

Executive

13 January 2022

Report of the Chief Operating Officer & Director Customer & Communities
Portfolio of the Executive Leader

Coronavirus Update Including Support to Business

Summary

1. This report provides an update on the Council's response to the recent wave of Covid-19, largely related to the Omicron variant.
2. Whilst the Council is well prepared and able to respond effectively to the challenges of Covid-19, there are some specific impacts which must be dealt with.
3. The Government has announced new funding for Business Support Grants in response to the latest wave of infection and the necessary controls, known as Plan B. Clarification and final details on all grant schemes are yet to be received at the time of writing. Therefore, Executive are asked to approve delegated authority to allow officers to progress the distribution of available funding as soon as possible in consultation with Executive Members, and for this to be formally reported back to public Executive Member Decision sessions as soon as practicable.

Recommendations

4. Executive is asked to:
 - a) Note the coronavirus update contained in paragraph 5 to 12
 - b) Approve the delegation for business support schemes as set out at paragraph 21.

Reason: To provide urgent financial support to the city's businesses to help them through the ongoing pandemic specifically in relation to the recent Omicron variant.

Background

5. On 26 November 2021, the World Health Organisation designated the variant B.1.1.529 a variant of concern, named Omicron. This was based on the evidence that Omicron has several mutations that may have an impact on how it behaves, for example, on how easily it spreads or the severity of illness it causes.
6. Since then, Omicron has spread quickly, becoming the dominant variant in the UK and proving to be more infectious than previous variants. Early indications are that the severity of illness caused may be less than some other variants, but whilst this is positive it does not mean the variant carries less risk. As it is more infectious, as it becomes wider-spread through the community, the likelihood of infection for people who may be vulnerable to serious illness from this strain is greater. It is, therefore, being taken extremely seriously.
7. The latest validated rate of new Covid cases per 100,000 of population for the period 23.12.21 to 29.12.21 in York was 1,586.6 (3,348 cases). The national and regional averages at this date were 1,508.1 and 1,412.9 respectively. Early indications are that this rate is likely to continue to increase in the next period.
8. Uptake of vaccinations remains the most significant response. As at 2.1.22, a total of 157,257 CYC residents aged 16+ have had the first dose of the vaccine. This represents 88.2% of the estimated (16+) population of York (ONS 2020). 150,090 residents aged 16+ have had both doses of the vaccine, representing 84.2% of the estimated (16+) population.
9. 5,006 CYC residents aged 12-15 have had the first dose of the vaccine. This represents 59.8% of the estimated (12-15) population.
10. 112,174 eligible CYC residents have received the booster vaccine. This represents 64.3% of the estimated (18+) population.
11. Hospital admissions are beginning to increase but as yet not in line with infections, and whilst there remain very significant pressures within the health system, the severity of the illness appears to be lower than previous waves.
12. The Council has seen a significant increase in staff testing positive for Covid over the last two weeks, although with many staff on

annual leave over Christmas, the impacts of this are yet to be seen. This still only equates to around 2% of staff. This could increase, but pressures within service areas are being managed with business continuity plans in place to support if needed. No reductions in services are currently expected at this time as a result of staff unavailability.

New Government Business Support Grants

13. The Government have recently announced four new support grants for business linked to the recent rise in the Omicron variant and its financial effect on local businesses. The guidance was received on 30th December and is currently being looked at. The high level information is detailed below.
14. The level of funding is yet to be confirmed and there is a clarification session with central government on Monday 10th January. Following this meeting the funds will be distributed subject to consultation with the relevant Executive Members. This will be formally reported back to public Executive Member Decision sessions as soon as practicable.

Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF)

15. This fund is intended to support those businesses affected by the pandemic that were ineligible for existing support linked to business rates. £1.5 billion has been allocated to local authorities based upon the estimated rateable value in each local authority rating list which falls within the scope of the fund, weighted for the Gross Value Added (GVA) impacts of COVID-19 per sector.
16. The support is delivered by way of a Section 47 business rate relief with the council been refunded for all awards through a Section 31 grant. Further clarification is yet to be received at the time of writing.

Hospitality & Leisure Grant (HLG)

17. This grant is to support Hospitality (accommodation, food & beverage services) and Leisure. Final clarification on distribution will be made at the meeting with central government on Monday 10th January.
18. The grant is based on rateable value (RV) as set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Rateable Value	£0 - £15k	>£15 - £51k	>£51k
Value of Grant	£2.7k	£4k	£6k

Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG)

19. The full details and further clarification regarding this grant, including the value of the additional award, are still to be received at the time of writing.

Cultural Recovery Fund (CRF)

20. The Government are providing £30 million in support to organisations in England such as theatres, orchestras and museums through the winter. Further clarification of this scheme including the value of any funding is awaited at the time of writing.

Council Schemes and Delegation

21. The details of all government support is expected in the next few weeks and where there is any discretion, a council scheme will be required. The funding for all support is coming from central government and will be expected to be distributed urgently. This paper recommends that, to facilitate this, a scheme approval where required is delegated as set out below through officer decisions in consultation with the Executive Members for Finance & Performance and Economy & Strategic Planning. All schemes will come back to the Executive Member Decision Session for Finance and Performance on 14th February for member review and endorsement in public.

CARF – The Director of Customer & Communities in consultation with the Corporate Director of Economy & Place.

HLG – The Director of Customer & Communities.

ARG – The Corporate Director of Economy & Place.

CRF – The Corporate Director of Economy and Place in consultation with the Assistant Director of Customer & Communities

Recommendations

22. Members are asked to:

- a. Note the coronavirus update contained in paragraph 5 to 12
- b. Approve the officer delegations outlined in paragraph 21 above in consultation with the Executive Members for Finance & Performance and Economy & Strategic Planning.

Consultation

23. There is no wider consultation required for this paper.

Implications

Financial

It is expected that the additional support outlined in this report will be fully funded through government grants. It is likely that there will be further work required to manage and maintain the grant schemes from a range of support services. These costs can be managed within existing budgets or from the additional burdens funding provided by government. No further funding is available beyond that provided by government and therefore it will continue to be important to ensure that the support provided is kept within the overall funding envelope outlined in this report.

Human Resources (HR)

Additional resources needed to support the grant process will be funded from separate grant funding

Equalities

This report will impact on all communities equally.

Legal

No implications

Crime and Disorder, Information Technology and Property

No implications

Risk Management

24. The key risk in relation to the new grants is fraud. There have been controls in place to manage this since the first grants were issued in 2020. The service works with Veritau to manage the risk and utilises the Government Spotlight tool Spotlight as well as using data matching from its own records. The risk is low.

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Report Approved

Date 5/1/2022

Specialist Implications Officer(s):

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

[Agenda for Decision Session - Executive Member for Finance and Performance on Thursday, 3 December 2020, 10.00 am \(york.gov.uk\)](#)

Annexes

None