

OFFICER DECISION RECORD

<p>CMT Officer: Paul Medd, Chief Executive</p>	<p>Delegated Power Being Exercised: Chief Executive Urgency Powers: Table 4, Functions delegated to officers: Chief Executive, Paragraph 6, Page F16 of the Constitution.</p> <p>In cases of urgency to have a general power, after consultation with the member holding the appropriate portfolio in Cabinet, or the Chairman of the relevant committee as the case may be, to deal with any matter not delegated to any other officer by statute or other legislation on which the Chief Executive considers to require a decision before the next meeting of the appropriate body within the Council.</p>
<p>Subject of Decision: Payment of Business Grants</p> <p>Government guidance states that the purpose of the Additional Restrictions Grant allocation is to pay discretionary grants to local businesses but there is also discretion for local authorities to use the money received from government to provide wider business support, which may include the costs associated with the provision of advice and guidance and skills training. The government has stated that councils have until 31 March 2022 to spend the funds they have been allocated. Fenland District Council established its first discretionary grant scheme using its Additional Restrictions Grant allocation in November 2020. This is explained in the Officer Decision Notice dated 17 November 2020.</p> <p>Fenland District Council established a further discretionary grant scheme, known as the Supplementary Winter Lockdown Grant, in January 2021. This is explained in the Officer Decision Notice dated 26 January 2021.</p> <p>A further scheme was established for the self-employed in March 2021, together with a scheme for those experiencing extreme hardship.</p> <p>The government has continued to re-open the economy in England in line with the roadmap published on 22nd February 2021. The fourth and final stage of the lifting of restrictions commenced with effect from Monday, 19th July 2021.</p> <p>The Council has supported local businesses across the economy as they recover from the economic impact of the pandemic and await the further lifting of restrictions when the government deems it safe to do so. On Wednesday 3 March 2021 the government announced, as part of the budget, a new scheme known as the Restart Grant would be introduced from April 2021 to support businesses registered for business rates which were dependent on the 'in-person' provision of services to their customers. Under the rules of this scheme one-off grants of up to £18,000 are available to eligible businesses.</p> <p>The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, also announced in the budget that a further £425 million had been set aside to increase the Additional Restrictions Grant allocation available to local authorities. Subsequent communication from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) indicated that the Council's additional allocation was £645,314. Guidance issued by BEIS has stated that receipt of this additional allocation is dependent on the Council demonstrating that, as at 30 June 2021, it had spent 100% of the £2,941,739 of Additional Restrictions Grant monies previously provided by BEIS. This date was subsequently extended to 31st July 2021 and the</p>	

Council having fully utilised its allocation then received the further £645,314 as mentioned above in August.

In 2020/21 many businesses received a 100% discount on their business rates liability due to the application of the expanded retail relief, a relief linked to the coronavirus. The cost of applying the relief was fully funded by government. For the 2021 /22 financial year the government determined that a 100% discount would only be available for the period 1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021 and after that point, for the period 1 July 2021 - 31 March 2022, the discount would reduce to 66%.

Following discussions between officers and members, the Council has agreed to pay a grant to those businesses in receipt of expanded retail relief where, after application of all reliefs, the business has a net business rates liability in excess of £1,000. The grant will be paid on a sliding scale on the basis set out below:

Net business rates payable for 2021-22 after all discounts applied	Grant payable
£1,001 - £2,000	£1,000
£2,001 - £3,000	£1,500
£3,001 - £4,000	£2,000
£4,001 - £5,000	£2,000
£5,001 - £6,000	£2,000
£6,001 - £7,000	£2,000

The Council will proactively contact those businesses expected to be eligible as per information held within the business rates system and will only pay the grant once the business has confirmed:-

- My business is entitled to Expanded Retail Discount. In aggregate, taking account of all hereditaments registered for business rates in England, my business has not exceeded the cap of £2M for businesses required to close on 5 January 2021 as per Coronavirus regulations and £105,000 for all other businesses. Full details can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-rates-expanded--retail-discount-2021-to-2022-local-authority-guidance>
- My business is currently trading and intends to remain trading from its current premises in Fenland until at least the end of the 2021 /22 financial year
- The business will not be in breach of domestic subsidy rules by accepting this grant.
- The bank details for my business are unchanged from those used for the most recent business grant I received from Fenland District Council; and
- My business wishes to apply for a business grant on the basis set out above.

It is estimated that this will utilise approx. £300k of the most recent Additional Restrictions Grant allocation received from government and up to 200 businesses may be able to claim the grant. This would leave a balance of approximately £300k to be utilised by 31 March 2022. It is envisaged that the balance may be utilised as follows:

1. Combined Authority Community Renewal Fund

We have made an 'in principle' offer to contribute £200k of the additional ARG monies to support a Combined Authority (CA) bid to Central Government for Community Renewal Funding (CRF). The CA's bid is for a business start-up/early-stage support programme that includes a grants element and if successful the delivery through the CA Growth Works contract won by Gateley. The £200k contribution from Fenland would be match-funded by the CRF hence making our ARG monies go further.

In summary:

1. Supporting sustainable business start-ups and early-stage businesses is key to economic growth in Fenland
2. We would ensure that the business support provided in Fenland is both additional and appropriate for Fenland
3. We would attract match funding
4. Depends upon the CA application being successful
5. We have only agreed in principle now and would be subject to further FDC approval

2. Customer Relationship Management Software

Since being formed in March 2020, the Economic Growth Team have brought together information on local businesses from a number of sources including from the Covid-19 grants and proactively generated new information. The number of individual businesses listed on a single Excel spreadsheet now totals well over 2,000. The team also manages enquiries from businesses considering expansion, relocation etc also via an Excel spreadsheet. Utilising Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software will enable the Team to much more efficiently and effectively engage with local businesses and those looking to locate in Fenland. The cost of a CRM system for an initial two-year period is estimated to be between £40k to £60k. This two-year period would be used to establish the benefit of investing in a CRM system for a longer term. The above two schemes will require further discussion and a separate decision notice when further details emerge.

Decision Taken:

Having consulted with the Leader of the Council and Finance Portfolio Holder to delegate to the S. 151 Officer the ability to:

- administer the Grant Schemes in accordance with Government Guidance; and the local key principles; and
- recover the costs associated with the above in accordance with s.31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

As announced and required by Government in October 2020 and howsoever amended until such time as they are discontinued when this delegation shall also cease subject to any appropriate transition arrangements having been concluded and all costs appropriately recovered.

Reason for the Decisions:

Alternative Options Considered (if appropriate):

No alternatives available as waiting to agree the new schemes at the next scheduled meeting of Full Council will result in a delay to implementation and therefore the availability of funding to qualifying businesses.

Background/Reports/Information considered and attached:

Government Announcements

Portfolio Holder/Officer's Signature

Paul Medd, Chief Executive
Councillor Chris Boden, Leader and Portfolio Holder

Date: 16 September 2021

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Please forward to Democratic Services upon completion

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Date copy passed to Democratic Services	Implementation Date: (if not called-in) (Allow 5 clear working days after publication of decision)
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Circulation: Democratic Services, Portfolio Holder, Officer and Accountancy.