

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

17 AUGUST 2021

ANGUS BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT GRANT

REPORT BY ALISON SMITH, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

ABSTRACT

This report includes a proposal to deliver a new business grant to support post Covid-19 business recovery across Angus.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) notes the strategic intent behind the proposals in this report and the outline criteria proposed for assessing applications
- (ii) agrees to allocate £250,000 from the 2021/22 General COVID support funding allocated to the Council to enable delivery of a Business Improvement Grant
- (iii) agrees to delegate to the Interim Director of Vibrant Communities and Sustainable Growth in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Council Leader and Leader of the SNP Group authority to finalise the scheme criteria/conditions and assessment method for the grant
- (iv) note that expenditure on the proposed Business Improvement Grant will be limited to the funds being set aside for this purpose

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

The delivery of a Business Improvement Grant will contribute to the following priority in the Council Plan 2021-24.

Economy: We want Angus to be a 'go-to' area for business

- spend council money locally where we can help to grow our local economy
- support the creation of local, paid, and lasting job opportunities for our citizens
- make Angus a low-carbon, sustainable area
- support business and economic growth by improving the physical and digital infrastructure

3. BACKGROUND

During 2020 and 2021, Angus Council staff delivered Scottish Government Covid-19 grant support to businesses across Angus. These grants were to aid the survival of businesses during the pandemic and to enable them to maintain staffing levels where possible.

To date 4,650 grants totalling £42,748,275 have been paid out across 16 different funds.

With the easing of restrictions and the ongoing national vaccination programme, companies are revisiting projects and areas of work which were not feasible during lockdown.

4. CURRENT POSITION

The council does not currently deliver its own Business Support Grant, so this would be new activity, aligned to economic recovery.

5. PROPOSALS

As part of our economic recovery, we have identified a gap in support for those businesses looking to improve or increase their current product/service offer.

We are therefore keen to offer grant support to underpin companies looking to develop new products, services, in-house efficiencies or build on other areas of diversification. In particular, we are keen to consider funding projects which are not part of current business operations but instead focus on researched and developed proposals which can be delivered this year.

Working with businesses on COVID grants has given us greater knowledge of, and insight into, the Angus business base. Those applying for, or being awarded funding, will also be supported with guidance and signposting to other sources of funding or help as and when they need it. It will also enable us to make links for them to other Council services where appropriate and build on the one council approach for customers. The funding will therefore be part of a package of support – a holistic approach – and not be seen as being delivered in isolation from other services which we provide.

Purpose

To enable companies to future proof their business, to ensure survival and support growth opportunities by being innovative in both outlook and practice. To promote economic recovery, protect and enhance job security, sustain, and potentially create jobs.

The fund is aimed at companies of up to 250 employees who can demonstrate ambition to innovate or diversify

This will be a discretionary fund, with each case being considered on its merits, based on agreed assessment criteria including outcomes, jobs created, benefits to the company and economic impact potential for Angus.

Eligibility

Businesses that have received Scottish Government Covid-19 grant support can submit an application. However, where there is an alternative source of funding available businesses should apply for this first. Businesses will be asked to note that such grant support may fall within state aid rules.

Applications are invited from all sectors of the Angus economy and businesses must be Angus based. Funding support will not be on a 100% basis for any projects. The fund will provide a one-off payment but businesses will need to show evidence that they are able to contribute 25% of the costs of the project.

Delivery

The grant fund will be widely promoted online, via partners and through e-newsletters to businesses. Applications and supporting evidence will be submitted via an online form.

The launch date of the fund is to be determined.

Grant Criteria

It is proposed that the final criteria and assessment method will be delegated to the Interim Director of Communities in consultation with the Director of Finance and Leader of the Council and Leader of the SNP Group.

Examples of Eligible Projects

DIGITAL

Management information systems
Website development – online sales, customer interaction, booking systems, payment systems
Digital and video platforms for marketing purposes

EQUIPMENT

Production of new products
Supporting zero carbon and circular economy

Logistics/distribution/delivery

INTERNATIONAL	Supporting exploration and engagement with new customer base/s Training or learning to mitigate impact of BREXIT First time attendance at Trade Events eg: cost and distribution of samples
GREEN	Reducing waste Improving energy efficiency Supporting renewables supply chain
HIGH STREET	Opening of new High Street businesses by Angus based business in vacant retail unit or work to diversify businesses or adapt to COVID-19 impact
PROCUREMENT	Supporting costs of consultancy in submitting first tender Collaborative submissions re above

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is proposed to set aside £250,000 to deliver the Business Improvement Grant scheme. This would be funded from the allocation of £5.656m of 2021/22 general COVID-19 support funding received by the Council from the Scottish Government. The use of this £5.656m for other purposes will be the subject of separate reports but the Business Improvement Grant scheme is considered urgent for implementation if it is to assist businesses in the immediate pandemic recovery period and there is sufficient funding available based on known other commitments to allow this to go ahead.

Proposed Allocation of Grants

AMOUNT	No of EMPLOYEES	Potential No of GRANTS	TOTAL FUND
£2,000	Micro (under 5)	15	£30,000
£5,000	5-10	15	£75,000
£8,000	11-50	5	£40,000
£15,000	51-250	2	£30,000

In addition, there could potentially be three one off awards of £25,000 to those projects deemed to be the most innovative and with greatest impact.

Total: £250,000

Expenditure on the proposed Business Improvement Grant will be limited to the funds being set aside for this purpose so the maximum spend would be £250,000. The Grant scheme is being proposed as a specific part of pandemic recovery so is temporary initiative rather than a scheme the Council would provide on an ongoing basis.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

8. CONSULTATION

The Director of Finance has been consulted in relation to this proposal.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Form

Step 1

Establishment of a Business Improvement Grant

Step 2

Is this only a **screening** Equality Impact Assessment Yes

(A) If Yes, please choose from the following options **all** reasons why a full EIA/FSD is not required:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| (i) It does not impact on people | No |
| (ii) It is a percentage increase in fees which has no differential impact on protected characteristics | No |
| (iii) It is for information only | No |
| (iv) It is reflective e.g. of budget spend over a financial year | Yes |
| (v) It is technical | No |

If you have answered yes to any of points above, please go to **Step 16**, and sign off the Assessment.

(B) If you have answered No to the above, please indicate the following:

Is this a full Equality Impact Assessment	Yes/No
Is this a Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment	Yes/No

If you have answered Yes to either or both of the above, continue with Step 3.

If your proposal is a **strategy** please ensure you complete Step 13 which is the Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment.

Step 3

(i)Lead Directorate/Service:

(ii)Are there any **relevant** statutory requirements affecting this proposal? If so, please describe.

(iii)What is the aim of the proposal? Please give full details.

(iv)Is it a new proposal? Yes/No Please indicate OR

Is it a review of e.g. an existing budget saving, report, strategy, policy, service review, procedure or function? Yes/No Please indicate

Step 4: Which people does your proposal involve or have consequences for?

Please indicate all which apply:

Employees Yes/No

Job Applicants Yes/No

Service users Yes/No

Members of the public Yes/No

Step 5: List the evidence/data/research that has been used in this assessment (links to data sources, information etc which you may find useful are in the Guidance). This could include:

Internal data (e.g. customer satisfaction surveys; equality monitoring data; customer complaints).

Internal consultation (e.g. with staff, trade unions and any other services affected).

External data (e.g. Census, equality reports, equality evidence finder, performance reports, research, available statistics)

External consultation (e.g. partner organisations, national organisations, community groups, other councils).

Other (general information as appropriate).

Step 6: Evidence Gaps.

Are there any gaps in the equality information you currently hold? Yes/No

If yes, please state what they are, and what measures you will take to obtain the evidence you need.

Step 7: Are there potential differential impacts on protected characteristic groups? Please complete for each group, including details of the potential impact on those affected. Please remember to take into account any particular impact resulting from **Covid-19**.

Please state if there is a potentially positive, negative, neutral or unknown impact for each group. Please state the reason(s) why.

Age

Impact

Disability

Impact

Gender reassignment

Impact

Marriage and Civil Partnership

Impact

Pregnancy/Maternity

Impact

Race - (includes Gypsy Travellers)

Impact

Religion or Belief

Impact

Sex

Impact

Sexual orientation

Impact

Step 8: Consultation with any of the groups potentially affected

If you have consulted with any group potentially affected, please give details of how this was done and what the results were.

If you have not consulted with any group potentially affected, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating action of any negative impact (Step 9)?

Step 9: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce potentially negative impacts?

Step 10: If a potentially negative impact has been identified, please state below the justification.

Step 11: In what way does this proposal contribute to any or all of the public sector equality duty to: eliminate unlawful discrimination; advance equality of

opportunity; and foster good relations between people of different protected characteristics?

Step 12: Is there any action which could be taken to advance equalities in relation to this proposal?

Step 13: FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

This step is only applicable to **strategies** which are key, high level decisions. If your proposal is **not** a strategy, please leave this Step blank, and go to Step 14.

Links to data sources, information etc which you may find useful are in the Guidance.

Step 13(A) What evidence do you have about any socio-economic disadvantage/inequalities of outcome in relation to this strategic issue?

Step 13(B) Please state if there are any gaps in socio-economic evidence for this strategy and how you will take measures to gather the evidence you need.

Step 13(C) Are there any potential impacts this strategy may have specifically on the undernoted groupings? Please remember to take into account any particular impact resulting from **Covid-19**.

Please state if there is a potentially positive, negative, neutral or unknown impact for each grouping.

Low and/or No Wealth (e.g. those with enough money to meet basic living costs and pay bills but have no savings to deal with any unexpected spends and no provision for the future.

Impact

Material Deprivation (i.e. those unable to access basic goods and services e.g. repair/replace broken electrical goods, warm home, leisure and hobbies).

Impact

Area Deprivation (i.e. where people live (e.g. rural areas), or where they work (e.g. accessibility of transport)).

Impact

Socio-economic Background i.e. social class including parents' education, people's employment and income.

Impact

Other – please indicate

Step 13(D) Please state below if there are measures which could be taken to reduce socio-economic disadvantage/inequalities of outcome.

Step 14: What arrangements will be put in place to monitor and review the Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment?

Step 15: Where will this Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment be published?

Step 16: Sign off and Authorisation. Please state name, post, and date for each:

Prepared by: Millie Clarke, Team Leader- Economic Development 8/6/21

Reviewed by :Merlyn Dunn, Manager – Economic Development 9/6/21

Approved by: Alison Smith, Interim Director of Vibrant Communities and Sustainable Growth 9/6/21

NB. There are several worked examples of separate EIA and FSD Assessments in the Guidance which may be of use to you.
