explain the reasons for the urgent decision.

Background

In November 2020 an Urgency decision was made (and the decision brought to Full Council on 15 Dec 2020) for SWT to set up an Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) Scheme to provide financial support to businesses where they had suffered financial loss as a result of the Government's Covid-19 restrictions. A budget of £3,102,300 was provided by Government for the scheme.

Government had been clear that their intention was for Local Authorities to quickly start to process applications and make payments, but the intention at the time was that the budget should be managed to cover any additional support required by businesses up until March 2022.

Unanticipated at the time was that the County would move into Tier 4 restrictions on 31 Dec 2020 and the Country as a whole would move to a National Lockdown from 5 January 2021 onwards. Subsequently greater demand was put on the ARG fund than had been originally anticipated.

In January 2021 the Government's emphasis on the timescales for use of the fund was modified and BEIS issued a clear message that it wanted to get more of the funds to businesses as soon as possible.

SWT reacted by widening our policy and quickly getting the scheme up and running again in January to provide support over the Tier 4 and Third National Lockdown periods. At that

point, the Government also announced that SWT would receive an ARG 'Top Up' amount of £1,377,895.

In mid Feb it was confirmed that the payments from the Government's mandatory business support schemes would extend until 31 March and SWT has continued to provide support to reflect this in the ARG scheme too, utilising funds from the original £3.1m allocation.

However there has recently been a much stronger message relating to the dissemination of the ARG fund. The Government has announced that a third payment of funds will be made available to Local Authorities, however it was stated in a BEIS webinar on 9 March that the third payment would be available to LAs, only once the first and second payments had been used.

With the rapid take up of support we are also nearing the £3.1 authorisation limit of the original allocation.

Therefore, in order to continue to support businesses and to ensure that SWT Council is in a position to access further funding promised by Government, authorisation is requested for the use of the £1.377m 'Top Up' payment to be utilised in line with existing ARG policies and delegations.

Government guidance:

The current guidance can be viewed at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/935130/additional-restrictions-grant.pdf

Reasons for proposed decision:

Extending the budget provides an approach to awarding the discretionary grant funding that provides for:

- Our delivering on the Government expectation of a quick response and their new expectation of our quickly spending all of the funding received to date
- Ensuring the total monies awarded remain within the limited funding available
- Managing the expectations of businesses
- Helps limit the risk of delay in gaining access to further financial support for the Additional Restrictions Fund which has been indicated by Government.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

The decision is to approve an extension to an existing budget, utilising funds provided by Government for the specific purposes of business support. Existing policies and mechanisms of amendment are in place and Full Council has previously been informed and has agreed these.

The timescales required to take the decision to Full Council would run the risk of delaying the provision of support to businesses and potentially delay access to further financial support for the Additional Restrictions Fund which has been indicated by Government.

The below has been completed:	Name(s)	Date
Relevant Portfolio Holder(s) consulted	Cllr Kravis	16/03/2021
Relevant ward councillor(s) consulted	This potentially affects all wards & there is insufficient time to consult all Members	NA
The following are if appropriate / applicable: Yes/No. If yes the implications should be attached to this decision notice.		
Finance implications	No, as the scheme allows us to keep the cost within the funding provided	
Legal implications	No	
Links to corporate aims	Yes, helps to support the local economy	
Community Safety implications	No	
Environmental implications	No	
Equalities Impact Safeguarding Implications	A specific EIA has not been undertaken due to time constraints for launching this scheme. No disproportionate impacts are anticipated to affect any of the protected groups. There are NO safeguarding implications	
Risk management	The scheme contains appropriate measures to help prevent fraud	
Partnership implications	None	

Any conflicts of interest declared by Leader or Portfolio Holders consulted on the proposed decision. If Yes provide confirmation from Chief Executive to grant dispensation for the Leader's / Portfolio Holder's views to be considered.

Financial Implication Summary

The funding for this scheme (£1,377,895) is provided by Central Government. Our scheme has been designed in a way that prevents us from spending more than the allocated funding.

Central Government will be providing funding under the New Burdens funding arrangements to cover the administration costs.

Decision Maker

I am aware of the details of this decision(s), considered the reasons, options, representations and consultation responses and give my approval / agreement to its implementation.

Signed:

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read "James Hassett".

Name: James Hassett

Date: 16/03/2021

Note – This decision record is for decisions taken by Chief Executive/Director. The decision(s) can be implemented in accordance with the approved delegations.

Note: A copy should also be sent to the Governance Team – governance@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk