

## ***Report to the Cabinet***

***Report reference: C-071-2020/21***

***Date of meeting: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021***



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolios: Customer and Corporate Services – Cllr. S Kane  
Finance and Economic Development – Cllr. J Philip**

**Subject: Amendments to the Additional Restrictions Grant Policy for  
Business Support**

**Responsible Officers: Rob Pavey (01992 564211)  
John Houston (01992 564094)**

**Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That Cabinet approve:**

- 1. That those businesses already awarded a grant under the Additional Restrictions Grant Policy received a further payment for the same amount;**
- 2. That the ARG scheme is extended to:
  - a) taxi drivers licensed by EFDC who will receive a single payment of £500 each;**
  - b) driving instructors with Approved Driving Instructor (ADI) registration who will receive a single payment of £1,000 each;**
  - c) kennels and catteries.****
- 3. The use of up to £500,000 to fund key programmes in the priority areas identified in this report as part of an Economic Resilience Fund.**
- 4. That future changes to the ARG scheme are delegated to the Customer Service Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Corporate Services and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.**

### **Executive Summary:**

The pandemic has impacted on businesses right across the Epping Forest District. The Council has worked hard to ensure the timely distribution of central government and local government support funding direct to local businesses. This direct support is critical to the continued survival of many businesses in a variety of different sectors. This report reviews current performance and suggests revisions to policy and approach linked to experience of administration and the needs of local businesses. Amendments to current policy and establishment of new funding priorities for local action are included.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

To ensure practice on business grant distribution and business support reflects changes in the needs of local businesses and the local economy.

### **Other Options for Action:**

To maintain the current approach.

### **Report:**

1. In November 2020 the Government announced an extra fund for Councils to support businesses known as Additional Restrictions Grants (ARG). The amount of the fund was calculated as £20 per head of population for each district. This fund amounted to £2.6m for Epping Forest District Council as a one-off payment which was to last until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. Each authority was to devise its own scheme to distribute funds bearing in mind the timeframe until the end of next financial year.
2. The Government laid out criteria around where the scheme was to be targeted. The intention was to support those businesses which – while not legally forced to close (closed businesses receive separate grants) – are nonetheless severely impacted by the restrictions. This was aimed at:
  - businesses which supply the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors
  - businesses in the tourism and events sectors
  - business required to close but which do not pay business rates
3. Councils had their own discretion to prioritise funding to certain groups within their own local economy, particularly those who had received limited or no support thus far. The Council's current ARG policy is laid out in Appendix 1 and was approved by the Council Leader under Emergency Powers in order to get payments out to struggling businesses as soon as possible. The first phase of these grant payments has completed and its possible now to take stock and assess where the Council can look at immediate additional financial support for businesses and longer-term initiatives for the use of the ARG fund.
4. The total spend on the first phase of the ARG fund has seen around £500,000 in grants being awarded. This leaves the authority with £2.1 m available for further grant awards and the ARG scheme also allows for initiatives to support the local economy other than by direct business grants.
5. The original grant award levels within the policy were targeted at small and micro businesses in line with the district's previous business grant discretionary policy:
  - £3,000 where 'small' businesses meet the required criteria
  - £2,000 where 'micro' businesses meet the required criteria
  - £1,000 where all 'other' businesses meet the required criteria including regular market traders

The recommendation is that the initial grant payment that the business received is repeated as a one-off award eg. a qualifying small business would receive an additional £3,000 payment. This would take the spend on the ARG scheme to £1m.

6. In addition to this, there are other aspects of the business community that have been identified as not receiving support despite the best efforts of the initial policy to cover all areas. There relate to kennels and catteries which require the business of holidaymakers leaving their pets with them whilst on vacation. Clearly this business sector has been adversely affected during Covid's restrictions and it is recommended that this business sector is included within the policy. There are 18 of these qualifying kennels and catteries around the district.

7. Another area where support could be provided is to individual taxi drivers who are licensed with this authority for private hire or as hackney carriage licence holders. The number of journeys undertaken by taxis has reduced dramatically. The current ARG policy recognises taxi companies but not individual taxi drivers. According to Licensing information there are around 500 potential beneficiaries. Other authorities have started to recognise that these drivers have largely missed out on support and have awarded one-off payments to them. A typical award amount has been £500 and it is recommended that a £500 one-off payment is made to those taxi drivers who are licensed by this authority. This would amount to £250,000.

8. A similar position applies to Approved Driving Instructors resident in the district whose trade has been severely curtailed during the Covid pandemic and indeed negated during the full lockdown. It is recommended that a payment of £1,000 is made to each such driving instructor.

8. From the ARG fund it is possible to top-slice an amount from the grant to help wider economic activity and development in a new economic resilience fund, rather than direct grants to businesses, with the intention of future-proofing the local economy.

9. The Economic resilience fund will provide direct investment into sectors in the district that have been severely impacted by the pandemic and which have significant potential long-term benefit to the district's development.

10. The fund will be established following approval by cabinet in March and will consist of the top slice of up to one third of the funds unallocated from ARG, amounting to a one-off sum of £500k. The remaining two thirds will be retained for a programme of enhanced grants direct to businesses and expansion of the eligibility criteria where possible, linked to experience of local business sectors that were inadequately served initially.

11. The fund will focus on a number of key priorities through targeted practical programmes to encourage and enable growth in sectors that have been highlighted by members and partners. The suggested priorities for the fund are:

- A Town centres and High Street Fund; to implement the recommendations of the Town Centre appraisals, which are currently being approved by Cabinet, and the investment in the 'Clickit Local' and 'Maybe' packages
- A Young Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Skills fund to; support the development of young entrepreneurs business products and ideas and expand the technical apprenticeship offer within the council, particularly in the Highway Ranger sector.
- A digital infrastructure and Applications fund; to enhance the roll out of access to the highest connectivity speeds and use of new technology to support business in the area, including

enhanced training and awareness for local businesses on access to new platforms for growth

- The Rural fund; to rollout where appropriate in rural communities the learning from town centre and other packages of support, in consultation with stakeholders, also focusing on retaining local infrastructure, and promoting opportunities for the visitor economy and staycations

12. Officers have already begun discussion with other public sector partners such as ECC and business representatives to understand how these priority programmes can be delivered in a co-ordinated manner at a local level.

13. Taking the extensions to the current ARG scheme, additional payments and local economic development fund this would leave the authority with £800,000 remaining from the ARG fund of £2.6m to fund further ARG grants until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. This is not the totality of grant funding left for businesses as there are at least 10 other business grants that have been or are in operation to support businesses during Covid. Additional funding continues to be received from Government as Covid circumstances change and at the time of writing it is not known how the current Lockdown will be lifted and the type of grants that would then be in operation. Should, during 2021/22 there is anticipated to be an underspend on the remaining ARG funding available further options to use this money will be presented.

14. The situation regarding Covid remains fluid including how the pandemic affects businesses. It would greatly assist businesses if the Council were to be able to be more responsive in meeting business need. It is therefore recommended that future changes that are needed to the ARG policy can be undertaken by the Customer Service Director in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Corporate Services and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.

**Resource Implications:**

£2.6m has been provided by the Government for Covid Additional Restrictions

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

None

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

None

**Consultation Undertaken:**

None

**Background Papers:**

Additional Restrictions Grant Guidance from the Government

**Risk Management:**

None



# Equality Impact Assessment

1. Under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, when making decisions, Epping District Council must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, ie have due regard to:
  - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
  - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
  - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
2. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:
  - age
  - disability
  - gender
  - gender reassignment
  - marriage/civil partnership
  - pregnancy/maternity
  - race
  - religion/belief
  - sexual orientation.
3. In addition to the above protected characteristics you should consider the cross-cutting elements of the proposed policy, namely the social, economic and environmental impact (including rurality) as part of this assessment. These cross-cutting elements are not a characteristic protected by law but are regarded as good practice to include.
4. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) document should be used as a tool to test and analyse the nature and impact of either what we do or are planning to do in the future. It can be used flexibly for reviewing existing arrangements but in particular should enable identification where further consultation, engagement and data is required.
5. Use the questions in this document to record your findings. This should include the nature and extent of the impact on those likely to be affected by the proposed policy or change.
6. Where this EqIA relates to a continuing project, it must be reviewed and updated at each stage of the decision.
7. All **Cabinet, Council, and Portfolio Holder reports must be accompanied by an EqIA**. An EqIA should also be completed/reviewed at key stages of projects.
8. To assist you in completing this report, please ensure you read the guidance notes in the Equality Analysis Toolkit and refer to the following Factsheets:
  - Factsheet 1: Equality Profile of the Epping Forest District
  - Factsheet 2: Sources of information about equality protected characteristics
  - Factsheet 3: Glossary of equality related terms
  - Factsheet 4: Common misunderstandings about the Equality Duty
  - Factsheet 5: Frequently asked questions
  - Factsheet 6: Reporting equality analysis to a committee or other decision making body

## Section 1: Identifying details

Your function, service area and team: Customer

If you are submitting this EqIA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team:

Title of policy or decision: Amendments to the Additional Restrictions Grant Policy

Officer completing the EqIA: Tel: 4211 Email: rpavey@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Date of completing the assessment: 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021

## Section 2: Policy to be analysed

2.1	<p>Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project? Change</p>
2.2	<p>Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): To provide financial support to businesses during the Covid period</p> <p>What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (ie decommissioning or commissioning a service)? The award of grants to qualifying businesses and establishment of a fund to support economic development</p>
2.3	<p>Does or will the policy or decision affect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• service users</li><li>• employees</li><li>• the wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities?</li></ul> <p>It will affect small businesses in our community</p> <p>Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate? Financial support</p>
2.4	<p>Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources? Grants funded by Government</p>
2.5	<p>Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies and how, if applicable, does the proposed policy support corporate outcomes? Supporting the local economy</p>

### **Section 3: Evidence/data about the user population and consultation<sup>1</sup>**

As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, eg service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).

3.1	What does the information tell you about those groups identified?  Businesses need financial support during the Covid lockdown period.
3.2	Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision? Feedback obtained from businesses during Covid period
3.3	If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary: Consultation would delay payments to intended recipients



## Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

<b>Description of impact</b>	<b>Nature of impact</b> Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why)	<b>Extent of impact</b> Low, medium, high (use L, M or H)
Age	N	L
Disability	N	L
Gender	N	L
Gender reassignment	N	L
Marriage/civil partnership	N	L
Pregnancy/maternity	N	L
Race	N	L
Religion/belief	N	L
Sexual orientation	N	L

## Section 5: Conclusion

		Tick Yes/No as appropriate	
5.1	Does the EqIA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	If ' <b>YES</b> ', use the action plan at <b>Section 6</b> to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place.



**Section 7: Sign off**

**I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately.  
(A typed signature is sufficient.)**

Signature of Head of Service:

Date:

Signature of person completing the EqIA: Rob Pavey

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021**Advice**

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqIA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqIA for your records. If this EqIA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, eg after a consultation has been undertaken.