



Cabinet

Date and Time - **Monday 6 September 2021 - 6.30 pm**
Venue - **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea**

Councillors appointed to the Committee:

Councillor D.B. Oliver (Leader), S.M. Prochak, MBE (Deputy Leader), C.A. Bayliss, T.J.C. Byrne, K.P. Dixon, K.M. Field, H.L. Timpe and J. Vine-Hall

AGENDA

14. **ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT - DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS GRANTS SCHEME** (Pages 1 - 4)

Malcolm Johnston
Chief Executive

Agenda Despatch Date: 3 September 2021

At the discretion of the Leader, the order of the items set out in the agenda may be varied
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**Rother District Council aspiring to deliver...
an Efficient, Flexible and Effective Council, Sustainable Economic Prosperity,
Stronger, Safer Communities and a Quality Physical Environment**

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Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 6 September 2021

Title: Additional Restrictions Grant - Discretionary Business Grants Scheme

Report of: Ben Hook - Director of Place and Climate

Cabinet Member: Councillors Bayliss and Dixon

Ward(s): ALL

Purpose of Report: To agree a revised Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme to provide funding to a targeted range of support to businesses affected by the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. This follows confirmation of additional funding from the Government of £711,303.

Decision Type: Non-Key

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the new Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme outlined in the report be approved;
- 2) the Community Grants Panel be given delegated authority to approve grants to businesses not exceeding the available funds; and
- 3) the Chief Executive be granted delegated authority in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holders for Finance and Performance Management and Economic Development and Regeneration to determine the amounts of grants and detailed criteria.

Reasons for

Recommendations: To maximise the use of the available funding to support local businesses. Any unspent funds will have to be repaid to the Government.

Introduction

1. Members will be aware that the Council has operated a discretionary business grant scheme in various forms since the first countrywide lockdown in March 2020. This has always been in addition to the previous schemes which helped small businesses and the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. The current Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme (ARG) came to an end on the 30 July 2021. In total the Council paid out £2,856,772 in grants to businesses, in excess of the £2.7m of funding received. In doing so the Council qualified to receive a further round of grant funding of £711,303 that will need to be spent by 31 March 2022. Part of the funding has already been committed to meet the cost of the

grants awarded under the previous scheme in excess of the original £2.7m of funding. This means £554,531 is available for the new scheme.

Proposed Scheme

2. For this expected final round of funding it is proposed to target this funding to achieve a longer-term benefit for the local economy through protecting viable but vulnerable businesses and jobs. The scheme will focus on the following:
 - a) **Businesses forced to close temporarily due to staff self-isolating** – Members will be aware that many businesses have had to close temporarily as a result of staff having to self-isolate. Whilst the Government have relaxed the rules, it is proposed to earmark some (up to £150,000) of the additional funding to support businesses in this situation meet their costs, particularly staffing costs not met through the Government furlough scheme.
 - b) **Rural Businesses** – Rother has a significant rural economy and due to not only COVID but also BREXIT many are struggling to remain viable, especially through difficulties in recruitment. This would not extend to bed and breakfast or holiday type accommodation which have been supported throughout the pandemic and now should be benefiting from the continued staycation of much of the population.
 - c) **Empty Shops** – to support retail shopping it is proposed to fund the installation of temporary shop window displays to improve the look of vacant shops in our towns and villages. This grant will be available to shop owners/landlords.
 - d) **Empty Commercial Space** – in addition to retail, there are vacant business premises in the district. To encourage new businesses to the area it is proposed to provide one-off grants to cover fixed property costs such as rent for up to two years. This could also extend to cover business loan repayments for those businesses acquiring property in the district. This grant would not be open to landlords.
3. It is also hoped that the Council will work with its partners such as the Business East Sussex Growth Hub and Job Centre Plus, to ensure the funding achieves the best long-term impact for the local economy.

Application Process

4. It is proposed to require businesses to make a bid for a grant which will then be assessed by a panel. To save time it is proposed to utilise the experience, knowledge and officer support of the Community Grants Panel. This established group of Members, officers and external experts has the necessary awareness of the issues local to Rother to enable sound decisions to be made on the award of grants.
5. The bids will need to be assessed at the same time (in case awards need to be moderated to the available funding) and therefore it is proposed that a deadline of 31 October 2021 be used to receive applications by. The assessment process will need to be satisfied as to the viability of the business and take into consideration the impact on local economy and employment should it fail.

Consultation

6. Officers and Members are in dialogue with local business representatives in the Chambers of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses to help establish the detailed criteria for the new scheme. In addition, parish and town councils will be consulted to help identify viable businesses that may require further temporary support.

Conclusion

7. From the operation of these grants over an extended period of time, it is clear that many businesses continue to struggle despite most of the COVID restrictions being lifted or relaxed. By targeting the new funding, the Council can provide a better level of support to specific businesses/sectors and make best use of the funding provided. Members are therefore asked to approve the new ARG discretionary scheme as detailed in the report. It is also proposed to delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holders for Finance and Performance Management and Economic Development and Regeneration to determine the amounts of grants and detailed criteria. It is also proposed to delegate the decision to award a grant to the Community Grants Panel.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	External Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	No	Exempt from publication	No

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Appendices:	None.
Relevant Previous Minutes:	None.
Background Papers:	None.
Reference Documents:	None.

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