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| Report to:       | Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Prosperity Board                          |
| Report Author:   | Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director,<br>Blackpool Council |
| Date of Meeting: | 16 September 2020  |

## RESPONSE TO COVID-19

### 1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To update the Board on COVID-19 Grant support to businesses by Blackpool Council, Fylde Borough and Wyre Borough Council.

### 2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To note the report.

### 3.0 Background Information

On 11 March 2020 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the creation of a **small business grant fund ("SBGF")** to help businesses deal with the immediate financial impact of the 2020 COVID-19 crisis. Although not part of Non Domestic Rate ("Business Rates"), eligible businesses were those who were registered for Business Rates and those who qualified for Small Business Rate Relief ("SBRR"). It was originally stated as a one-off grant payment of £3,000.

On 17 March 2020 the Chancellor announced an extension to the SBGF scheme and an increase in funding to £10,000. He also announced a new grant fund for those Business Rate payers who were in the **retail, hospitality and leisure sector** but who did not receive SBRR. The scheme was in two parts and awards were made based on rateable value. Scheme 2A ("RHGA") was a £10,000 payment for those with a rateable value up to and including £15,000, and Scheme 2B ("RHGB"), a payment of £25,000 for those with a rateable value above £15,000 but below £51,000.

On 1 May 2020 the government announced a new **Discretionary Grants Fund (DGF)** scheme which would provide a discretionary grant payment to those who were not eligible for the SBGF or the RHG Schemes. Further guidance was issued by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on the Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund on the 13 May 2020. This scheme was funded on the basis of 5% of the expected expenditure on the two grant schemes above.

On 23 July the Government informed Local Authorities of the closure of all COVID 19 Business Grant Schemes on 28 August 2020. This includes the Discretionary Grant Fund as well as the Small Business Grants and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant

#### 4.0 Blackpool Council

A critical part of Blackpool's multi-faceted response to the pandemic was the immediate establishment of an enhanced business support service to help protect the local economy.

With thousands of Blackpool's businesses and their employees facing huge upheaval after the government lockdown announcement, it was vital that the Council and partners were able to deliver a dedicated service that gave credible help and guidance to those who needed it.

As Central Government began to roll out £330bn worth of rescue measures including temporary loans, rate relief, cash grants, Job Retention and Self Employment Schemes to support businesses and save employees from hardship, the Council's Business Support Team within the Economic Development Services, established a COVID-19 helpdesk: [www.blackpoolunlimited.com/c19business-support](http://www.blackpoolunlimited.com/c19business-support).

They then formed a close working relationship with colleagues in finance and business rates departments to provide urgent help to those businesses that were eligible for financial aid to be able to access it. The partnership has provided a remarkable service to date, certainly one of the best in the country. Within the first few weeks, there was a huge surge in usage of the website helpdesk with 12,000 enquiries and almost 900 businesses receiving direct support to date.

The strong cross-working relationship with finance and business rates was crucial as many of these queries related to the rate support grants being administered by the Local Authority.

On 1 April 2020, Blackpool Council received a total of £59m from Government to start the process of paying the business support grant payments to local businesses. The challenge was to get the money out the door as quickly as possible, recognising that many businesses were becoming increasingly desperate for support. Over the next two weeks, messages went out across multiple channels to advise eligible businesses to send in their bank details so payment could be made.

At the same time, the finance and business rates teams were working around the clock and through weekends to check eligibility, make sure the claims were not fraudulent and the process the payments directly into bank accounts.

As of the end of August 2020, the Council had paid £47.17m to 4,154 businesses.

The first publicised league tables showed that Blackpool Council was above average nationally in respect of the speed of getting these payments out to local businesses- 51.8% v 49.6% national average by amount and 61.2% v 51% national average by number.

When the discretionary fund was made available by government they asked each Local Authority to allocate a percentage of the remaining resources according to a locally determined set of criteria. By 28 August 2020, Blackpool had paid £2,450,000 to 216 businesses. This is around £30,000 more than the allocation but the Council had committed this additional resource so that it could apply the criteria fairly and ensure that all of the money made available was paid out (thereby not handing any back to the Treasury).

It is also important to note that the Council's adult employment services (such as Positive Steps) continue to actively support unemployed residents remotely, at a time when job vacancies in the local labour market have plummeted. These employability measures will be crucial once the economy is fully switched back on, where many more unemployed will require assistance.

In addition as part of the efforts to rejuvenate the economy has also made bids to the Reopening High Streets Fund, Future High Streets Fund, High Street Heritage Action Zone Fund, Getting Building Fund and Towns Fund with some approvals already received.

Below is a summary position statement on the various Covid-19 grant schemes in Blackpool:

| <b>FUND:</b>                      | <b>NUMBER OF GRANTS ISSUED:</b> | <b>VALUE OF GRANTS ISSUED:</b> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Small Business Grants Fund        | 3,161                           | £31,610,000                    |
| Retail, Hospitality, Leisure Fund | 774                             | £13,110,000                    |
| COVID Discretionary Grants Fund   | 219 ( <i>884 applications</i> ) | £2,450,000                     |
| <b>TOTAL:</b>                     | <b>4,154</b>                    | <b>£47, 170,000</b>            |

## 5.0 Fylde Borough Council

The Council established a cross party member Town Centre Working Group (TCWG) which has the remit to lead on and oversee the Council's response to the impact of Covid-19 on the town centres and the wider economy in Fylde. The TCWG meets on a regular basis and has a dynamic action plan that incorporates initiatives from the Reopening the High Streets Safely Fund and measures proposed by the Lancashire Resilience Fund.

Officers have provided support and advice to premises ahead of opening along with continued support (7 days a week). The Council provided grants to the three town centres (St Annes/Lytham/Kirkham) for each business group to fund initiatives that support recovery in the town centres.

Dedicated teams were set up to provide advice and support to non-essential retail and then the hospitality sector ahead of re-opening with ongoing advice, monitoring and support throughout. The Borough has seen a significant number of people visit the coast and countryside as the lock down eased, the better weather arrived, people being on furlough and international travel curtailed. This placed pressure on waster, parks, litter, enforcement, car parking and traffic management all of which have had additional resources to manage demand. Significantly more visitors made social distancing more difficult and led to an increase in reports of non-compliance.

A significant number of businesses have reported good business triggered by staycations and COVID circumstances i.e. furloughed parents; children at home; travel bans and the Eat Out to Help Out initiative. However, there are concerns that the landscape will change in September with weather change, end of the scheme and schools reopening. The circumstances created by COVID 19 has benefited tourism locations despite the lack of major events to attract footfall, it has helped many businesses recover after the lockdown.

The need to social distance has resulted in a review of existing public realm schemes currently being delivered to ensure that pedestrian flows to ease movement is addressed. The Council has produced an initial video Enjoy Fylde Safely aimed at providing reassurance to visitors and residents that Fylde is managing the risks responsibly and that it is safe to visit, a further video has been produced to update and reinforce the message across all service sectors.

Below is a summary position statement on the various Covid-19 grant schemes in Fylde Borough:

| <b>FUND:</b>                      | <b>NUMBER OF GRANTS ISSUED:</b> | <b>VALUE OF GRANTS ISSUED:</b> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Small Business Grants Fund        | 1,233                           | £12,330,000                    |
| Retail, Hospitality, Leisure Fund | 319                             | £5,770,000                     |
| Discretionary Grants Fund         | 180                             | £1,011,250                     |
| <b>TOTAL:</b>                     | <b>1,732</b>                    | <b>£19,111,250</b>             |

## 6.0 Wyre Borough Council

The Council established an internal taskforce to oversee and coordinate its response to Covid-19 and one element of this is to consider the impact on the local economy. This group meets on a weekly basis.

An additional internal working group has been established to support the reopening safely of the four Town Centres within the Borough (Poulton / Fleetwood / Garstang / Cleveleys) and this meets on a fortnightly basis. The working groups remit has been to develop the Action Plan required for the Re-opening the High Streets Fund. Four individual groups meet fortnightly for each of the Town Centres consisting of Councillors, Council Officers and Business Representatives.

Officers have provided support and advice to premises ahead of opening, with continued support taking place via visits and direct communications.

Shop counts and Business Health Checks have taken place in the four town centres. The Health Check has centred on the support businesses require to aid responses to Covid-19 measures and to gauge specific business support to aid survival, topics have included Access to Finance, Growth Planning and Marketing. Referrals to providers were made and interventions for those concerned have been initiated. Statistical data gathered from this exercise has been shared with the Town Centre Groups. A further Town Centres Health Check is taking place during September and will continue on a bi-monthly basis for the remainder of 2020.

Manual Footfall counting took place in August for each Town Centre. The data from this will be shared with each group once the Council is in receipt of our Dashboard from Springboard. Footfall counters will be placed into each Town Centre in October 2020.

The need to social distance has resulted in some temporary road closures namely in Cleveleys and Garstang, and this is being reviewed weekly with officers and with the partners we are working with.

Webcams are to be installed within each Town Centre to provide a visual projection of the Town Centres in real-time to aid social distancing at peak periods. Sound systems are being installed to provide safety reminders to visitors whilst creating an improved atmosphere via music for visitors when visiting their chosen Town Centre.

Below is a summary position statement on the various Covid-19 grant schemes in Wyre Borough:

| <b>FUND:</b>                      | <b>NUMBER OF GRANTS ISSUED:</b> | <b>VALUE OF GRANTS ISSUED:</b> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Small Business Grants Fund        | 1849                            | £18,490,000                    |
| Retail, Hospitality, Leisure Fund | 493                             | £8,695,000                     |
| Discretionary Grants Fund         | 138                             | £1,069,000                     |
| <b>TOTAL:</b>                     | <b>2,480</b>                    | <b>£28,254,000</b>             |