

**REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 17 JUNE 2020**

**PORTFOLIO: ENTERPRISE**

**REPORT FROM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, PLACE & ENVIRONMENT**

**SUBJECT: REOPENING HIGH STREETS SAFELY FUND (RHSS)**

**1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director, Place & Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Enterprise, to enter into a RHSS Grant Funding Agreement with the Cities and Local Growth Unit (CLGU). CLGU is a joint unit between the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- 1.2 To agree the proposed spending plan for the Council's RHSS grant allocation of a maximum of £77,836 as set out in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 1.3 That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director, Place & Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Enterprise, to award contracts for the delivery of the RHSS Grant Funding Agreement; in line with the proposed spending plan.
- 1.4 That the decision be taken as a matter of urgency and not subject to call-in because of the need to ensure that outcomes can be delivered to meet the initial deadlines of the majority of shops re-opening in the week commencing 15 June 2020.

**2 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 The suggested programme of works allows the funding allocation to be used to target the issues of highest priority within the scope of the scheme.
- 2.2 The urgency of the programme requires delegation of authority to the Assistant Director, Place & Environment to ensure that outcomes can be delivered to meet the initial deadlines of the majority of shops re-opening from 15 June 2020.

**3 SALIENT INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Government has mandated that councils across England are to share £50m of additional funding (from the European Regional Development Fund) known as the Reopening High Streets Safely fund (RHSS). RHSS is intended to support the safe reopening of high streets and other commercial areas as part of planned recovery measures relating to the COVID 19 pandemic (The money will allow local authorities in England to put in place additional measures to establish a safe trading environment for businesses and customers, particularly in high streets, through measures that extend to the

end of March 2021. Councils have been allocated sums of money from RHSS, which can be drawn down from Government in accordance with the terms of the scheme. The monies are grant monies and do not need to be repaid but they can only be spent in accordance with plans approved by Government. Expenditure must be incurred by the Council in the first instance and then reclaimed from Government.

- 3.2 Expenditure for reimbursement under RHSS is eligible from 1 June 2020. The detail of the requirements of RHSS will be covered in a RHSS Grant Funding Agreement with the Cities and Local Growth Unit (CLGU), based on the Council's proposed spending plan, that should be in place by the end of June. Once this agreement is in place then claims for reimbursement for expenditure incurred from 1 June can begin to be made. The RHSS will be available to access up until the end of March 2021.

- 3.3 Rochford District Council has been awarded an allocation of no more than £77,836, subject to expenditure meeting the criteria for the grant.

3.4 Scope of RHSS

Government is clear that RHSS will support 4 main strands of activity:

**1. Support to develop an action plan for how the local authority may begin to safely reopen their local economies.**

It is not essential that the Council develops these plans but, in considering how to use this funding, all local authorities are encouraged to engage businesses, business organisations, lower tier authorities such as Parish Councils and other relevant stakeholders when considering how to use this award.

**2. Communications and public information activity to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.**

The Council can choose how to communicate to its residents their role in ensuring that the local economy can reopen safely. It will be for the Council to decide the most appropriate communication channels for their areas. There is scope to pay the salaries of staff or consultants to develop this work.

**3. Business-facing awareness raising activities to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.**

The principle of this activity is the same as for communications to residents, but it is recognised that the messaging needs to be different and as such part of a separate campaign.

The campaigns should be focused on supporting SMEs. The advice being provided in these campaigns should be focused on those businesses that operate alongside public spaces and have customers.

**4. Temporary public realm changes to ensure that reopening of local economies can be managed successfully and safely.**

To ensure that public spaces that are next to businesses are as safe as possible, temporary changes will need to be made to the physical environment. This funding can be used to enhance that existing offer to increase the level of safety measures, improve their attractiveness and ensure consistency of approach across individual and multiple public spaces including high streets. These changes can help improve consumer confidence and increase, safely, the number of active consumers.

**3.5 Activities out of scope**

**3.6** There are three main categories where activities cannot be supported by RHSS:

- Activity that provides no additionality - This funding should not be replacing the source for already committed expenditure. For example, funding cannot be used to subsidise salary, but it can support a new temporary role to support the implementation.
- Capital expenditure – This funding is intended to help local authorities address the short-term issue of reopening their local economies. It can support some temporary changes to the physical environment, but those changes should not be anticipated to last beyond 12 months, or until no longer required for social distancing.
- Grants to businesses – Funding cannot provide direct financial support to businesses to make adaptations to premises, purchase PPE, purchase goods or equipment or offset wages or other operating costs.

**Claiming Expenditure**

**3.7** Local authorities will be able to spend money on eligible activities from 1 June 2020 and claim it back from CLGU in arrears. The default position is that claims will be paid quarterly.

**3.8** A standard claims template will be provided for local authorities and as a minimum all claims should contain the details of the outputs of the expenditure, as set out below, and results achieved in the claim.

**3.9** For expediency a number of contracts totalling approximately £8,000 have already been awarded (after the 1<sup>st</sup> June date) drawing down from existing appropriate Economic Development budgets as an interim measure. These contracts are to enable delivery of the business support pack and employment of a project management consultant to oversee coordination and delivery of

the action plan. This is at the Council's own risk based on an assessment of the spend criteria set out in the guidance and will be sought to be recovered from the overall grant allocation, once the RHSS Grant Funding Agreement is in place.

#### Outcomes

- 3.10 A set of expected outcomes has been set out by Government and in order for a claim by the Council to be valid under the terms of the RHSS Grant Funding Agreement, the Council must ensure that the planned RHSS expenditure delivers at least one of the listed outcomes below:
- 3.11 An Action Plan – an action plan which is focused on activities that help ensure that Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, including Social Enterprises in the area covered by the plan, are able to build their resilience and adaptability in the context of the economic impact of COVID-19.
- 3.12 A Public Information Campaign - a public information campaign which must be focused on activities that include *inter alia* promotion of local commercial areas, make the public aware of the precautions in place, enable the public to make informed travel choices on how best to visit commercial areas and enable the public to visit commercial areas safely whilst COVID-19 non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) are in place such as social distancing measures.
- 3.13 A Business Information Campaign - this indicator is linked to business facing campaigns. It is possible that a single campaign may be developed which covers both public and business facing elements.
- 3.14 Employment of a COVID-19 Communication Officer - who must be focused on activities that help ensure that Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, including Social Enterprises to build their resilience and adaptability in the context of the economic impact of COVID-19 in the area covered by RHSS.
- 3.15 Number of High Streets with Temporary COVID-19 Adaptations - adaptations made to public spaces adjacent to commercial areas which help Small and Medium Sized Enterprises including Social Enterprises to build their resilience and adaptability.
- 3.16 Number of Neighbourhood Shopping Areas with Temporary COVID-19 – Adaptations - adaptations made to public spaces adjacent to commercial areas which help Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, including Social Enterprises to build their resilience and adaptability in the context of the economic impact of COVID-19 in the area covered by RHSS.

The Council's planned expenditure to be included in its RHSS Grant Funding Agreement, as outlined in Appendix 1, is aligned against the above outcomes.

**4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 The alternative is not to proceed any further with the outlined spend as in Appendix 1. It should be noted that to ensure expediency an approximate £8,000 has already been committed using existing budgets and reserves.

**5 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 As set out in paragraph 3.9, there is a small risk that expenditure incurred in advance of the RHSS Grant Funding Agreement being in place with CLGU could be borne directly by the Council if it was deemed outside the scope of the RHSS terms and conditions. This risk is mitigated by any initial expenditure incurred being clearly aligned with the required outcomes of RHSS.
- 5.2 In addition there is an ongoing risk that as claims against expenditure are retrospective, even once the RHSS Grant Funding Agreement is in place, if elements of the expenditure were subsequently deemed outside of the scope of the agreement, they would be borne directly by the Council. This risk will be mitigated by internal controls to ensure that any spend directly aligns to the RHSS Grant Funding Agreement with CLGU.

**6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Aside from officer time to implement the scheme (which will be found within existing Council resources) the costs incurred in relation to RHSS will be contained within the Council's grant allocation of £77,836 and will therefore not create a budgetary pressure.
- 6.2 Spend will be monitored to ensure it is in line with the RHSS Grant Funding Agreement once this is in place and can be fully reclaimed retrospectively from CLGU.

**7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Council will be entering into a grant funding agreement with the CLGU under which it will take on legal responsibilities to administer the scheme in accordance with that agreement and the RHSS scheme itself.
- 7.2 As per section 9E of the Local Government Act 2000 discharge of any executive function can be delegated to (among others) an officer of the Council.
- 7.3 Delegation to the Assistant Director, Place & Environment (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Enterprise) would be permissible under the Council's Constitution and more particularly Part 3 B and C.

**8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and found there to be no impacts (either positive or negative) on protected groups as defined under the Equality Act 2010.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

The decision should be taken as a matter of urgency and not subject to call-in because of the need to ensure that outcomes can be delivered to meet the initial deadlines of the majority of shops re-opening in the week commencing 15 June 2020.

LT Lead Officer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



**Assistant Director, Place & Environment**

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**Background Papers:-**

None.

For further information please contact Marcus Hotten on:-

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If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.

## APPENDIX 1

Required Outcomes	Activity	Delivery Date	Estimated Budget
CV-19 action plan	Consultation with stakeholders and formulation of action plan	Mid-June	£2,000
	Project management of action to ensure delivery of key outcomes	December	£10,000
CV-19 public information campaign	Communication Plan	Early June	£2,000
	Web site Development	Mid-June	£2,600
	Video	Late June	£2,400
	Brand Development	Early June	£2,300
	Marketing Campaign	October	£2,350
	Further supporting campaign – repeat of the above	December	£7,000
CV-19 Business Information Campaign	Business Information Pack	Early June/ Early July	£4,500
	1:1 Business Consultancy Support	October	£3,000
	Further Supporting campaign – update of the above	December	£5,000
High Streets with Temporary CV-19 Adaptations	Signage & Banners	Mid-June	£6,000
	Road Closures if appropriate	Mid- July	12,000
	Information Maps	Mid-June	£5,000
	Further high street adaptations as required	December	£10,000
Neighbourhood Shopping Areas with Temporary CV-19 – Adaptations	Signage & Banners	End of June	£1,000
Allocated Budget			<b>£77,150</b>