

Crawley Borough Council

Consideration Report for Delegated Decision by the Leader

Not before 27 July 2022

Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) – Revised

Report of the Head of Corporate Finance (FIN/582)

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To seek approval for the Council's COVID19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) Discretionary Relief to local business ratepayer guidelines.
- 1.2. The Council has been given £5,303,160 to grant COVID19 additional relief fund (CARF) discretionary relief to business ratepayers within Crawley. The guidelines seek to provide guidance to staff and stakeholders on how this CARF Discretionary Relief is to be made and what factors are considered when making an award.
- 1.3. At its meeting on 24 November 2021 the Cabinet considered the Budget Strategy 2022/23 - 2026/27 (report FIN/537) and in doing so delegated authority to the Leader of the Council in consultation with the Chief Executive and the Head of Corporate Finance to approve a discretionary business rates scheme to distribute the share to Crawley Borough Council.
- 1.4. A scheme has been previously approved but there was very low take up across the Council's in West Sussex that agreed the joint scheme. Therefore a revised scheme of 'Direct Award' with the option for the business to refuse has been designed. The deadline for allocating the relief is the 30th September 2022. Teams across West Sussex have been working on the 'Energy Rebate' scheme and therefore have not had the resource to work through the CARF scheme over the last four months.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Leader:
 - a) Approve the Council's Covid-19 revised Additional Relief Fund Discretionary Relief Guidelines.
 - b) Give delegated authority to designated senior officers to make relief awards within these guidelines.

3. Reasons for the Recommendation

- 3.1. The Council has been given £5,303,160 to grant COVID19 additional relief fund (CARF) discretionary relief to business ratepayers within Crawley. These guidelines seek to provide guidance to staff and stakeholders on how this CARF Discretionary Relief is to be made and what factors are considered when making an award.

4. Background and Issue to be Resolved

- 4.1. On 15 December 2021 the Government announced that it would provide Local Authorities with additional funding to help businesses pay their business rates to offset the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.2. [Government guidance](#) for the scheme was issued on the 15 December 2021. The Government Guidance introduced a rates relief scheme to replace the legal right to appeal to the Valuation Office Agency on Material Change of Circumstances grounds due to COVID19.
- 4.3. Billing authorities will be responsible for designing the discretionary relief schemes that are to operate in their areas. However, in developing and implementing their schemes local authorities based on the Government guidelines
- 4.4. Crawley Borough Council has agreed these revised guidelines (attached as an appendix to this report) with all other West Sussex Boroughs and District Councils. The guidelines are in line with the guidelines issued by the Government.

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1. The options considered in this report are the only ones available to the Council as the Council seeks to become more transparent in the use of its discretionary financial assistance to local business during the current COVID19 outbreak. The application process had very low take up across West Sussex, therefore a direct award scheme will ensure maximum delivery of the relief.

6. Urgency of Decision

- 6.1. Due to the urgent nature of this decision the Special Urgency Procedure Rule has been used for this decision as it has been impracticable to publish a Forthcoming Decision Notice for the 28 clear days period and publish the consideration report 5 clear days before the decision is taken. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission has agreed the use of this provision. In addition, due to the urgent nature of this decision the Chief Executive has Protected the decision from Call-In, so that the Council can start supporting our businesses as soon as possible

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. The government grant allocated by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in respect of the COVID19 Additional Relief Fund is £5,303,160. This is a cash limited fund and any relief incurred over and above this must be funded by the Council. There is currently no additional funding identified within the Council to support Discretionary Relief, which means that expenditure will need to be contained within the cash limited.

8. Background Papers

- [COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund \(CARF\)](#): Local Authority Guidance (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC))
- [Budget Strategy 2022/23 – 20236/27 – FIN/537](#) (Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 22.11.21 & Cabinet on 24.11.21)

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