

Covid-19 Discretionary Grant Fund Round Four

Date: 15th September 2021

Report of the Chief Officer for Culture and Economy

Report to Director of City Development

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- This report sets out a proposal to reopen the Council's Covid-19 Discretionary Grant Fund (DGF) for a fourth round of grant applications to help businesses and charities who are continuing to struggle due to Covid-19 related restrictions.
- The proposal will support the Best City Ambition to have 'A Strong Economy and a Compassionate City'. Providing support to businesses to ensure that they can bounce back from Covid-19. The proposal will help to protect jobs and livelihoods and ensure that our economy can recover from the pandemic.

Recommendations

- a) To reopen the Council's Covid-19 Discretionary Grant Fund to new applications against the grant criteria set out in appendix 1 of this report.
- b) To aim to have the Grant Fund open for a period of up to four weeks in October 2021 to enable grant applicants to apply through an online application form accessible through the Council's Website.
- c) To report progress on a regular basis including the number of grant applications received, those approved and paid to ensure that the Council maximises the Additional Restrictions Grant allocation from which grants are made.
- d) To ensure that where possible (and subject to the level of demand) grant applications are appraised and paid within twelve weeks of receiving all the information required to assess an application.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 The proposal is being brought forward as Local Authorities are being encouraged to focus remaining Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) funding on businesses which are closed or are severely impacted by Covid-19 restrictions. Leeds ARG allocation is £22,908,275 and to date £12.915m has been spent supporting 3,000 businesses / charities. After taking account of a number of existing ARG commitments Leeds has approximately £6.5m available to support businesses/charities who have been impacted by the pandemic. This must be defrayed before 30 March 2022 or returned to central government.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

Lead Member for Culture and Economy was consulted on the 6th September 2021 on this proposal

- 2 This proposal covers the whole of Leeds Metropolitan District and is designed to help businesses and charities operating in sectors or locations which continue to struggle due to the pandemic.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 3 Consultation on the development of Covid-19 business grants has been ongoing and has been undertaken with the following groups:
- Elected members through the Members Outbreak Control Board.
 - Business representative bodies through the Leeds City Council silver command group for Business and Economy including the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, Leeds BID, Leeds Hotels and Venues Association and Tech Nation.
 - Independent businesses through the representative group established as part of Covid-19 Emergency Structures.
 - Through the West Yorkshire Combined Authority with Business Support teams of Local Authorities (LAs) across West Yorkshire (WY) and those of LAs in York, Harrogate, Selby and Craven.

Equality

- 4 As with all our Covid-19 business support schemes the information we provide on the Leeds City Council website about this scheme and the application form will be reviewed to ensure that they meet web accessibility legislation. There will be the ability for an applicant to flag that they require language support if required.

What are the resource implications?

- 5 The Economic Development team will administer the 4th Round of Covid-19 Discretionary Grants and be responsible for ensuring compliance in line with the criteria set by central government for the use of ARG funding. Resources have been re-deployed from Economic Development to support the administration and appraisal process. Five temporary posts have been created to help with the anticipated increase in workload, these posts are fully funded through the New Burdens funding received from central government for the delivery of Covid-19 business support. The broader work of the Economic Development team will be impacted by the redeployment of staff but officers will work to ensure this is minimised as far as possible.

What are the legal implications?

- 6 Grants will be provided pursuant to Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.

As set out in the Government's guidance, grants must be provided so as to be compliant with the provisions of the Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) with the European Union.

- 7 Grants awarded through the 4th Round must comply with the government's subsidy control bill as published by the Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy on the 30th June 2021.
Applicants will be required to complete a declaration giving details of any other subsidies or Covid related assistance they have already received. Grants will not be provided where the Council is not satisfied that the provisions of the TCA will be complied with.
- 8 In administering any grant scheme, the Council must have due regard to the Government guidance and must act in a proportionate, objective, rational and reasonable manner. In addition, the Council must also act in a business-like manner with reasonable care, skill and caution and with a due and alert regard to the interests of the council tax and business rate payers of Leeds.
- 9 The recommendations contained in this report are in line with the original Key Decision taken on 19 November 2020 (reference D52499) which determined the approach to the administration of Leeds City Council Covid-19 Local Restrictions Support Grants and Additional Restrictions Grants both in relation to the initial funding and any subsequent funding and delegated the approval to award grants under it as set out in the Director of City Development's Sub-Delegation Scheme.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 10 To inform scheme design, Officers took into account data available from a range of sources including the council's business rates database and data gathered during the administration of previous rounds of the Discretionary Grant Funds. Whilst there remains a risk that insufficient resources are in place to administer grants, this will be mitigated by introducing an application window for the 4th Round of Discretionary Grant Funds and by additional staff funded by burdens payments.

Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

Options, timescales and measuring success

11 a) What other options were considered?

The Council has in setting the proposed grant criteria focused assistance on existing businesses who can clearly demonstrate a significant loss of income due to the pandemic. The proposed grant amounts and eligible costs reflect the experience of the previous three rounds of discretionary grant funding.

b) How will success be measured?

Success will be measured by the number of businesses assisted and the time taken to appraise and pay grant assistance to eligible businesses. The Economic Development Service will also (subject to resources being available) aim to carry out an evaluation of businesses assisted to gather intelligence on the impact of the pandemic on businesses, particular sectors and locations.

c) What is the timetable for implementation?

To aim to launch Round 4 on the 27th September 2021, to have the scheme open for applications for a 4 week period and to aim to appraise all grant applications and all payments processed by the end of the 2021/22 financial year.

Links to previous decisions can be found here:

- Covid-19 Local Restrictions Support Grant and Additional Restrictions Grant Schemes including Discretionary Grant Funds [Council and democracy \(leeds.gov.uk\)](https://leeds.gov.uk/council-and-democracy)
- Covid-19 Additional Restrictions Grant Phase Two [Council and democracy \(leeds.gov.uk\)](https://leeds.gov.uk/council-and-democracy)

Appendices

12 Proposed DGF Round 4 Grant Criteria

Background papers

13 None