

Record of Decision taken by Chief Executive/Director

Decision title: Second '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: James Hassett

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Date of Decision: 14 May 2021

Details of decision:

The Chief Executive has agreed to include within the scope of the Council's Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) scheme a second 'top-up' payment of £1,281,419.

The funding for this purpose will be drawn down from Government in May 2021 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 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.

An initial amount of £3,102,300 was provided by Government for this purpose. This was followed by a 'top-up' amount of £1,377,895 provided in January 2021 making a budget total of £4,480,195.

Throughout the period of National Lockdown during the early part of 2021 there has been an increasingly stronger message from Government to Local Authorities that they should ensure that ARG funds are disseminated to businesses that require support as quickly as possible.

To further encourage this, in March 2021 the Government announced that a third payment of ARG funds would be made available to Local Authorities. However, the third payment would be made, only once the Local Authority had fully spent the first and second payments. Also, spend needed to have occurred by 30 June 2021 in order to claim the additional funds.

In April the Government issued a list of indicative top up allocations (Appendix 1). Somerset West and Taunton was allocated £1,281,419 provided we hit the Government's spend target of 30 June.

At 30 April 2021 SWT had distributed to businesses all but £149k of the original £4.48m budget.

Businesses in the Hospitality, Leisure and Accommodation sectors remain ordered to close and their suppliers and service providers also remain significantly impacted. SWT has policy in place for the continuation of the scheme so that we are able to provide support to the businesses in the sectors that remain impacted.

The May round of payment to implement this scheme requires £400k to finance it and it is anticipated that additional direct financial support will be required for some businesses thereafter.

With a budget of only £149k remaining, the decision was made that, as soon as funds of £1.28m are drawn down from Government for the second top-up amount, that this amount is added to the existing ARG budget. Funds are to be utilised in line with existing ARG policies and delegations to ensure that there is no delay in providing support.

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 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 access to further financial support for the Additional Restrictions Fund which has been indicated by Government.

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The below has been completed:	Name(s)	Date
Relevant Portfolio Holder(s) consulted	Cllr Kravis	11/05/2021
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.

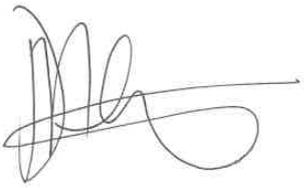
Financial Implication Summary

The funding for this scheme (£1,281,419) 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: _____

Name: Dawn Adey signed of behalf of James Hassett

Date: 14/05/2021

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