

SUPPORT TO BUSINESSES, HOUSEHOLDS AND THE COMMUNITY

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To note the scale of administration that the Council has provided in order to support our businesses, households and communities over the previous 12 months.
- 1.2 To note the ongoing support to be administered by the Council from 1 April 2022.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report follows on from the previous report presented to the panel in June 2021.
- 2.2 This purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the support given to businesses via the government's various Business Support Schemes and the support given to our communities in 2021/22. The report also summarises the support being administered from 1 April 2022.
- 2.3 Since 1 April 2021, the following support to businesses and households has been administered:

BUSINESS SUPPORT GRANTS (Section 3)

- 1. Restart Grants
- 2. Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant
- 3. Additional Restrictions Grant
- 4. Expanded Retail Discount

SUPPORT FOR HOUSEHOLDS (Section 4)

- 5. Test and Trace Support Payments
- 6. Test and Trace Voucher scheme
- 7. Household Support Fund
- 8. Council Tax Hardship Fund

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES (Section 5)

- 9. Grants to support local groups

SUPPORT FROM 1 APRIL 2022 (Section 6)

- 10. Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief
 - 11. COVID Additional Relief Fund (CARF)
 - 12. The £150 Energy Rebate scheme
 - 13. The Energy Rebate Discretionary scheme
 - 14. Household Support Fund and Food Voucher scheme
 - 15. Homes for Ukraine
 - 16. Council Tax Hardship Fund
- 2.4 The schemes closed at various times, as detailed in government guidance, and weekly returns were submitted via DELTA to record eligibility and payments made.
 - 2.5 Between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 the council has administered and distributed various grants, payments and funds totalling £32,269,606.70.

3. BUSINESS SUPPORT GRANTS

- 3.1 Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 we have administered and distributed various grants to support businesses, **totalling £31,744,124**. The government provided detailed guidance on the types of businesses eligible for each of the grants and supplementary FAQ's. Eligibility was principally based on our records of ratepayers, the rating list on specified dates and the nature of the business use of the property. The grant schemes are summarised below:

1. Restart Grants

- 3.2 The Restart Grant provided additional support for businesses legally forced to close with reopening safely in the non-essential retail, hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care, and sports/gym sectors. This grant was intended to support businesses that are predominantly reliant on delivering in-person services for the general public, where the main activity takes place in a fixed rate-paying premises, in the relevant sectors.
- 3.3 The Restart Grant was a one-off payment for business ratepayers who were the ratepayer on 1 April 2021. All eligible businesses received an email notifying them how to apply for the Restart Grant, receipt of the application and confirmation of payment. To maximise take-up, a reminder email was issued and the scheme was also promoted via enews and social media. The grant had two strands:

Scheme A – Non-essential retail

Grant Payment	Criteria
£2,667	Businesses with a rateable value of less than £15,000
£4,000	Businesses with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000
£6,000	Businesses with a rateable value £51,000 or above

Total Grants Paid	No. of businesses awarded a grant
£1,508,113	482

Scheme B - Businesses in the hospitality, leisure, accommodation, personal care, and sports/gym sectors:

Grant Payment	Criteria
£8,000	Businesses with a rateable value of less than £15,000
£12,000	Businesses with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000
£18,000	Businesses with a rateable value £51,000 or above

Total Grants Paid	No. of businesses awarded a grant
£10,304,000	1086

Total Restart Grants (Scheme A + Scheme B)

Total Grants Paid	No. of business awarded a grant
£11,812,113	1,568

2. Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant

- 3.4 The Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant scheme was developed in response to an announcement made by the government on 21 December 2021 to provide additional support to businesses in the hospitality, leisure, and accommodation sectors in recognition that some businesses were likely to struggle following the impact of the Omicron variant.

Grant Payment	Criteria
£2,667	Businesses with a rateable value of less than £15,000
£4,000	Businesses with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000
£6,000	Businesses with a rateable value £51,000 or above

Total Grants Paid	No. of businesses awarded a grant
£2,498,165	755

3. Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG)

- 3.5 During 2021/22, the Economic Development team continued the administration of the discretionary Additional Restrictions Grants (ARG) for businesses impacted by the pandemic, that were not eligible for the rate-based grants. The funding could also be used for wider business support.
- 3.6 The initial funding from government was £3,601,720 and a further amount of £1,599,713 was received, totalling £5,201,433.
- 3.7 In July 2021, as we met Government grant distribution targets for ARG, we were awarded a further £1,402,655, in addition to the 2020/21 allocations, to support businesses in the district. An additional 'top-up' of £337,669 was received in January 2022 in recognition of the impact of the Omicron variant.
- 3.8 Between April 2021 and March 2022 there were five separate schemes developed and administered: ARG Schemes 3, 4 and 5, The New Forest Taxi Driver Grant and the ARG Omicron scheme.

ARG 3 – Scheme open for applications 31 March 2021 to 23 April 2021

- 3.9 This scheme was for businesses not eligible for the rate-based grants in hospitality, events and leisure sectors and their supply chains, manufacturing and engineering sectors and their supply chains and Ofsted registered childcare.

Grant Payment	Criteria
£1,048	Business based in a domestic dwelling
£2,996	Business with premises costs of £15,00 or less
£4,543	Business with premises costs between £15,000 and less than £51,000
£6,714	Business with premises costs of £51,000 or above

Total Grants Paid	No. of businesses awarded a grant
£1,502,106	749

ARG Taxi Driver Scheme: Open for applications 14 April 2021 to 7 May 2021

3.10 This scheme was for all NDFC licenced Taxi Drivers.

Grant Payment	Criteria
£1,000	A flat rate, one-off grant for all NFDC licenced taxi drivers
Total Grants Paid	No. of businesses awarded a grant
£457,000	457

ARG 4 – Scheme Open for applications: 18 May 2021 to 2 June 2021

3.11 This scheme specially targeted larger businesses who would demonstrate a significant impact to operations, who were ineligible for rate based grants.

Grant Payment	Criteria
Dependent on number of applications	Business with 50 - 250 employees. with a Head Office in NFDC, in the in retail, hospitality, events or leisure sectors, or their supply chains that are not eligible for rate-based grants

Total Grants Paid	No. of businesses awarded a grant
£120,000	2

ARG 5 – Scheme Open for applications 1 November 2021 to 23 November 2021

3.12 This scheme was for businesses not eligible for the rate-based grants in hospitality, events and leisure sectors and their supply chains, manufacturing and engineering sectors and their supply chains, and Ofsted registered childcare.

Grant payment	Criteria
£1,050	Business based in a domestic dwelling
£2,500	Business with premises costs of £15,00 or less
£4,000	Business with premises costs between £15,000 and less than £51,000
£5,500	Business with premises costs of £51,000 or above

Total Grants Paid	No. of businesses awarded a grant
£1,072,750	606

ARG Omicron Scheme – Open for applications 10 February 2022 to 28 February 2022

3.13 This scheme was for business rate payers in the tour operator & travel agent, personal care (hair and beauty etc) and gyms, sport, and fitness (indoor only) sectors. The grant payment was based on the available ARG funding divisible by the number of eligible applications

Grant payment	Criteria
£3,850	Business occupying a property on 30 December 2021 with premises costs of £15,00 or less
£5,400	Business occupying a property on 30 December 2021 with premises costs between £15,000 and less than £51,000
£7,270	Business occupying a property on 30 December 2021 with premises costs of £51,000 or above

Total Grants Paid	No. of businesses awarded a grant
£647,590	162

- 3.14 In 2021/22, ARG was also used to fund wider business support measures including the New Forest Shop Doctor Programme and the Rebel Business School, a training programme for start-up businesses.
- 3.15 The ARG schemes are closed and we fully allocated all of the funding provided by the government deadline of 31 March 2022.
- 3.16 In total, £3,799,446 of Additional Restrictions Grant funding was distributed in 2021/22 to 1,976 businesses.

4. Expanded Retail Discount

- 3.17 To support eligible businesses in the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors during 2021/22 they were entitled to a business rates discount of 100% for the period 1 April to 30 June, followed by a 66% discount from 1 July to 31 March 2022. Applications are online and to date we have awarded expanded retail discount of £13,634,400 to 1,416 businesses.

Scheme administration

- 3.18 The government provided guidance for the business support grants affected by the tier restrictions, as well as regular updated FAQ's.
- 3.19 Businesses were able to claim their grants via an eform which we developed in-house. The e-form gathered all the relevant information, including a declaration on state aid and subsidy allowances, and had built in security and validation checks and enabled filtering to authorise grants promptly. We undertook data-matching with our back-office system to ensure there was still an active business rates account.
- 3.20 To encourage maximum take-up of the grants all of the schemes were promoted via social media, website, weekly businesses enews and through network channels. E-mails were sent to businesses to encourage and promote the schemes. E-mail notifications were sent to previous business grant recipients, and for ARG applicants a shortened form was developed for those that had received a previous grant to simplify the process.
- 3.21 Feedback from businesses has been very positive in our applications process, prompt payment of grants and email notifications.
- 3.22 We did receive contact from numerous businesses that were ineligible and undertook several reviews. We also received correspondence from MP's and national organisations.
- 3.23 To comply with guidance, we undertook checks using the governments Spotlight facility to ensure solvency and undertook data matching.
- 3.24 The Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) have provided additional new burdens funding for administering the schemes.
- 3.25 We are currently in the process of providing BEIS with reconciliation information, this will include proving a sample of applications and details of payments made.
- 3.26 The Revenues and Benefits service administered the grant schemes, developing eforms, making payments, and providing statistics, supported by Economic Development who managed the Additional Restrictions Grants. This joint working across portfolios will continue going forward when communicating with businesses.

4. SUPPORT TO HOUSEHOLDS

- 4.1 Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 we have administered and distributed various grants to support households and community groups **totalling £515,924.44**. Funding was received from the Department for Health and Social Care and Department for Work and Pensions (either directly to the Council or via Hampshire County Council) to support households. There was also residual funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government available to support our communities.

5. Test and Trace Support Payments

- 4.2 From 28 September 2020, Government introduced a new law so that certain people had to self-isolate due to COVID-19. The Test and Trace Support Payments supported those on a low income who were required to self-isolate, were unable to work from home, and would lose income as a result.
- 4.3 The scheme was initially due to close on 31 January 2021, but was subsequently extended to 28 February 2022.
- 4.4 There were two schemes:

Mandatory

This scheme is for those having to self-isolate following notification from the NHS, who are employed or self-employed and unable to work from home, would lose income as a result of having to self-isolate and were in receipt of a qualifying benefit, notably Universal Credit, Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, Jobseekers Allowance or Working Tax Credit.

Those eligible received a payment of £500. This scheme was fully funded by government.

Discretionary

This scheme is for those having to self-isolate following notification from the NHS, who are employed or self-employed and unable to work from home, would lose income as a result of having to self-isolate, were in financial hardship, and were not in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

Those eligible received a payment of £500. This scheme was fully funded by government.

- 4.5 There were changes to eligibility criteria (our last policy was version 7), including where an individual was responsible for looking after a child aged under 15 (or 25 with Educational Health Care Plan).
- 4.6 Applications were via an online form, and evidence of a reduction in earnings, for example pay slips, their unique NHS Test and Trace identification number, bank statements to verify bank account details, were provided and we verified DWP data to check receipt of a state benefit, and our internal records to ensure occupancy.
- 4.7 The total payments made (including 2020/21) are tabulated below, with £387,000 being distributed between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022.

Scheme	No. of applications	No. of awards	Value of awards (£)
Mandatory	1,006	657	328,500
Discretionary	1,195	303	151,500
Total	2,201	960	480,000

- 4.8 The government have provided funding to date of £48,865 towards the administration of this scheme and we have undertaken a full reconciliation exercise.

6. Test and Trace Voucher scheme

- 4.9 Hampshire County Council onwardly distributed additional funding to support those ineligible for the mandatory or discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment scheme, or where the loss of income was greater than £500. The support consisted of food vouchers, emailed to recipients, and we supported 13 households totalling £1,600. The value of the voucher was dependent on various factors, including family size.

7. Household Support Fund

- 4.10 The Department for Work Pensions provided funding to Hampshire County Council to support households to 31 March 2022. Our allocation of funding of £90,000 was utilised to support vulnerable households experiencing financial hardship with their housing costs.
- 4.11 Although permissible, we did not allocate any of the funding to cover our own administrative costs to ensure we maximised the support for vulnerable households.
- 4.12 Alternative support had to be considered before making an award, including Discretionary Housing Payments.
- 4.13 We worked closely with partners to promote the scheme and to seek referrals, including the voluntary sector, of households experiencing hardship. We signposted applicants to other support available, for example Food Larders or the energy vouchers administered by Citizens Advice New Forest.

No. of applications	No. of awards	Total awards (£)
273	232	90,000

- 4.14 The funding was used to support vulnerable households in a variety of ways, including with rent arrears and essential household items, with award values dependent on the household circumstances.

8. Council Tax Hardship Fund

- 4.15 We supported 147 households in need of support with paying their council tax totalling £37,324.44 during the year.

5. COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- 5.1 Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 we have supported and distributed grants to community groups, **totalling £9,558.26**. We have developed a good working relationship with partners and continue to meet monthly with representatives from the voluntary sector to share information, identify joint working, and promote support schemes and projects available to support our residents.

9a. Working with the traveller community

- 5.2 One group identified for support was the traveller community and working with Citizens Advice New Forest we provided funding of £2,400 for a project to work with and support this community. On working with this community the outcomes were:
- 13 households received a £147 energy voucher,
 - 5 payments of £100 from the winter grants for residents over 60,
 - 5 households were supported with applying and reapplying for benefits, for example Personal Independence Payments,

- Applications for housing were made
- Environmental health issues were investigated
- Residents are now using the Food Larders, saving money on food bills

9b. Cost of Living

- 5.3 Working with Citizens Advice New Forest, Community First Wessex, Trussell Trust (Food Banks), Youth and Families Matter and Southampton University a Poverty Action Steering Group was established who undertook research into the cost of living across the district. The report, which was funded by all partners, highlighted several key factors on food bank usage and its impact.
- 5.4 Funding has been secured for 3 years to employ a Local Partnership Campaign Manager who will review the contents of the report, raise awareness, and work with partners to develop and implement an action plan to support our communities.

9c. Afghan Resettlement scheme

- 5.5 As part of the government Afghan Resettlement scheme we supported one family with resettling into the New Forest. Working in partnership with Hampshire County Council and TwoSaints, we had discussions with the landlord, arranged food parcels on arrival, provided cash support totalling £2,758.26 and assisted with claiming benefits, including Universal Credit.

9d. Supporting local groups

- 5.6 To support local groups that support our vulnerable residents, grants totalling £4,400 were awarded. The purpose of the grant was to support groups with reopening or providing activities to vulnerable residents, including the elderly and those with mental health.

6. SUPPORT FROM 1 APRIL 2022

- 6.1 The following support is being administered from April 2022.

10. Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief

- 6.2 From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 eligible businesses in the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors and entitled to a 50% business rate relief, subject to subsidy control and an overall cash cap of £110,000.
- 6.3 Applications are via an online form and to date we have awarded £4,740,207 to 792 businesses.

11. COVID Additional Relief Fund (CARF)

- 6.4 The government provided funding of £4,356,538 to award a one-off payment to reduce chargeable amounts in respect of business rates for the 2021/22 financial year only to support businesses affected by the pandemic that are not eligible for existing support linked to business rates, for example Expanded Retail Discount.
- 6.5 Local authorities are responsible for developing their own discretionary scheme.
- 6.6 Our scheme was available to eligible occupied businesses that were on the rating list and trading on 15 December 2021 and that were adversely impacted by the pandemic. Certain properties were excluded, for example beach huts, car parks, and communication masts.

- 6.7 Our scheme provided details on indicative awards, based on the formula for the distribution of the funding, which included the impact on business sectors. The relief award is to be clarified once all applications have been processed.
- 6.8 The application was via an online form. We identified businesses as being potentially eligible for the relief and sent two letters to promote the scheme. The response was lower than expected so we looked to support eligible businesses in arrears with their business rates and undertake a further mailing exercise with businesses being contacted directly by phone.
- 6.9 Funding has to be distributed by 30 September 2022 and we aim to award the relief by 30 June 2022.

12. The £150 Energy Rebate Scheme

- 6.10 The government announced a package of support, known as the Energy Bills Rebate, to help households with rising energy bills. This includes a one-off £150 non-repayable rebate for households in council tax bands A to D, known as the Council Tax Rebate.
- 6.11 Households are eligible if they are the council taxpayer, occupy the property as their sole and main residence and the property is in band A to D (including those with a Band E but has a disabled band reduction) as of 1 April 2022.
- 6.12 Only one payment is to be made per household, regardless of the number of councils taxpayers or occupants.
- 6.13 Where we have bank account details as the household pays their council tax by direct debit, payments were made automatically to the household where the details matched. All eligible households were paid their £150 energy rebate in April.
- 6.14 Where we did not have the households bank account details, and where the council tax account and bank account details do not match, 13,688 letters were sent to provide details of the scheme and how to claim the rebate. The letters contained a unique code for security. For those residents unable to claim online, staff were available to support over 1,000 households with making their application by phone or in person at our Information Offices.
- 6.15 Payments were only made after completing pre-payment checks, including the use of Spotlight, duplicate bank account details and an active council tax account.
- 6.16 Payments to date (as of 1 June 2022):

No. of eligible households	No. of payments	Total payments (£)	% Paid
53,882	50,504	7,575,600	93.7%

- 6.17 We will contact all those that have yet to apply by letter, and again will be available to support those unable to complete the online form. All payments must be made by 30 September 2022. Where we are unable to pay the energy rebate to an eligible household because of no response, we will credit the £150 to their council tax account.

13. The Energy Rebate Discretionary Scheme

- 6.18 The government have provided funding to Local Authorities to develop their own schemes to provide further support to energy bill payers who are not eligible under the terms of the mandatory scheme, or to provide targeted “top-up” payments to the most vulnerable households in council tax bands A to D.

- 6.19 Our funding is £320,850 and our scheme looks to support the following households with a one-off rebate of £150 per household. To be eligible for a discretionary payment the applicant must be occupying a property as their main residence on 1 April 2022, and:
- a) be liable for council tax, in receipt of Council Tax Support and occupying a property in council tax bands E to H
 - b) be liable for council tax and occupying a property in Bands E to H and is exempt from council tax due to being severely mentally impaired, a student, a care leaver aged under 25, or an annex occupied by a dependant relative.
 - c) be liable for council tax and occupying a property in Bands E to H and receive a carer or severe mental impairment disregard discount
 - d) does not pay council tax directly to the Council and can provide evidence to the Council that they are responsible for paying energy bills, e.g. electricity.
 - e) were in emergency accommodation on 1 April 2022 following a placement by our Housing Team to prevent homelessness and have become liable for council tax prior to 1 October 2022 and occupy a property in any council tax band and have not received an energy rebate payment.
 - f) have had a banding appeal decision from the Valuation Office Agency before 1 October 2022 and the band is now between A to D
- 6.20 Should there be any residual funding after making payments to those above we will provide a “top-up” to all those in receipt of Council Tax Support in all council tax bands by evenly distributing the funding available.
- 6.21 We are currently developing an eform and will promote the scheme via a targeted mailshot, the website, social media and through resident e-newsletters.

14. Household Support Fund and Food Voucher scheme

- 6.22 The government have announced further funding from April 2022 with an emphasis on utilising one-third of the funding to support pensioners, one-third to support families and one-third for other groups, which could include pensioners and families. We have received confirmation from Hampshire County Council on our allocation and scheme guidance for the period to 30 September 2022, which is as follows:
- a) Household Support Fund of £45,045 for Exceptional Housing Costs. This is essentially a continuation of the scheme detailed in section 9.
 - b) Food voucher of £65 per person in receipt of Pension Credit
 - c) Food voucher of £30 per household in receipt of Council Tax Support
- 6.23 We are reviewing the guidance to develop and administer our scheme and procuring a voucher supplier to issue food vouchers to our 7,941 Council Tax Support claimants.
- 6.24 The government have recently announced that the Household Support Fund is being extended from October 2022 to 31 March 2023. We await details of our allocation and eligibility criteria.

15. Homes for Ukraine

- 6.25 As part of the response to the Ukraine refugee crisis we are working with Hampshire County Council, sponsors and the voluntary sector to support refugees. This includes attending workstreams with local authorities, voluntary sector networking to promote and signpost support and dealing with sponsor queries.

- 6.26 In partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions, local support groups and employers, we are hosting a job club for refugees, where additional advice and information will also be available.

16. Council Tax Hardship Fund

- 6.27 We have supported Citizens Advice New Forest with £35,000 to fund a Debt Supervisor for 2 years to build up resilience with debt advice within their service to support our residents with money problems (see Cabinet report dated 6 April 2022).
- 6.28 This leaves £91,000 and we will work with our partners to identify any emerging issues to support our most vulnerable residents and communities across the district.

Further Information:

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Background Information: