

Decision under Delegated Powers

Officer Making the Decision

Strategic Director of Corporate Services

Recommendation

That the policy for the operation of the Charnwood Business Grant Support schemes with effect from 11th October 2021 be approved as set out at Appendix A

Reason

To take action in relation to a matter which would otherwise have been submitted to Cabinet.

Authority for Decision

Delegation of Executive functions - (Section 8.3 of the Constitution states that the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors and Heads of Service can take such action as is required in the case of an emergency or urgency subject to:

- (i) consultation with the Leader (or, in the Leader's absence, the Deputy Leaders);
- (ii) consultation with the Chief Executive and relevant Strategic Directors in each case; and
- (iii) a report on the action taken being made to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

Decision and Date



30/09/2021

Simon Jackson

Strategic Director of Environmental & Corporate Services

Background

In response to the Coronavirus, the Government has announced a series of grants to support businesses affected by the pandemic. Charnwood has had in place policies to support the administration of schemes but an update is considered necessary due to additional funding being made available in August 2021 to support the Additional Restrictions Grant Fund.

Additional Restrictions Grant Fund

The Government initially allocated £3.71m towards this scheme, with a further announcement on 5th January of a top up to this fund of £1.65m. Despite this funding eligible to be used until March 2022 the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy have advised all funding must be spent by 30th June to receive a further top up of £1.16m to this fund.

This 'top'up was received in August and utilised for the previously agreed schemes, however there is now the desire to support a county wide business start up grant scheme.

The policy set out at Appendix A provide the full details of this most recent scheme.

Financial Implications

The cost of this grant scheme is fully funded by government; the Council has been allocated an additional amount of £1.16m on top of the previous £5.36m

The government note that the Council has received new burdens funding to cover the costs of administering this and other grant schemes; however, in general, grants administration will be covered out of existing budgets.

Consultation with Leader and Deputy Leader

Following an informal briefing, a fair draft of this policy was used to consult with the Leader and Deputy Leader who both confirmed that this could be used as the basis for the final policy. (There are no material differences between the consultation draft and final version as set out at Appendix A.)

Consultation with Chief Executive and relevant Strategic Directors

Consultation has been effectively concluded via the Council's COVID-19 ongoing organisational response to the pandemic. The Chief Executive and all Directors have concluded that the recommendations of this report are both necessary and urgent.

Risk Management

There are unavoidable inherent risks within the grants scheme around the prioritisation of different business sectors and the rationing of grant payments (hence it is inevitable that there will be disappointed applicants) but there are no specific risks associated with this decision.

Key Decision: Yes

Date included on Forward Plan

Background Papers: None

Appendix A Additional Restriction Grant Policy

APPENDIX A

Additional Restrictions Grant – September 2021

Background to Business Grants

- 1.1 Following the successful expenditure of the Council's entire Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) allocation by 31st July 2022 the Government allocated an additional top-up grant to Charnwood Borough Council to provide to its business community between 1st August 2021 and 31st March 2022. The total amount allocated was £1.16m
- 1.2 Accompanying this additional grant allocation was an updated ARG guidance document. This guidance provides high-level details as to what Local Authorities can and cannot do with this funding. It also identified that Local Authorities have the discretion to develop further criteria to suit local circumstances on top of the national criteria. It is these local criteria and the development of the associated grant scheme that is the subject of this local policy.
- 1.3 Local Authorities are required to set out the scope of how they intend to spend this funding, providing clear guidance on which types of business are being prioritised, as well as the rationale for the level of grant to be provided. This policy meets this requirement.
- 1.4 The Government intends that these grant schemes widen access to support for local businesses and stimulate local economies. Charnwood Borough Council will progress these payments as a matter of urgency but recognise the need to undertake a thorough assessment and appropriate due diligence before grants are paid
- 1.5 Where possible the Council has consulted with the business community and wider stakeholders to develop the proposed schemes that will be outlined in this policy. The Council has taken full account of the requirements of Government and the issues, threats, challenges and opportunities that have arisen locally and nationally over the past 18 months when developing these schemes.
- 1.6 Potential applicants should note that grants under this scheme will be subject to tax in line with the applicant's tax arrangements. For businesses, the Government advises this is only where there is an overall profit for the tax year once this award is included.

2 Total Funding Available

- 2.1 The Government has set each council's top up funding allocation and the allocation to Charnwood Borough Council was £1.16m. To date this funding has been utilised to support both the Business Development & Diversification Fund and the Local Discretionary Support Grant (LDSG).

- 2.2 The Government suggests that Local Authorities may wish to consider collaborating as they design their discretionary schemes to ensure consistency where they are working across a functional economic area, notably here the Leicester and Leicestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) area; and to ensure alignment and reduce duplication with any other local discretionary business grants that may have been established. The councils within the LLEP area are mindful of this suggestion and have worked with the LLEP and other councils in Leicestershire to develop a countywide scheme of business advisors aiming to support start-up businesses and to provide grant application referrals.
- 2.3 The funding available for individual businesses and charities will vary from council to council. There is no direct correlation between the funding allocation and the number of eligible businesses for the discretionary schemes being set up in each council area.
- 2.4 Therefore, it is likely that similar businesses in different council areas across Leicestershire (and indeed further afield) could be subject to different prioritisation and grant amounts.
- 2.5 As set out by the Government, the ARG are primarily and predominantly aimed at:
1. Providing direct grant support to businesses severely impacted by restrictions and the ongoing impact on the Covid Pandemic
 2. Supporting businesses that have been unable to access other business support grant schemes.
 3. Supporting home businesses and sole traders (without using ARG as a wage support mechanism for employees or owners of a business).
 4. Other business support measures that allow businesses to be the direct recipients of ARG funding.
 5. Distributing funding to a LEP or Growth Hub for the provision of wider business support.

3.0 Business Start-Up Programme

- 3.1 In order to complement the previous grant schemes and further invest ARG funds into the local economy of Charnwood it has been agreed that an amount of £150,000 will be allocated to a Business Start-up Programme.
- 3.2 A £7,500 contribution has been made to the LLEP to support the development of a 6-month programme of business support activity targeting businesses under 1 year old or those who imminently starting their business. This will be free to use at point of access.
- 3.3 Due to potential oversubscription this grant will be available only to businesses referred by business advisors in the first instance, albeit the

council reserves the right to welcome all applications should it choose to do so at a later date.

3.4 Grant eligibility criteria will be:

- Full completion of the application form along with any and all required supporting evidence.
- Responses to any relevant clarification(s) being fully and satisfactorily provided to the Council.
- Business can have been trading for no more than 1 year and must be trading at the time of application (proof will be requested – evidence of invoicing, business rates details, companies house detail etc)
- Applicant must have been referred to the Council by a recognised business advisor to be considered for a grant. For the purpose of this grant a recognised business advisor will be one contracted to the LLEP's countywide business support scheme, and / or the LLEP's Business Gateway service and / or the Restocking the Business Base scheme operated in Charnwood by Loughborough University.
- Business must be located within the Charnwood Borough

3.5 Submission of an application form to this fund does not guarantee funding will be awarded and this will be determined by the content of the application alone.

3.6 Consideration of the following will be priorities when assessing the outcome of an application:

- Whether the business is planning on matching any funding award should it be provided
- High level growth projections to demonstrate sustainability over the long term.
- Level of funding received to date (if applicable)
- What the funding will be used for and comprehensive explanation as to why it is needed

3.7 Who can apply?

- Businesses in an area governed by Charnwood Borough Council who are micro sized enterprises (10 employees or less and turnover of no more than £1.7 million).
- Businesses need to have been actively trading for no longer than 1 year at the date of application and still trading as at the time of application submission.

3.8 What can the grant be spent on?

The grant can only be spent on the following types of activity:

- 1-2-1 specialist advice to address the immediate needs of the business, e.g HR, accountants, legal, marketing, financial, H&S, IT / digital or sector specialists etc.
- New equipment
- New technology, IT, or telecommunications
- Improvements and investment to business premises.
- A marketing campaign to promote the new business [a full marketing plan must be submitted in this instance].

3.9 What is the amount of grant funding that can be applied for?

The maximum grant award is £10,000. For 1-2-1 specialist advice this is capped at £1,500. Grant awards will be calculated based on the information provided in the application

4.0 Application Process and Timescale

4.1 The fund will open on 11th October 2021 and will close on the 14th January 2022. The Council reserves the right to close the scheme earlier than the date above in the event that grant awards have already drawn down the maximum amount of funding available to the Council. Applications received after closure of the scheme will not be considered. The Council invites applications only via a referral from a business advisor (see 3.4 above) via email to DGf@charnwood.gov.uk. Once the email referral is received you will then be sent a link to complete the application on the Council's website www.charnwood.gov.uk

4.2 Applicants will be asked to confirm that by accepting any awarded grant payments they are in compliance with State Aid rules, that to the best of their knowledge they are eligible for the scheme and acknowledge that the Council reserves the right to recover any funding made in error or as the result of misleading information being submitted and that they are happy for their information to be stored in adherence to the relevant GDPR regulations.

4.3 Along with the application form, applicants will be required to submit 3 fully detailed and itemised quote(s) for all goods / services they are looking to purchase. These must be from verified / established companies and whose main business is the supply of these goods or services. We are unable to accept quotes from Ebay or similar auction / bid-based websites; or third-party organisations or intermediaries or organisations that have a conflict of interest with the business applying.

4.4 All applications will be checked for completeness and eligibility against the guidelines. If your application is incomplete or ineligible it will be rejected, and we will send you an e-mail outlining the reason(s). We are unable to progress incomplete or ineligible applications.

5.0 Assessment / decision-making process

- 5.1 Applications will be assessed by the Evaluation Panel which will review and consider the application in line with 3.6 above. All applications will have due diligence checks as part of the application assessment process to ensure compliance. This will include company status, financial details, trading history and any other matters the Panel considers appropriate to the nature of any particular application.
- 5.2 Grants will be awarded on a first come first served basis based on the date of receipt of a fully completed and eligible application until the available funding is committed. Incomplete applications will not be considered as received until all the required supporting information has been provided.
- 5.3 After you have purchased the goods/services you may be required to submit copies of the evidence of eligible expenditure.
- 5.4 The Council reserves the right to clawback grant payments from businesses if the terms of the grant award have not been complied with.
- 5.5 There is no right to appeal, and the decision of the Council is final. The Council's interpretation of this document is at its own discretion and it will be the final arbiter of the definitions contained within this policy

6.0 Managing the Risk of Fraud

- 6.1 The Council and the Government will not accept deliberate manipulation and fraud. Any business or person caught falsifying their records or the information submitted to gain a grant award will face prosecution and any funding issued will be subject to clawback, as may any grants paid in error.
- 6.2 The Government's grants management and counter fraud functions will provide local authorities with access to 'Spotlight', a digital assurance tool. This tool will also assist the Council with pre and post payments assurance, including identification of high-risk payments. There will also be joint working across councils and government departments in preventing fraud.
- 6.3 The Council also reserves the right to use any details submitted by businesses to check against national records and databases to highlight any potentially fraudulent activity.

7.0 Policy Review

- 7.1 This policy has been written in line with Government guidance. It will be subject to dynamic review as circumstances dictate and in line with future clarifications and changes that may be announced by the Government.

Strategic Director of Environmental & Corporate Services

Charnwood Borough Council

September 2021