

Record of Decision taken by Chief Executive/Director

Decision title: Third 'Top-Up' Payment to extend the Budget for Somerset West and Taunton Council's Additional Restrictions Grant scheme (Discretionary Covid Business Grants Fund)

Chief Executive/Director making the decision: Andrew Pritchard

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Date of Decision: 12 January 2022

Details of decision:

The Chief Executive has agreed to include within the scope of the Council's Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) scheme a third 'top-up' payment of £305,025.57

The funding for this purpose is to be received from Government in January 2022 and will be used with immediate effect to provide directed financial support to businesses that remain impacted by the Covid restrictions.

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 SWT 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.

This was originally set up through an Urgency decision. The initial amount was £3,102,300 and the Urgency decision included the set-up of a budget and policy. The policy included the delegated authority to the Director of Development and Place to amend the scheme criteria should the need arise in line with the shape of restrictions/business need. In line with Council processes, the Urgency decision was then brought to the next Full Council for Councillor attention.

SWT has received two further 'top-up' amounts of ARG funding from Government since then as the pandemic has progressed and restrictions have been extended; £1,377,895 in January 2021 and £1,281,419 in June 2021. For each of the top up amounts received, due to the need to get the funds to businesses quickly, we have followed the process of making an Urgency Decision to add the funding to the existing ARG budget and following this up with a report to Full Council.

Putting the funds within the scope of the existing scheme has meant that officers have been able to turn around changes to funding criteria quickly with the sign off from the

Director of Development and Place. This has been done on a number of times over the past year, as national restrictions have been amended and the types of businesses affected have changed. Each change to criteria has been taken in consultation with either the Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration or the Leader of the Council.

The Government announced that Local Authorities will receive a third top up amount of ARG funding in January 2022. The amount for SWT is £305,025.57. This needs to be spent by 31 March 2022 (i.e disseminated to businesses) or otherwise returned to Government.

The Urgency Decision is therefore required in order to ensure that there is sufficient time to allocate funds, sign off a scheme, implement an application process and make payments within the tight timeframe determined by Government.

Government guidance:

The current guidance can be viewed at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1044351/additional-restrictions-grant-la-guidance.pdf

Reasons for proposed decision:

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

- Delivers on the Government expectation of a quick response in providing business support
- Manages the expectations of businesses
- Ensures there is sufficient budget available to award the appropriate funding to businesses in line with SWT policy

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 payments. The Government has stated that any ARG funding which remains unspent by 31 March 2022 must be returned to Government, so the decision has also been taken mindful of the need to achieve spend by 31 March deadline.

The below has been completed:	Name(s)	Date
Relevant Portfolio Holder(s) consulted	Cllr Kravis	11/01/2022
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 will allow 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 will contain appropriate measures to help prevent fraud including pre and post payment checks.	
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.

The Portfolio Holder declared an interest, but this was checked with Governance and was found not to be relevant to this decision. The decision is to add funds to the Additional Restrictions Grant budget, but does not set out what the criteria for the scheme will be.

Financial Implication Summary

The funding for this scheme (£305,025.57) is provided by Central Government. The administration of the scheme will be 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: _____

Name: Andrew Pritchard

Date: 12/01/2022

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