

Record of Decision taken by Chief Executive/Director

Decision title: Extended Scheme Rules and Guidance for applications to Somerset West and Taunton Council's Discretionary Business Grants Fund

Chief Executive/Director making the decision: James Hassett

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Date of Decision: 8 June 2020

Details of decision:

The Chief Executive has approved the adoption of an extended discretionary business grants scheme for Somerset West & Taunton. The scheme is detailed in Appendix 1.

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:

The guidance issued by Central Government on 13 May 2020 provided funding for local authorities to make discretionary grant payments to businesses to provide financial support where they have suffered financial loss as a result of Covid 19. This guidance can be viewed at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/885011/local-authority-discretionary-grants-fund-guidance-local-government.pdf

Government prescribed elements of the eligibility criteria for this funding, but left elements of this to the discretion of individual Local Authorities. Consequently we were required to develop, publish and implement our local approach to awarding this funding. Government were also clear that their intention was for Local Authorities to very quickly design and implement schemes in order to get funding out to businesses.

Consequently we quickly developed a scheme in consultation with the Portfolio Holder (Cllr Kravis) and agreed with the Chair of Scrutiny (Cllr Wren) that this scheme could be signed off by the Chief Executive under the urgent decision powers. The Chief Executive's decision dated 22 May 2020 refers.

The discretionary scheme has been operation for just over a week. Analysis of the volume of claims received to date suggests that we are likely to be still left with available funding at the end of the two week claim window in the current scheme. The Government's intention remains for us to distribute this money quickly. Consequently it is prudent to make a decision

now, to avoid delay when the two week claims window ends, on extended eligibility criteria for the award of the discretionary grants.

Full details of the extended eligibility criteria are set out in Appendix 1.

NB. The original scheme criteria did provide for a limited extension of the scheme for certain businesses with a rateable value of up to £51,000. However, in practice we do not believe that is going to be sufficient to attract sufficient applications to exhaust the funding. The revised criteria outlined in Appendix 1 extends the rateable value ceiling beyond the original £51,000 and consequently a further formal decision is required.

Reasons for proposed decision:

The scheme adopted, as detailed in the attached documents, provides an approach to awarding the discretionary grant funding that provides for:

- Our continuing the quickly distribute funding to businesses in need of financial assistance
- Ensuring the total monies awarded remain within the limited funding available
- Reasonable safeguards to ensure we target assistance to the categories specified by Government & to avoid fraudulent claims
- Is manageable from an administrative perspective
- Helps to manage the expectations of businesses & avoid unnecessary claims

Alternative options considered and rejected:

We believe the approach chosen best enables us to best target funding to the priority business identified by Government where they will meet the eligibility criteria set by Government around property related costs. The criteria also allows us to assist businesses in business rated premises to keep trading i.e. protecting the high street and we believe is more likely to target money at businesses with employees thereby helping to protect jobs. Other approaches were considered, but did not best meet these objectives.

The below has been completed:	Name(s)	Date
Relevant Portfolio Holder(s) consulted	Cllr Kravis	5 Jun 20
Relevant ward councillor(s) consulted	This potentially affects all wards & there is insufficient time to consult all Members	
The following are if appropriate / applicable: Yes/No. If yes the implications should be attached to this decision notice.		
Finance implications	No, as the proposed 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 implementing this scheme. No disproportionate impacts are anticipated to affect any of the protected groups. Help will be available within this scheme to charities, which will help them deliver their mission, and will therefore be of benefit to people within some of the protected groups. There are NO safeguarding implications	
Risk management	The proposed 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.

The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Kravis, has been consulted regarding this decision and has declared that his partner works for organisations who may benefit from these grants. I have considered this and am happy to grant dispensation for the Portfolio Holder's views to be considered.

Financial Implication Summary

The funding for this scheme is provided by Central Government. Our scheme has been designed in a way that presents 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: **James Hassett**

Date: 08 June 2020

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*