

Cabinet

Tuesday, 17th November, 2020
6.00 - 6.20 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Steve Jordan (Leader of the Council), Victoria Atherstone (Cabinet Member Economy and Development), Flo Clucas (Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles), Chris Coleman (Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment), Rowena Hay (Cabinet Member Finance), Alex Hegenbarth (Cabinet Member Corporate Services), Peter Jeffries (Cabinet Member Housing), Andrew McKinlay (Cabinet Member Cyber and Safety) and Max Wilkinson (Cabinet Member Climate and Communities)
Also in attendance:	Gareth Edmundson, Paul Jones, Darren Knight, Tim Atkins, Sarah Farooqi

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 10th November would be considered at the 1st December meeting instead.

4. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

There were none.

5. ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS - DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS GRANT SCHEME

The Cabinet Member Finance presented the report, thanking the Revenues and Benefits team for reacting swiftly to the latest tranche of government financial support. She explained that this particular funding had a discretionary element, which required the drafting of a Cheltenham-specific policy in order to be open, fair and transparent.

The government was providing the council with a total of £2,349,522 for a grant scheme for business rate payers forced to close during this period of national restrictions. Additional funding would be made available if the initial funding proved insufficient to support all eligible businesses, and any unspent funds must be returned to the government. She reported that the scheme was now live, and had already received over 100 applications, with the first payments due to go out on the 18th November.

She added that further funding was due to be received for grants to sector businesses such as nightclubs, dancehalls and sexual entertainment venues that had been continuously closed since March. This funding was yet to be determined, but a small number of Cheltenham businesses were likely to qualify under the scheme.

£2,326,120 was being provided to the council for a locally designed scheme to support businesses impacted by national and local restrictions between now and March 2022. The government was indicating that no more funding would be made available for discretionary business grant support during this time. Therefore, it was necessary to find a balance between providing help to local businesses as soon as possible, and holding back funding for a later date, so £1m would be allocated for the national lockdown period in November and December.

She stressed that the amounts allocated would be monitored closely, and that applications would be considered in date order as they were received. If the total sum allocated was to near £1m with applications outstanding, these applications would be assessed in order of date received, and once the £1m had been allocated the remaining applications may need to be rejected. She added that new burdens funding would be provided in respect of the administration costs of these schemes.

She clarified that the amount of grant paid would be as follows:

- businesses occupying properties with a rateable value, or paying rent or mortgage per annum, of exactly £15,000 or under on 5th November 2020 would receive up to £1,334
- those paying £15,000 to £51,000 would receive up to £2,000
- those paying over £51,000 would receive up to £3,000

An online application form would be available on the council's website shortly, and the scheme would go live early next week with payments going out at the end of the week. She noted that due to the limited funding, it would only be open for 14 days from the date the application form was made available on the website.

She added that a revised scheme would be prepared in respect of any future restriction periods, aimed at supporting the most affected business sectors.

The Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles asked whether the amount of funding would be adequate considering that things would not return to normal for quite some time. The Cabinet Member Finance responded that extra funding would be available from national schemes if needed, although the discretionary schemes were different as they did not allow topping up. This was key for businesses like B&Bs that paid council tax but not business rates. She stressed that this was why the council had avoided allocating all the funding immediately, in case of future uncertainty. She acknowledged the possibility of further future lockdowns, and agreed that it was important to think of the situation down the line.

The Cabinet Member Housing echoed the thanks to the Revenues and Benefits team for turning the report around so quickly, which compared favourably to other authorities around the country. He emphasised that funding should always be distributed at the local level, with authorities given control over how to allocate it, since they knew their area best.

The Cabinet Member Cyber and Safety supported getting the money out quickly. He acknowledged concerns about the amount of funding in the long term, but businesses needed the money now, and it could be too late in the future. The Leader of the Council agreed that it was impossible to predict exactly how much to use now and how much to save later, and suggested it was better to cover urgent needs now.

The Leader moved to a vote, where it was unanimously:

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Additional Restrictions - Discretionary Business Grant Scheme in Appendix 2 be approved;
2. Authority be delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits to take decisions relating to applications made under the Additional Restrictions - Discretionary Business Grant Scheme, and authority be delegated to the Executive Director Finance and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance, to consider and determine any reviews requested in respect of such decisions;
3. The Head of Revenues and Benefits be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance to make changes to the Additional Restrictions - Discretionary Business Grant Scheme in line with any changes made by Government, or, as required to ensure the successful operation of the scheme;
4. The Executive Director Finance and Assets be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member Finance to add any further category of businesses eligible for this scheme, if required;
5. The Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed) Addendum scheme be noted, and authority be delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits to take decisions relating to applications.

6. BRIEFING FROM CABINET MEMBERS

The Cabinet Member Corporate Services reported on leadership development opportunities within the council, in partnership with Gloucestershire College. He cited the Institute of Leadership and Management in particular as a nationally recognised qualification that staff would be supported in attaining. There was a wide variety of development opportunities available, including training on complaint handling, social media and business case building.

He added that the council was undergoing an organisational review, which had been pushed back by Covid but was now back on track. An external consultant had been hired to take this forward, and had already met with the Executive

Leadership Team and Cabinet Members to explore organisational challenges. He emphasised that the key question was how the organisation could be set up to most effectively tackle these challenges and prepare for the future.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged that there had been a serious incident at the Municipal Offices on the morning of the meeting, and sent his best wishes to the person who was injured. He reported that the Chief Executive had addressed council staff earlier about this, and stressed that staff would get the support they needed.

Chairman