

PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR BUSINESS, HIGH STREETS & TOURISM AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE, INVESTMENT AND CORPORATE SERVICES DECISION – 2 FEBRUARY 2022

ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT -OMICRON SCHEME

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In response to the Omicron variant, on 21 December 2021 the government announced the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant and an additional funding allocation (Top-up 3) to the Additional Restrictions Grant. Both schemes will provide additional support to business who have been severely impacted by reduced business activity due to the spread of the Omicron variant.
- 1.2 This Portfolio Decision is in respect of the proposed allocation of this new Top-Up 3 fund via an Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) Omicron scheme.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 ARG is designed to support businesses, severely impacted by Omicron, that are not eligible for the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant.
- 2.2 To date there have been 6 separate rounds of New Forest ARG grants to businesses, covering the impact of the restrictions from 5 November 2020 to 19 July 2021, as follows:
- The New Forest Taxi Driver Grant: specific support for the New Forest’s licenced taxi drivers during the winter of 2020/21.
 - ARG issue 1, Issue 2, issue 3 and issue 5 supported New Forest businesses of any size and structure, including those based in a domestic dwelling, within specific sectors severely impacted by the Covid restrictions.
 - ARG issue 4 recognised the additional impact of the restrictions on medium-sized businesses (those employing 50 – 250 employees) within specific sectors severely impacted by the Covid restrictions.
 - In addition, ARG grants also provided sponsorship of New Forest Business Partnership’s Business Support Events and support for Hythe Ferry.
- 2.3 The attached ARG Omicron policy proposal will ensure all ARG funds are allocated by the deadline of 31 March 2022.
- 2.4 The allocation for ARG Omicron is £605,986. This is a combination of the new Top-Up 3 allocation of £337,669 combined with the residual from Top-Up 2.
- 2.5 The funding for ARG Omicron is far less than for previous ARG schemes; these previous schemes had sufficient budget to support a wide range of business sectors not eligible for the rates based grants, including those based in a domestic dwelling.

In addition, rate paying businesses such as in personal care and the travel sector, previously eligible for support through the Local Restrictions Support Grants (LRSG) or Restart Grants, are not eligible for support through the Omicron Hospitality & Leisure scheme.

- 2.7 For these reasons, there are now greater numbers of businesses that fall outside of the support of the Omicron Hospitality & Leisure scheme and are potentially seeking support from ARG, albeit the scheme has a much reduced budget.
- 2.8 Therefore, in order to prioritise limited ARG Omicron scheme support to those businesses, severely impacted by reduced business activity due to the spread of the Omicron variant, the scheme will be prioritised and administered as stated in the attached policy document.
- 2.9 These proposals have been developed in consultation with the Budget Responsible Officer, Ryan Stevens, Service Manager, Revenue and Benefits.
- 2.10 The ARG schemes are administered by the Economic Development team, with support from the Revenue and Benefits team and the budget responsible Officer Ryan Stevens, Service Manager, Revenue and Benefits.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no financial implications to the Council as the ARG scheme is fully funded by Central Government.

4. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no crime and disorder implications.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no environmental implications.

6. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no equality and diversity implications.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That the Additional Restrictions Grant - Omicron Policy be approved.

8. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS ENDORSEMENT

We have agreed to the recommendation in this report.

Cllr Jeremy Heron, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Investment and Corporate Services

Sign: Cllr Jeremy Heron Date: 2 February 2022

Cllr Michael Harris, Portfolio Holder for Business, High Streets & Tourism

Sign: Cllr Michael Harris Date: 2 February 2022

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Background Papers:

Appendix 1: Additional Restrictions Grant -
Omicron Policy

Date on which notice given of this Decision – 2 February 2022

