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**TITLE: COVID-19 SERVICES UPDATE**

Committee: Finance & Assets Committee

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[V145]

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1.0 ISSUE

1.1 To provide the Committee with an update on services supporting businesses and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 Members are requested to note the contents of this report.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 To support businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has introduced a number of grant schemes. These have been administered by Local Authorities. At the time of writing this report, the Council has paid out £18,979,252.03 across all the grant schemes.

3.2 As part of the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, an officer-led COVID-19 recovery group was formed, led by the Director, Operations, and includes representation from Environmental Health, Communities & Partnerships, Housing and Community Advice Service, Customer Services and Communications.

4.0 GRANT SCHEMES

Lockdown 1 – Spring/Summer 2020

4.1 In March 2020, the Government launched two grant schemes; the Small Business Grant Fund and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund. Under the Small Business Grant Fund (SBGF) all businesses in England in receipt of either Small Business Rates Relief (SBRR) or Rural Rates Relief (RRR) in the business rates system were eligible for a payment of £10,000. The Council paid 901 grants to local small businesses, a total of £9,010,000.

4.2 Under the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant (RHLG), businesses in England that would have been in receipt of the Expanded Retail Discount (which covers retail, hospitality and leisure) with a rateable value of up to and including £15,000 were eligible for a grant of £10,000, those with a rateable value of over £15,000 and less than £51,000 were eligible for a grant of £25,000. The Council

paid 289 grants to local retail, hospitality and leisure businesses, a total of £5,380,000.

- 4.3 In June 2020, a discretionary grant scheme was introduced, aimed at small and micro businesses with fixed property costs that are not eligible for the SBGF or the RHLG Fund because they received Charitable Rate Relief or were outside the business rates system.
- 4.4 The following types of business were eligible:
- small businesses in shared offices or other flexible workspaces, such as units in industrial parks or incubators
  - regular market traders
  - bed and breakfasts paying council tax instead of business rates
  - charity properties getting charitable business rates relief, which are not eligible for small business rates relief or rural rate relief
- 4.5 ECDC received £828,000 for this scheme and it was oversubscribed. £550,000 was paid to 55 small businesses, £188,000 to 63 regular market traders (one market trader received the final £2,000), £60,000 to 12 bed and breakfast businesses and £30,000 to 10 charities.

#### Lockdown 2 – November 2020

- 4.6 To support businesses required to close due to local restrictions. during the second period of national lockdown restrictions, the Government introduced the Local Restrictions Support Grant scheme (Closed) (Addendum). Businesses that are eligible are those that have been mandated to close by Government and include non-essential retail, leisure, personal care, sports facilities and hospitality businesses. Those with a rateable value of £15,000 or under received £1,334, those with a rateable value of £15,000 and less than £51,000 received £2,000 and those with a rateable value of exactly £51,000 or above received £3,000. To date the Council has paid out a total of £615,180, 270 businesses received £1,334, 99 businesses £2,000 and 19 businesses £3,000.
- 4.7 On 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 the Government introduced a grant scheme specifically for those businesses that have been unable to open since March 2020 called the Local Restrictions Support Grant (Sector). There is one business in East Cambridgeshire that is eligible for this grant and that business received the grant. During periods of national lockdown 'lockdown' restrictions being imposed, the Local Restrictions Support Grant (Sector) ceases to apply, as relevant businesses will receive funding from the LRSB (Closed) (Addendum) scheme.

#### Additional Restrictions Grant

- 4.8 The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) is a discretionary funding scheme for local authorities to support businesses in their local economies during periods of lockdown relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. East Cambridgeshire District

Council has been allocated £2,594,853 for the ARG scheme. The payment is for the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 financial years. Once we exit national lockdown the Council will not receive additional funding if we re-enter national or local restrictions.

- 4.9 The Council held two application rounds to cover the November lockdown period. The eligibility criteria for the second round was amended to allow eligible businesses operating from domestic properties to receive a grant. 89 grants were paid to businesses in round 1 and 65 grants to businesses in round 2, a total of £308,000.

#### Tier 2 Restrictions – December 2020

- 5.0 Tier 2 LRSG (Closed) grants are available to businesses which were forced to close because of the Tier 2 restrictions and have a business rates account. Only businesses that cannot serve a substantial meal to accompany the purchase of alcohol are eligible for this grant. Businesses with a rateable value of £15,000 or under received £1,143.43, those with a rateable value of £15,000 and less than £51,000 received £1,714.29 and those with a rateable value of exactly £51,000 or above received £2,571.43. The Council has paid out a total of £19,436.60, 14 businesses received £1,143.43 and 2 businesses received £1,714.29.
- 5.1 In addition, grants are also available for hospitality, hotel, accommodation and leisure businesses with a rateable value that have stayed open but whose income has been severely reduced due Tier 2 restrictions, via the Tier 2 LRSG (Open) scheme.
- 5.2 Businesses with a rateable value of £15,000 or under received £800.57, those with a rateable value of £15,000 and less than £51,000 received £1,200 and those with a rateable value of exactly £51,000 or above received £1,800. The Council has paid out a total of £41,273.84, 12 businesses received £800.57, one business closed after the first 14 day grant payment period so only received £467, 17 businesses £1,200 and 6 businesses £1,800.

#### Christmas Support Payment

- 5.3 During December 2020, Government announced a one-off payment of £1,000 to public houses that derive less than 50% of their income from sales of food. To date the Council has paid out 34 Christmas Support Payments.

#### Lockdown 3 – 26th December 2020 – 15th February 2021

- 5.4 Businesses with a rateable value that were forced to close from Boxing Day 2020 are eligible for three grants to cover the period 26th December 2020 – 15th February 2021; LRSG (Closed) to cover the ten day Tier 4 restrictions period, LRSG (Closed) (Addendum) to cover the six week national lockdown period and a one-off Closed Business Lockdown Payment. The combined value of these grants for businesses with a rateable value of £15,000 or under is

£6,477.43 for those with a rateable value of £15,000 and less than £51,000 £9,714.29 and those with a rateable value of exactly £51,000 receive £14,571.43. To date, the Council has paid out a total of £2,741,361.63, 253 businesses received £6,477.43, 91 businesses £9,714.29 and 15 businesses £14,571.43.

- 5.5 Councils are currently waiting for guidance from Government regarding grant funding for closed businesses beyond 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and an update will be given at the meeting.

#### Additional Restrictions Grant – Round 3

- 5.6 For round 3 of the ARG scheme, the eligibility was widened out to also include customer facing businesses, whose primary activity is provision of in-person services for the sale of goods/services to the public on a face to face basis that were allowed to be open. Businesses must be able to demonstrate that they were severely impacted by reductions in footfall or by the wider changes in behaviour of customers as a result of the restrictions put in place to control the spread of COVID-19 from 26<sup>th</sup> December 2020 – 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021.
- 5.7 Businesses operating from a commercial property will receive £6,000, businesses operating from a domestic property, £5,000 Community facilities (village halls, church halls, meeting rooms, scout or guide huts etc), £5,000 and all eligible open businesses will receive £4,000.
- 5.8 This scheme was launched on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and a verbal update on the number of grants paid will be given at the meeting. The closing date for applications is 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021. After this date consideration will be given to any remaining funding.

#### COVID-19 Recovery Group

- 6.0 Since the formation of the COVID-19 Recovery Group, the group have successfully bid for £330,000 of funding from the countywide COVID-19 outbreak management fund and the winter payments fund. All of the funding supports additional services or resources to help residents.

#### Communities

- 7.0 Regular contact has been made with community groups and parish councils throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to offer support. Many of these groups have formed the community outreach groups or 'hubs' that make up the East Cambs Co-ordination Hub. Regular monthly meetings also take place between the Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and community groups and organisations to understand the current need in our communities and to offer assistance where necessary.
- 7.1 As part of this ongoing support and communication, a need to provide a small but vital funding pot to communities was recognised. These community groups

have been stood up since the pandemic started and many have undertaken tasks which have not just fulfilled the immediate need of shopping trips and dog walking, but also activities (whilst restrictions allowed) to help residents. A community grant scheme, which offers funding of up to £500 per community hub was launched in January. The take up on the grant has been good in the first month with examples of funding going to support healthy treats for elderly and shielding residents, as well as a restock of volunteer PPE and expenses for travel, insurance, food parcels and vouchers, befriending and prescription collections to name but a few.

- 7.2 The Council has recently launched a survey for those 60 and over in a bid to get further clarification of how COVID-19 has affected them and the support they may need as restrictions change. This will close on 14 March 2020.
- 7.3 The Council has been successful in recruiting for the COVID-19 Co-ordinator post.

#### Environmental Health

- 8.0 The Council has been working alongside the County Council to launch support and training for taxi drivers to help reduce the transmission of COVID-19. The training includes a video advising taxi drivers on the necessary safety precautions required such as cleaning procedures, cashless payment and the use of masks, as well as providing a subsidy for fitting a quality standard screen within their vehicle. The Council website is being used as the hub for the training for all neighbouring district and city local authorities, who are offering this service. Since going live 212 drivers have completed the training and applied for funding. The next stage of the scheme is to promote the scheme to residents and to encourage those who require a taxi, to ask for a driver who has been COVID-trained and has a screen in place.
- 8.1 Environmental Health continues to support NHS Test and Trace. As part of their role, the District Council contacts (by phone or in person) where NHS contact tracers are unable to get a response from a resident.
- 8.2 The Council has worked alongside partner organisations to support the launch and promotion of the Rapid Testing Site in Soham. This not only includes continued assistance from the Environmental Health and Communications team, but also the initial set up support from the Facilities Management team. This has also been promoted internally and externally through posters at the Grange and our social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook as well as Facebook events, community groups and Facebook advertising. This was funded by the County Council).
- 8.3 A number of officers have been trained to undertake rapid tests including the Service Lead for Environmental Health and Housing and Community Advice Service. Four members of East Cambs Street Scene have also undertaken training and will be able to provide refuse collectors with regular rapid tests.

## Housing

- 9.0 The Housing and Community Advice Service will be leading on the undertaking of rapid tests for Council officers as well as those in hostels and on traveller sites. From an officer perspective, they will mainly focus on testing those who cannot work from home and/or undertake visits to public premises, for example, those supporting food parcel deliveries and visits to shared accommodation.
- 9.1 The recruitment for a Housing Advice (Court Officer) closed on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February.
- 9.2 Since the end of 2020, the Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEPE) provision has been continuously open and at the time of writing this report, will be until further notice. This is to help anyone who may find themselves sleeping rough in the extremely cold weather. This protocol is usually activated when the temperature drops to zero degrees centigrade for three consecutive nights but we took the decision to open it continuously.
- 9.3 As part of the Council's support to help administer the East Cambs Co-ordination Hub, the Housing and Community Advice Service and Customer Service officers have continued to support residents with food parcels and collections of prescriptions.

## Customer Services

- 10.0 Customer Service officers continue to be the first point of contact for resident enquiries during the pandemic either by phone, email or through Click & Connect – the Council's online self-service portal.
- 10.1 As well as this, the Customer Services team regularly call those identified as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) to ensure that they have the support they need.
- 10.2 Customer Services are also responsible for the administration of the £500 Self-Isolation Support Payment. The uptake for this payment has been extensive, with many being eligible for the discretionary section of the support payment. As the Council began to near its original funding capacity for discretionary grants, a bid was made to the countywide COVID-19 outbreak management fund and further funding has now been secured to ensure the Council can continue to offer this payment to those residents in need.

## Communications

- 11.0 The Communications team has continued to promote the messages from all the District Council's service areas. This includes the projects created and mentioned as part of this report. As well as this, the team have created the Council's own campaign to promote COVID-19 messaging, 'Let's Protect East Cambs'.

- 11.1 Some of the most recent areas of promotion have included the creation of a leaflet with information for residents on the rapid testing site in Soham, vaccination information and shopping locally and safely, alongside key message boards on the refuse vehicles. It also reiterates a thank you message to East Cambs residents for playing their part in keeping infection rates down and asking them not to be complacent because rates are falling. This will be printed and distributed in GP surgeries and food parcels.
- 11.2 A second campaign has been created to advise people on shopping locally and safely when buying essentials during lockdown. This has been achieved through funding from the ERDF Reopening High Streets Safely Fund to support the safe reopening of high streets across the district. So far, the campaign includes print advertising in local newspapers, digital adverts on local news sites and Facebook, two radio adverts and the production of a video guiding you through the advice.
- 11.3 A significant proportion of communications activity currently is supporting the campaigns and communications messages through partner organisations within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum. This includes assisting the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group with vaccination information and the county's #StandFirm campaign which uses local case studies who have had COVID-19 at the forefront of the campaign.
- 12.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT/CARBON IMPACT ASSESSMENT
- 12.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.
- 12.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required.
- 12.3 Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA) not required.
- 13.0 APPENDICES
- 13.1 None

| <u>Background Documents</u>                              | <u>Location</u>                | <u>Contact Officer</u>   |
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| Government guidance notes for the various grant schemes. | Room 13, The Grange, Ely       | Sally Bonnett<br>Infrastructure and Strategy Manager<br>(01353) 616451<br><a href="mailto:sally.bonnett@eastcambs.gov.uk">sally.bonnett@eastcambs.gov.uk</a> |
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