

**Classification:** Public

**Key Decision:** No

## **Gravesham Borough Council**

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 4 January 2022

**Reporting officer:** Sarah Parfitt, Director (Corporate Services)

**Subject:** COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund

### **Purpose and summary of report:**

To inform Members of the COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund.

To seek Member approval to delegate authority for the design and implementation of the COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund Scheme to the Director (Corporate Services), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Performance & Administration.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Cabinet delegate authority to the Director (Corporate Services), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Performance & Administration, to develop a COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund Scheme and associated policy, and to make the necessary arrangements to assess eligibility and determine award of funding to eligible businesses.
2. Cabinet delegate authority to the Director (Corporate Services) to make any further technical amendments to the scheme where further government advice is issued and ensure that the Portfolio Holder for Performance & Administration is kept informed of any such amendments required.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 On 25 March, the Government announced plans to provide an additional business rates support package, worth £1.5 billion, to support businesses in England affected by COVID-19 but not eligible for existing support linked to business rates.
- 1.2 On 15 December, the Government released guidance on the COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) intended to support billing authorities, such as Gravesham, in administering the CARF business rates scheme. The guidance sets out the scope of CARF and the criteria which local authorities should have regard to when determining the awarding of business rates relief from the fund.

## **2. Funding Received**

- 2.1 A total of £1,762,857 has been allocated to Gravesham Borough Council for the CARF Scheme, which is required to be applied to the business rates account of eligible businesses during the 2021/22 billing period (i.e. 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022).
- 2.2 The council will be required to comply with regular reporting requirements to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on distribution of funds through the scheme and there will be reconciliation exercise in due course to confirm reliefs awarded by the council from the funding received.

## **3. Scheme Design and Administration**

- 3.1 It is for each local authority to design, adopt and implement the scheme within their authority boundary and determine award of financial support under their scheme. It is also for each authority to decide the level of relief for individual hereditaments.
- 3.2 The guidance from Government does, however, set out some expectations in how the funding is expected to be used to grant reliefs to eligible businesses:
  - not award relief to ratepayers who for the same period of the relief either are or would have been eligible for the Extended Retail Discount (covering Retail, Hospitality and Leisure), the Nursery Discount or the Airport and Ground Operations Support Scheme (AGOSS),
  - not award relief to a hereditament for a period when it is unoccupied (other than hereditaments which have become closed temporarily due to the government's advice on COVID-19, which should be treated as occupied for the purposes of this relief), and
  - direct support towards ratepayers who have been adversely affected by the pandemic and have been unable to adequately adapt to that impact.
- 3.3 Given the speed with which the council is required to act, delegated authority is sought to be given to the Director (Corporate Services) to develop a COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund Scheme and associated policy, and to make the necessary arrangements to assess eligibility and determine award of funding to eligible businesses. In developing a scheme for Gravesham, it is intended to work with other Kent Authorities in early January to seek to develop common principles for individual authority schemes, alongside taking advice from professional bodies such as the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV). As per the recommendations of this report, the final scheme design will be agreed in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Performance & Administration.

## **4. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 4.1 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1041468/CARF\\_LA\\_Guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1041468/CARF_LA_Guidance.pdf)

Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
<b>Legal</b>	The COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund will be administered through discretionary Business Rate Relief powers under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	Payment of funds by Government to the council will be made 'on account' through a Section 31 payment to ensure there is no cashflow impact on the council of administering the scheme. At the end of the billing year (i.e. after 31 March 2022) the council will be required to take part in a payment reconciliation exercise to consider any difference between the funds provided by Government and reliefs issued by the council, with any difference paid to or recovered from the council.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	<p>The aim of the payments proposed under the discretionary scheme are to support local businesses affected by COVID-19 but not eligible for existing support linked to business rates. The financial risk to the council is minimised by funding being provided on account by Government for the Scheme. Anticipated demand will need to be factored into any scheme design and associated levels of relief to be awarded.</p> <p>Sufficient checks and controls will be incorporated into any application and payment process and through post-payment review processes to protect against fraud and error.</p>
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? Advice will be sought from the Data Protection Officer as scheme design and eligible businesses are confirmed.</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at <a href="mailto:gdpr@medway.gov.uk">gdpr@medway.gov.uk</a>. N/A</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. N/A</p> <p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. N/A</p> <p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	#2 Place: a dynamic borough; defined by a vibrant and productive local economy taking advantage of growth in the area, supported by its strong and active community.

<b>Climate Change</b>	N/A
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	No direct implications.
<b>Digital and website implications</b>	Any application process will be made available on the council website.
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	No direct implications.