

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 9 June 2020

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor David Thain (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Greg Chance, Brandon Clayton, Julian Grubb, Bill Hartnett, Mike Rouse and Craig Warhurst

Also Present:

Joanne Beecham, Nyear Nazir and Mark Shurmer

Officers:

Clare Flanagan, Sue Hanley, Mark Hanwell, Kevin Hiron, Bev Houghton, David Riley and Judith Willis

Committee Services Officer:

Jess Bayley

126. DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS GRANT POLICY

The Financial Support Manager presented the Discretionary Business Grant Policy for Members' consideration and in doing so highlighted the following for Members' consideration:

- The Government had introduced financial support for businesses, including grants for small businesses that were eligible for business rates relief, early in the lockdown for Covid-19.
- By the date of the meeting, £12.6 million grant funding had been distributed by the Council amongst local businesses.
- A number of local business which had been impacted by the lockdown had unfortunately not been eligible for funding under existing schemes.
- The government had recently announced that local authorities would be provided with an uplift, or additional funding, calculated on the basis of 5% of anticipated expenditure in response to Covid-19 by the Council as of 3rd May 2020. Redditch Borough Council had been allocated £724,000.
- This additional funding had been allocated to the Council in order to enable authorities to provide discretionary grant

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Chair

- funding to businesses that had been ineligible to apply for grant funding under the previous schemes.
- In order to be eligible to apply for a discretionary business grant businesses needed to be able to prove they had been in business since at least 11th March 2020, had not previously received grant funding related to Covid-19 and the business could not be in administration.
 - The government had advised the Council that in the first place a number of small businesses should be prioritised for discretionary business grant funding including; market stall traders, small bed and breakfast providers, Voluntary and Community Sector organisations occupying premises where they were not required to pay business rates and businesses occupying shared premises.
 - The Council had also identified businesses locally that, though impacted by the lockdown, had not previously been eligible to receive grant funding. These businesses would be allowed to apply for funding under the discretionary scheme.
 - The Council had identified tiers of businesses, in terms of the extent to which certain businesses would be prioritised for funding over others. The Government's priority businesses would be the first to receive funding followed by other local businesses identified by the Council as in need of financial assistance.
 - Following publication of the report a couple of adjustments had been agreed to the policy. This would include explicit reference to the fact that political parties would not be eligible to apply for a grant and funding would be provided to market traders on a pro rate basis.
 - The Council would advertise the opportunity for eligible businesses to apply for a discretionary business grant for a set period. Applications would be assessed at the end of that period and then funding provided within five days of the decision.

After the report had been presented Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's pre-scrutiny of the report, which had resulted in Members noting the report.
- The funding that had been allocated to Redditch Borough Council for the discretionary grant, as Members noted that two separate figures had been quoted in the agenda papers. Officers explained that a typographical error had been made in the policy and this would be amended.
- The deadline for applications to the discretionary business grants scheme. Officers advised that the deadline to apply would be 30th June 2020 and Officers would aim to start

advertising the funding opportunity as soon as a final decision had been taken on the matter.

- The extent to which schemes at other authorities in Worcestershire had been taken into account when developing the Discretionary Business Grant Policy for Redditch. Officers advised that the policies developed by Wyre Forest District Council and Wychavon District Council had been considered. There were a number of similarities between those Councils, though local priorities would vary.
- The potential for grant funding to be provided to taxi drivers and taxi firms. Members were informed that many taxi firms had a central office based in small premises and could be eligible for support through business rates relief.
- The action that would be taken to contact businesses that would be eligible to receive business grant funding and how they would be identified. The Committee was informed that a proactive approach would be adopted by Officers and, wherever possible, eligible businesses would be notified of the availability of the funding.
- Members concluded their discussions by thanking the Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources, the Financial Support Manager and their team for their hard work in respect of this matter.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the guidance for awards of discretionary grants is adopted; and**
- 2) the Executive Director for Finance and Corporate Resources is authorised to finalise the guidance and to make other decisions in relation to the payment of grants, following consultation with the Chief Executive and the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management.**

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.18 pm