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| Committee(s): Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee | Date: 24 November 2021 |
| Subject: Brentwood Business Growth Grant | Wards Affected: All |
| Report of: Phil Drane, Corporate Director (Planning & Economy) | Public |
| Report Author: Name: Laurie Edmonds, Corporate Manager (Economic Development) Telephone: 01277 312500 E-mail: laurie.edmonds@brentwood.gov.uk | For Decision |

Summary

Since November 2020, central government has provided £2.99m to Brentwood Borough Council as part of its Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) fund allocation. To date five rounds of Additional Restrictions Grants have been distributed totalling £2.72m.

With the remaining £250,000 of ARG funding, (Subject to final reconciliation) it is recommended that a new Brentwood Business Growth Grant is created to support local businesses who are looking to scale and grow within the Borough post-pandemic.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

R1. Approve the Brentwood Business Growth Grant policy, set out in Appendix A.

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. Since November 2020, central government has provided £2.2m to Brentwood Borough Council as part of our Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) fund allocation. This was a fund for local businesses facing financial difficulties due to regional and national lockdowns, particularly those who had been ineligible for the main Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB) and Restart grants. These were businesses who had not been mandated to close, but who remained impacted by Covid restrictions (for example, supply chain or ancillary businesses to those mandated to close).

2. In late January 2021, the Secretary for Business, pledged a top-up to the ARG fund to each local authority, subject to their existing ARG fund being fully utilised by 30 June 2021. Brentwood met this condition and has received a top up amount of £771,000.
3. Since November 2020, five rounds of ARG grants have been given out to local businesses, totalling £2.72m.
4. There remains £250,000 of ARG funding available (subject to a final reconciliation) that must be distributed by 31 March 2022.

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

5. The ARG guidance states that Local Authorities can use ARG funding for business support activities. This may primarily take the form of discretionary grants, but Local Authorities could also use this funding for wider business support activities.
6. Due to the limited funds remaining, administering a fifth round of discretionary grants using the November 2020 policy would mean that the maximum award level would be £750.
7. Alternative methods of grant distribution have been considered, including focusing on specific sectors and giving out grants on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Reasons for Recommendation

8. To create a level playing field, this new ARG policy encourages businesses of any size or sector to put forward growth projects for funding. Grant applicants will be asked to detail how their project will create new jobs, safeguard existing jobs, increase turnover and bring new skills into the businesses.
9. Businesses can apply for up to £10,000 of ARG funding to support their projects.
10. Backing Essex Business, fully funded by Essex County Council, offers up to 12 hours of free business support. Their advisers can assist Brentwood businesses with analysing viable project options before submitting their grant applications.
11. The Brentwood Business Growth Grant can be used by local businesses as matched funding to help them unlock further grants from organisations such as

Low Carbon Across South Essex (LoCASE) or South East Business Boost (SEBB).

12. Increasing new jobs, safeguarding existing jobs, increasing turnover and bringing new skills into the borough helps meet the Council's corporate objectives.

Consultation

13. There has been no formal consultation.

References to Corporate Strategy

14. The Council's key priority to grow the economy includes a vision to be a thriving borough.

Implications

Financial Implications

Name/Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Corporate Director (Finance & Resources) and S151 Officer

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15. There are no significant implications on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Government has provided the Council with a grant funding through the ARG scheme, of which £250,000 currently remains (Subject to final reconciliation) and is proposed to be distributed according to the Brentwood Business Growth Grant policy by 31 March 2022.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer

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16. The General Power of Competence was introduced by the Localism Act 2011 and came into force in February 2012, this amended the existing powers under the Local Government Act 1972. It gives the Council the power to do anything an individual can do unless prohibited by law. The Council can rely on this power to administer the grants.
17. The recommendation is to adopt the Brentwood Business Growth Grant, as part of the ARG scheme. The Government introduced a discretionary business scheme which needs to be administered to local businesses, in order for officers to do this they need to have the delegated authority to administer the scheme according to the proposed policy.

Economic Implications

Name/Title: Phil Drane, Corporate Director (Planning & Economy)

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18. Economic implications are contained within this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Name/Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager (Communities, Leisure and Health)

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19. There are no direct equality and diversity implications arising from this report. The Brentwood Business Growth Grant policy sets out the criteria by which the ARG fund will be assessed and allocated.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

None

Background Papers

- Additional Restrictions Grant guidance to local authorities
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/978400/additional-restrictions-grant-la-guidance.pdf
- Item 575, Emergency Committee, 18 November 2020, Local Restrictions Support Grants
<https://brentwood.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=398&MIId=2232>

Appendices to this report

- Appendix A: Brentwood Business Growth Grant Fund Policy (November 2021)