

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 24 JANUARY 2022

PART I - NOT DELEGATED

19. OMNICROM DISCRETIONARY GRANT SCHEME (DoF)

1. Summary

1.1 This report enables the Committee to make its recommendations on the Council's Policy on Grants to Business to recognise loss of income as a result of the Omnicrom variant of Covid-19.

2. Details

Context

2.1 The Omnicrom Hospitality and Leisure Grant provides local councils with one-off grant funding to support to hospitality, leisure and accommodation businesses, in recognition that the rise of the Omnicrom variant means that some businesses are likely to struggle. The aim of the Omnicrom Hospitality and Leisure Grant scheme is to support businesses:

- that offer in-person services
- in the hospitality, leisure and accommodation sectors

2.2 There is a national statutory scheme, aimed at business rate payers, that is subject to a separate policy and grant funding and a discretionary scheme for which the Council has received £228k. This additional grant funding has to be used to provide direct grants to businesses and councils are encouraged to top up this funding with previous ARG funding. Three Rivers has approximately £0.3M in ARG funding that is yet to be allocated to specific schemes.

2.3 The Government has specified that businesses must make new applications for funding under the Omnicrom grant scheme and has specified certain information that must be provided. The Council, therefore, is not able to make additional payments to businesses that have previously received support but instead will need to open a new application window. For the statutory scheme applications will end on the 25th of February to allow grants to be processed and pre-application checks to be carried out before the 28th deadline.

2.3 For the discretionary grant this will be from the 25th of January to the 15th of February, a period of three weeks. All grants have to be awarded by the 28th of February and the amount of the discretionary award can only be finalised once the application window is closed as the policy allows grants to be scaled back, or up, should demand exceed the funding available.

2.4 A right of appeal to the Head of Revenues and Benefits has been to provide a more structured process for those unhappy with any decision in the light of previous experience. In order to maintain an independent review, the Revenues Manager (or Benefits Manager in her absence) will make any determination required by staff processing the applications.

2.4 Appendix 1 contains the proposed principles for the discretionary scheme and Appendix 2 the policy for the Statutory Scheme.

3. Options/Reasons for Recommendation

3.1 The recommendation below enables the Committee to implement schemes for Omicron grants to businesses.

4. Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

4.1 The recommendations are seeking the approval of the Committee to the principles for distribution of the discretionary Omicron business grants to allow officers to produce the detailed grant policy and make payments of grants to businesses before the deadline of 28 February 2022. It also seeks formal approval for the policy for the statutory scheme which implements the national scheme.

5. Equal Opportunities, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Customer Services Centre, Communications, Health & Safety & Website Implications

5.1 The decision will allow the payment of support to businesses meeting the grant requirements to assist them with the financial impact of the Omicron variant.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 The recommendations allow the Council to distribute the additional grant funding of £228k it has received in respect of Omicron for direct grants to businesses and provides for the allocation of further funding from the Council's remaining unallocated ARG pot.

6.2 All statutory grants made in line with the policy will be funded directly by Government.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 Following the approval of the Omicron Grants – Additional Restrictions Grant (Discretionary) principles, the Council will produce a formal policy for distribution of the grant funding.

8. Risk Management Implications

8.1 Risks will be managed through the formal grant policy.

9. Recommendations

That Committee

- (a) Approve the principles for distribution of the grant set out at Appendix 1
- (b) Delegate to the Director of Finance approval of the final grant policy and allocation of the residual ARG funding.
- (c) Approve the statutory grant policy set out at Appendix 2 to implement the national scheme.

Report prepared by:

Alison Scott – Director of Finance

Background Papers:

None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Proposed principles for the discretionary scheme

Appendix 2 - The policy for the Statutory Scheme

Omicron Grants –Additional Restrictions Grant (Discretionary)

The types of business this scheme is intended to help, are those working from commercial premises but who do not pay rates, and businesses based from home or alternative locations within Three Rivers. We will support smaller businesses and those operating in the supply chain to the larger businesses in the hospitality, leisure and accommodation sectors. Examples of businesses include, but are not limited to:

- hospitality, accommodation & leisure
- personal care
- the travel and tourism sector, including group travel, travel agents and tour operators, coach operators
- wedding industries
- nightclubs
- theatres
- events industries
- wholesalers
- English language schools
- breweries
- freelance and mobile businesses (including caterers, music and events, hair, beauty and wedding related businesses)
- gyms, and other businesses that have not received other grant funding
- taxi drivers holding a Three Rivers license and resident in Three Rivers.

We will pay grants for businesses renting premises but not directly paying business rates in line with the statutory grant scheme:

£1,500 for businesses whose rent is below £15,000 per year

£2,000 for businesses whose rent is between £15,000 and £51,000 per year, and

£3,000 for businesses whose rent is above £51,000 per year.

For home based businesses we will give a grant of £500.

The scheme is open to all businesses with an income of at least £5,000 per annum prior to the pandemic which should be evidenced via copies of accounts submitted to Companies House or tax returns.

All businesses are required to evidence a direct loss of income resulting from the current Covid-19 situation to qualify for the grant, for example this could include copies of bank statements, evidence of cancellations of events/orders or company accounts.

For businesses claiming a higher grant based on annual rents, you will need to provide evidence of the rent payable otherwise you will be paid as if a home-based business.

Applications can be submitted online from the 17th January to the 7th February after which time grants will be paid. Should the total value of approved applications be more than the funding available, the Council reserves the right to reduce the level of individual grants payable. Alternatively if the total value of applications is less than the funding available, the Council reserves the right to increase the level of grant. Any changes could be applied across the board or only relation to an individual category of business at the council's discretion.

Any businesses refused the grant have the right of appeal to the Head of Revenues and Benefits whose decision will be final. Any appeals should be submitted within 5 working days of the receipt of the notification that you have been refused the grant to allow the Council to meet the Government's deadlines for payment of the grant. Details of how to appeal will be set out in the notification.