



Committee and Date

Cabinet

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Item

Public

COVID-19 Business Support and Grant Funding End of Programme Review

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1. Synopsis

1.1. This report provides an overview of support to businesses led by or involving the Economic Growth Team during covid-19 and of grant funding awarded, but also focuses on the delivery of business support programmes and its legacy under the Additional Restrictions Grant.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. Whilst this programme of funding was delivered before the establishment of the Shropshire Plan, it is important to set these funds in this context, in particular ensuring a Healthy Economy was maintained through a bespoke programme of business support that supported to mitigate some of the key economic risks associated with the pandemic, which are outlined in detail within section 8.

2.2. The aspiration for these funds, in particular those within the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), could be used to create a range of business support programmes, where there was a unique opportunity to use these funds without many of the restrictions under other grant related programmes (e.g. business rate linked grants, European funding etc).

2.3. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the final position of the covid-19 business support grants, but also to provide some detail on the programme of business support that was delivered through the covid-19 funds.

2.4. Shropshire Council delivered £164,122,313 of grant funding to businesses across Shropshire, making 32,939 individual grant payments during programmes between April 2020 and March 2022.

- 2.5. The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), which formed a proportion of the grant programme, provided Shropshire Council with £12,766,827 of funds, with a proportion of these funds also used to deliver a broader business support programme totalling £2,928,383 of this pot, sitting alongside the business grants programme with the remainder of ARG funds used to deliver a range of discretionary grants directly to businesses.
- 2.6. This report provides details of the delivery of the wider programme including outputs and case studies will be outlined in more detail in sections 7 and 8, alongside case studies within the appendices.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That Cabinet acknowledges the delivery of the covid-19 business grants and wider business support programme and the positive impacts made to the Shropshire business community.

REPORT

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. As this report is a review of a completed programme, there are no current or outstanding risks with the delivery of the programme.
- 4.2. There were a number of risks that were considered throughout the delivery of the programme. The first of these were to ensure that funds were as close to being fully spent as possible within the timeline that was outlined to Shropshire Council by Government as no funds could be retained after the spend deadline.
- 4.3. Of the £12,766,827 ARG funding, only £17,985.16 remained unspent, as a result of a project being withdrawn late in the programme with the funds unfortunately not able to be reallocated before the spend deadlines set by Government. This still equated to 99.86% of funds being delivered through the programme.
- 4.4. Secondly, one of the main guidance points provided to Shropshire Council by Government were that funds needed to be delivered either directly to businesses in the form of grants or through programmes offering support directly to businesses. This meant that any potential project or fund explored needed to ensure that there were direct deliverable impacts to businesses.
- 4.5. To ensure that this process was followed, for any direct business grants, a thorough application and assessment process was completed including support via colleagues in Business Rates, Audit and Finance. For the business support programmes, an application process was submitted by partners with a thorough assessment and

evaluation of delivery completed to ensure that partners were delivering necessary outputs directly to businesses.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. It should again be noted that as this report is a retrospective review of a now completed programme, there are no current or outstanding financial implications with the delivery of the programme.
- 5.2. A total of £164,122,313 of grant funding was provided to businesses across Shropshire, between April 2020 and March 2022. A breakdown of funds that were delivered across all programmes can be found in appendix 13.
- 5.3. A total of £12,766,827 of funds were allocated to Shropshire Council under the ARG programme with only £17,985.16 remaining unspent as outlined in section 4.3. Shropshire Council delivered in total £164,122,313 of grant funding to businesses across Shropshire.
- 5.4. To deliver the grants and business support programmes, no additional costs were incurred by Shropshire Council and the programme was delivered using existing Shropshire Council resources. Whilst members of Economic Growth led on the majority of the programme, support was provided by colleagues in Finance, Business Rates and Audit to deliver the grants and business support, alongside colleagues in ICT to develop a bespoke grant assessment system.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. When developing the ARG programme, it was clear that an element of focus needed to be aimed towards supporting businesses around the climate change agenda. To support this, funds were specifically allocated to deliver a support programme that was managed collaboratively via CREST, part of University of Chester (University Centre Shrewsbury) and Shrewsbury based business Evora Edge.
- 6.2. The ARG grant programme therefore provided an opportunity to generate a positive impact on the environmental performance on energy and fuel consumption and renewable energy generation in Shropshire by providing business with expert support and networking opportunities around the decarbonisation of existing buildings and related business growth opportunities.
- 6.3. Further information relating to this programme can be found within 8.48-8.51 and within the appendices section 8.

7. Background

- 7.1. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the final position of the covid-19 business support grants, but also to provide some detail on the individual programmes of business support activity that was delivered using the covid-19 funds.
- 7.2. In Spring 2020 further to the announcements of lockdown by Government, the start of a number of business grants were implemented that would be awarded by Local Governments to support businesses that were most heavily impacted by covid-19 and the associated lockdown periods.
- 7.3. In total Shropshire Council delivered business grants across 15 mandated programmes, with eligibility criteria and terms set out by Government. Whilst each grant programme had its own terms, values and timelines for delivery, they were generally made available to businesses in the retail, hospitality, personal care, leisure and accommodation sectors, although latter schemes in 2022 did not award funding to businesses in the retail or personal care sectors. These were delivered alongside 7 discretionary grant programmes, with eligibility criteria and terms set out by Shropshire Council based on local demand and need.
- 7.4. In total across all of these 22 business grant programmes, Shropshire Council delivered £164,122,313 of grant funding to businesses across Shropshire, making 32,939 individual grant payments during programmes between April 2020 and March 2022. An overview of the total grant allocations for each available fund can be viewed in appendix 13.
- 7.5. The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), which formed a proportion of the discretionary grant programme, also delivered a broader business support programme totalling an additional £2,928,383 sitting alongside the business grants programme. The total ARG allocation to Shropshire Council was £12,766,827, with £9,838,444 used to deliver discretionary grants to businesses.
- 7.6. The discretionary grants were delivered via two separate funding programmes. Firstly, via four rounds of discretionary grants (DARG), which were delivered to businesses unable to access the mandated grant funding made available by Government. Each of these rounds offered at different levels of grant funding but were broadly used to support businesses within the retail, hospitality and leisure (RHL) sectors who were not business rate payers, businesses within the RHL supply chain and companies involved in the delivery of events across the county. In total, 2,612 discretionary grants were awarded through these four programmes.
- 7.7. The second programme, our Wider Economic Recovery Grant (WERG) was developed to offer larger grants of between £10,000-£25,000 to those businesses providing wider economic benefit for

the county beyond the business itself and directly supporting other businesses in their post COVID-19 recovery. In total, 56 grants were awarded to businesses from a range of sectors delivering activity towards environmental and sustainability activity, festivals and events, markets and local associations, professional services and training and tourism and urban renewal.

- 7.8. Section 8 and the appendices of this report will be used to outline how this £2,928,383 of funds through the ARG programmes were delivered.

8. Additional Information

- 8.1 Details of how the £2,928,383 business support programme were delivered, including outputs and case studies can be found in full within the appendices. An overview of the programme can be found in appendix 14 with more specific details and case studies being made available in appendices 2-13.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. This report has provided a detailed overview of the work undertaken throughout the course of covid-19, initially outlining the outputs from grant funding support through both mandated and discretionary grant programmes, before focusing on the detailed programme of business support that was delivered by Shropshire Council and partners to offer support through and post-pandemic.
- 9.2. Some of the programmes will be able to explore future funding, such as UK Shared Prosperity Funds (UKSPF), as a way to extend these programmes and can draw on the results and experience from the programmes that were delivered through ARG.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Dean Carroll – Portfolio Holder for Growth, Regeneration and Housing

Local Member

The programme was pan-county, so no specific local members have been engaged.

Appendices

1. Table of Outputs
2. Marches Growth Hub Update October 2022
3. Silverpreneurs®
4. Apprenticeship Support Project
5. Building Shropshire ARG Final report
6. Co-working report
7. Upskill Shropshire Training courses
8. Environmental project summary of outputs
9. Food Partnership development final report and outputs
10. Blue Remembered Hill Final report
11. Shropshire Infrastructure Partnership sector support
12. Commonwealth Game QBR event
13. COVID-19 Grant Allocations
14. COVID-19 Business Support Programme Overview