

REPORT TO	DATE
Chief Executive, in Consultation with the Leader of the Council	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2020



TITLE	PORTFOLIO	REPORT OF
Urgent Decision Under Section 35 of the Council's Constitution: COVID19 Response Business Grants of £10,000 and £25,000	Leader	Director of Planning and Property

Is this report a key decision? (i.e. more than £100,000 or a significant impact on more than 2 Borough wards)	Yes
Is this report confidential?	No

## PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To seek approval for the payment of Covid-19 Business Grant Payments

## RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That the Chief Executive and S151 Officer of South Ribble Council be given delegated authority to approve payment of the COVID19 Business Grants in line with the government guidance and the council's own procedure.

## REASONS FOR THE DECISION

3. The scheme is in line with government requirements to administer grants to business affected by COVID19

## CORPORATE OUTCOMES

4. The report relates to the following corporate outcomes:

Excellence, Investment and Financial Sustainability	✓
Health, Wellbeing and Leisure	
Place, Homes and Environment	✓

Projects relating to People in the Corporate Plan:

## **BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT**

5. In response to the Coronavirus the Government announced there would be further support for small businesses and businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector. A grant payment would be made to qualifying ratepayers administered by the Local Authority.
6. The Government have provided guidance and eligibility criteria.
7. The cost of the scheme will be funded by way of a S.31 grant payment from government on or before the 1 April 2020 to cover the cost of providing grant payments to eligible businesses.
8. The council is administering and managing the schemes essentially on behalf of government and is responsible for the administration and payment of the grant monies. The additional costs involved in the administration of this scheme is intended to be reimbursed by the government using new burdens funding.

## **PROPOSALS (e.g. rationale, detail, finance, procurement)**

9. Provisional estimates of total grant payments could be over £20m. The council will receive funding on 1st April of £20.8m however it is the Council's ambition to get these grants paid to businesses as soon as possible.
10. The two grant funding schemes are outlined below:
11. Small Business Grant Fund : A small business grant payment of £10,000 for all businesses in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief.
12. Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHL) : A retail and hospitality grant of £10,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with property with a rateable value of £15,000 and under; or a retail and hospitality grant of £25,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with property with a rateable value of over £15,000 and under £51,000.
13. The key date for qualifying for grant payments is 11 March 2020. Businesses needed to be in occupation on this date to have been eligible for the relevant grant.
14. The process for administering these grants has been developed and scrutinised by finance and internal audit.
15. The process decided upon involves all potentially eligible ratepayers being contacted by either email or letter. An online form needs to be completed by the ratepayer and a unique verification code entered. Eligibility checks are

completed, and payments are checked and then processed through the creditor system.

16. Any businesses caught falsifying records to gain additional grant money will face prosecution and will be required to pay the grant monies back.

## **CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT AND OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION**

17. A dedicated email and phone line has been set up to deal with general enquiries from all business requiring support.

## **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

18. The Government have requested that Local Authorities roll out this grant scheme there are therefore no alternatives.

## **AIR QUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

19. .None

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

20. The process has been fully reviewed by Audit and measures are in place to ensure fraudulent activity is minimised.

## **EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPACT**

21. The grants are available to all eligible businesses

## **COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER**

22. The process outlined in this report provides assurance that the grants can be administered in a timely fashion and that the risk of fraudulent claims has been minimised. The report has been scrutinised by the council's internal audit team.
23. There are large cash flow implications from processing these grants. The council has taken temporary borrowing to enable any payments to be made prior to the Government providing funding. Funding of £20,888,000 is expected from Government on 1st April.

## **COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER**

24. The payments proposed are in accordance with a Government scheme which is funded through Central Government grants and administered by the Council. Clearly as a responsible public authority we must act with speed to assist those affected businesses covered by the scheme. It is also important of course that

we have procedures in place to avoid fraud and/or abuse. Internal Audit have advised in this regard.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

## APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

Appendix 1 - Coronavirus Small Business Grant Claim Process - South Ribble Borough Council

**Jonathan Noad**  
**Director of Planning and Property**

Report Author:	Telephone:	Date:
Jonathan Noad	01772 625206 / 07970 687833	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2020

## Approval of Urgent Decision

I confirm that I consider this decision is one of genuine urgency in accordance with section the Council's constitution:



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Councillor David Howarth  
Chair of the Scrutiny Committee

Dated: 31 March 2020

Following careful consideration and assessment of the contents of the report, I approve the recommendations contained in the report in accordance with the Council's constitution in consultation with the Leader of the Council:



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Gary Hall - Chief Executive

Dated: 1 April 2020



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Councillor Paul Foster – Leader of the Council

Dated: 1 April 2020

## Appendix 1

### Coronavirus Small Business Grant Claim Process - South Ribble Borough Council

The Government has announced funding for local authorities to support small businesses, which pay little or no business rates because of Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR), Rural Rate Relief (RRR) or tapered relief. This will provide a one-off grant of £10,000 per hereditament to eligible businesses to help meet their ongoing business costs. Businesses will be eligible if they are a small business, based in England and already receive SBRR and/or RRR and they are a business that occupies property.

In order to pay the grants and reclaim money from Government, the council needs to collect the relevant information about each business. The claim system below is to be put in place to satisfy Government guidance and to combat fraud.

#### Process

1. Data extracted from the NNDR database into a spreadsheet to identify businesses registered on the system by the 11<sup>th</sup> March Government deadline and in receipt of SBRR or RRR, which makes them eligible to claim the Small Business Grant (SBG). Ensure that businesses specifically excluded from the Grant (Guidance 20-22) are not included in the spreadsheet i.e. no occupation for personal use, car parks & parking spaces, businesses in liquidation or were dissolved as of 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and include those with a RV between £12k-£15k on tapered relief (Guidance 15).
2. A Firmstep form is put in place on the council website to collect all the data required in the Government guidance, a unique SBG reference number to combat fraud and the financial information required to make the grant payments Use the SBG Reference number as the invoice number if possible so that the creditor's system would identify any potential duplicates.
3. A unique SBG reference code is added to each record in the NNDR data spreadsheet to use to verify applications.

Each eligible business is notified by letter by the Investment and Skills Team through email or by post (where no email address is available) and invited to apply for the grant using the unique reference number they have been given The letter states that the grant is for the ratepayer and may be liable for recovery if the recipient was not the ratepayer on the 11.03.2020. Include the fraud warning (see Guidance 33) and a statement regarding State Aid (see Guidance 43-44).

4. Businesses complete the application form on the council website at [https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus\\_Business\\_Support](https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus_Business_Support) The form includes the

data listed in Government guidance Annex B – Data Collection Form, the ‘Information Required Upon Application’ Firmstep Form also includes a statement about State Aid and the fraud warning as set out in the Guidance (33)

5. Firmstep generates an enquiry from each submission, which is automatically emailed to the Investment and Skills Team to save and respond to any additional information requested, and populates a spreadsheet, which can be accessed by the Business Rates Team
6. The Business Rates Team will verify each application on the spreadsheet by cross referencing the unique SBG reference number to make sure duplicate applications are rejected and the SBRR reference and will mark as verified. If the information held /provided is believed to be incorrect the Guidance (31) states the Council could - withhold payment/ recover the grant and take reasonable steps to identify the correct ratepayer. A decision will be made with regards to the Council's approach to the rating list changes exceptions (Guidance 37-39) As part of the verification process if necessary check that the information provided in the application including for example the applicant and the bank account details relate to the registered ratepayer. If there is any uncertainty/irregularity with regards to the information provided in the application refer this to the Revenues and Benefits Manager.
7. The verified list will be passed each day to creditors. The authoriser be the S151 officer since there is no budget holder
8. Creditors

## Creditors

### Initial Setup:

Create 'Creditor Type' within Admin Module/Creditor Admin/Control Data  
Maintenance/Type of Creditors

AUTHORITY	CODE	DESCRIPTION	KEY2VALUE
SRBC	BR	Business Rates	BRCred
CBC	BR	Business Rates	BRCred

This will allow identifiable report and targeted payment runs.

### Uploading of Business Rate Creditors

Creditors to be uploaded on bulk using Creditor Upload Template. There is no manual typing of creditor details it is copy and paste from the information sent by the business team, this is done by the creditors team.



CBCcreditoruploadt  
emp.xls



SRBCcreditoruploa  
dtemp.xls

Another member of creditor team spot checks 20% of creditors on the upload template against information from the business team. If error is found the whole spreadsheet is checked.

### Upload Creditors into Creditors System

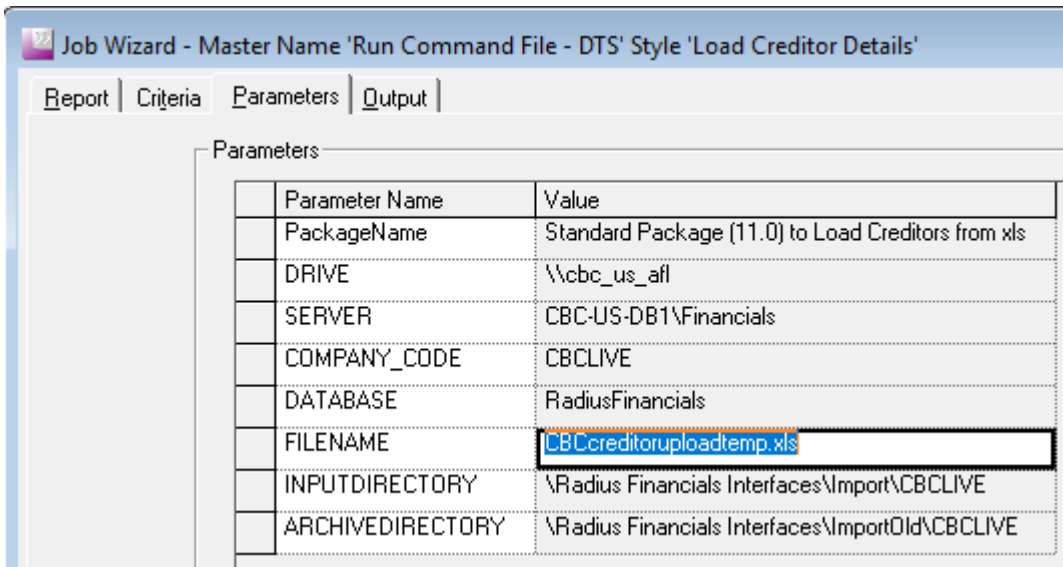
Open Reports Client/Creditors

Select: Run Job Wizard

Master: Run Command File – DTS

Style: Load Creditor Details

N.B. Add a date identifier, and move into Archive once completed.



Parameter Name	Value
PackageName	Standard Package (11.0) to Load Creditors from xls
DRIVE	\\cbc_us_afl
SERVER	CBC-US-DB1\Financials
COMPANY_CODE	CBCLIVE
DATABASE	RadiusFinancials
FILENAME	CBCcreditoruploadtemp.xls
INPUTDIRECTORY	\\Radius Financials Interfaces\Import\CBCLIVE
ARCHIVEDIRECTORY	\\Radius Financials Interfaces\ImportOld\CBCLIVE

This process will import the selected spreadsheet and produce a report in PDF format

## Uploading of Grants

Vouchers to be uploaded using Voucher Upload Template



CBCvoucherupload  
temp.xls

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SRBCvoucheruploa  
dtemp.xls

---

Copy and paste Mandatory fields, save into:

SRBC – cbc\_us\_afl/Radius Financials Interfaces/Import/SRBCLIVE

CBC – /CBCLIVE

Another member of creditor team spot checks 20% of creditors on the upload voucher template against information from the business team. If error is found the whole spreadsheet is checked.



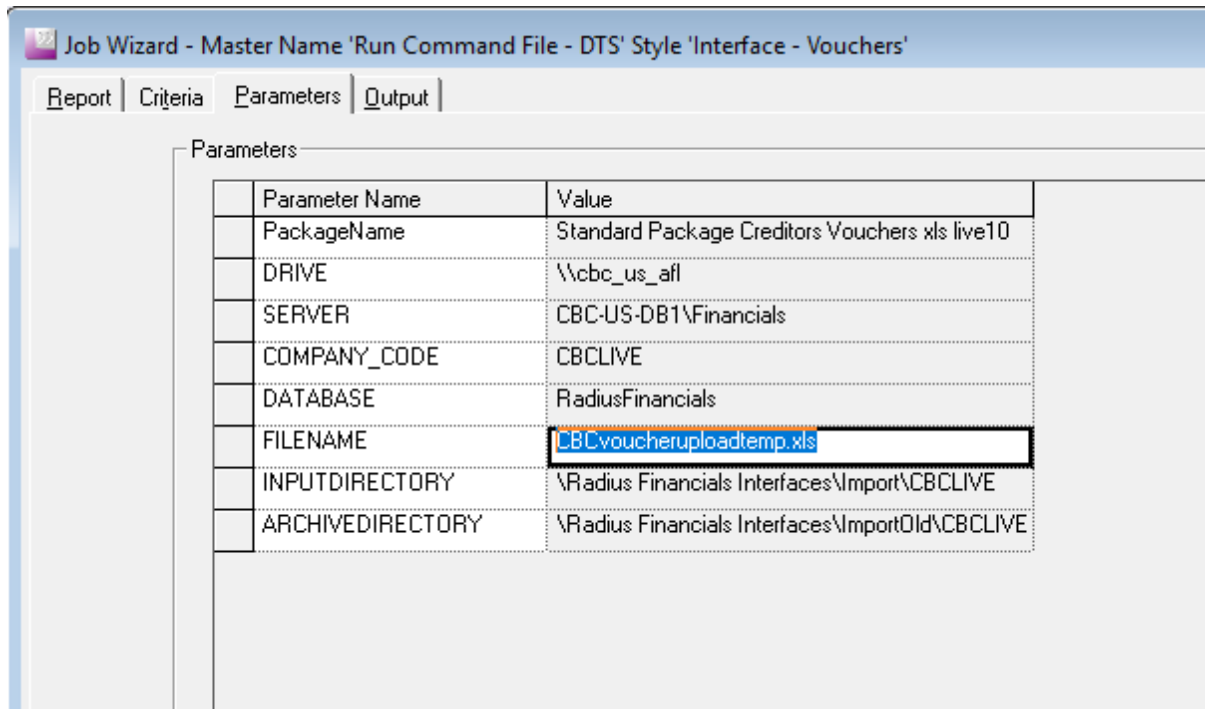
Open Reports Client/Creditors

Select: Run Job Wizard

Master: Run Command File – DTS

Style: Interface Vouchers

N.B. Add a date identifier, and move into Archive once completed.



Parameter Name	Value
PackageName	Standard Package Creditors Vouchers xls live10
DRIVE	\\cbs_us_afl
SERVER	CBC-US-DB1\Financials
COMPANY_CODE	CBCLIVE
DATABASE	RadiusFinancials
FILENAME	CBCvoucheruploadtemp.xls
INPUTDIRECTORY	\\Radius Financials Interfaces\Import\CBCLIVE
ARCHIVEDIRECTORY	\\Radius Financials Interfaces\ImportOld\CBCLIVE

This process will import the selected spreadsheet and produce a report in PDF format

Vouchers authorised by James Thomson or Tony Furber

Bespoke Business Rate Payment Run

With regards to the creditor setup process, the normal built in controls will continue to operate for the identification of duplicate creditor accounts. Each rejection for a duplicate creditor will be investigated independently and checked against the provided information.

Regarding the Creditors Voucher process, the normal built in system controls will continue to operate for the identification of duplicate payments. The SBG Reference number will be being used at the Voucher (invoice)

The BACS payment processes will continue to operate as normal except it will be only for these payments. No normal creditor payments will appear on the run.

The Business Rates Team will provide a batch control total for each days transactions i.e. x no. of transactions and £x in total due to be paid.

9. A monitoring spreadsheet will be maintained by the Business Rates Team and Investment and Skills Team to show which businesses have had applications received, verified and paid
10. Reminders will be sent by the Investment and Skills Team to businesses which have not applied – using email, post or telephone to make sure every business is aware.
11. The required information will be sent by the Business Rates Team to Government to reclaim the funding. Document responsibility for: pre-grant submission checks (to ensure that the data provided is complete and accurate); checking and submitting the weekly performance data; monitoring repayment of the grant monies, reconciling expenditure to the grant value reclaimed/repaid; and for undertaking post-event assurance work been assigned.

## Letter example

### Coronavirus Small Business Grant - Your ref number

**(Please quote this on your application and all correspondence)**

The Government has announced funding for local authorities to support small businesses, which pay little or no business rates because of Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR), Rural Rate Relief (RRR) or tapered relief.

This will provide a one-off grant of £10,000 to eligible businesses to help meet their ongoing business costs. You will be eligible if you are a small business and already receive SBRR and/or RRR and you are a business that occupies property,

In applying for this grant, you will need to confirm that your business was occupying the premises for which you are applying on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and that you are the ratepayer. ***\*Please refer to terms at the bottom of this letter.***

In light of the Small Business Grant support and the Job Retention Scheme, we hope all businesses will retain their staff and continue to pay them where possible.

In order to send you this money, the council needs to collect the relevant information about your businesses. Please can you complete the form on our website at [https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus Business Support](https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus_Business_Support)

We are receiving a high volume of requests for business support but we will process your claim as soon as possible. In the meantime, please email all enquiries to [info@businessinsouthribble.gov.uk](mailto:info@businessinsouthribble.gov.uk)

Thank you very much  
Yours faithfully

Business & Skills Team  
South Ribble Borough Council

**\*The United Kingdom left the EU on 31 January 2020, nonetheless under the Withdrawal Agreement the State aid rules continue to apply during a transition period, subject to regulation by the EU Commission. Businesses should be aware that grant payments are currently subject to State Aid limits. This limit has recently increased to 800,000 Euros in order to take into account the additional support needed due to Covid-19. If you believe that by receiving this grant payment that you will exceed State Aid limits, please contact us.**

**The Government will not accept deliberate manipulation and fraud - and any business caught falsifying their records to gain additional grant money will face prosecution and any funding issued will be subject to claw back.**

## Firmstep Form

The screenshot shows the 'Welcome' step of the 'Coronavirus Business Support' form on the mysouthribble platform. The browser address bar shows the URL: [https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus\\_Business\\_Support](https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus_Business_Support). The form has a blue header with the mysouthribble logo and a 'Home' button. Below the logo is a navigation bar with 'Welcome', 'Business Details', and 'Submit Application'. The 'Welcome' section contains the following text:

**Coronavirus Business Support**

To apply for grant funding under the Small Business Grant Scheme or The Retail and Hospitality Grant Scheme you must meet the eligibility criteria. There are set out on the Government website <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>

You are eligible for the Small Business Grant Scheme funding if:

- your business is based in England
- you are a small business and already receive SBRR and/or RRR
- you are a business that occupies property

You are eligible for the The Retail and Hospitality Grant Scheme grant scheme funding if:

- your business is based in England
- your business is in the retail, hospitality and/or leisure sector
- your business has a rateable value of under £51,000

If you meet these criteria, please complete the following form

At the bottom of the form are 'Cancel' and 'Next' buttons. A reference number 'Reference: COVID-APP188307715' is displayed at the very bottom.

The screenshot shows the 'Business Details' step of the 'Coronavirus Business Support' form. The browser address bar shows the URL: [https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus\\_Business\\_Support](https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus_Business_Support). The form has a blue header with the mysouthribble logo and a 'Home' button. Below the logo is a navigation bar with 'Welcome', 'Business Details', and 'Submit Application'. The 'Business Details' section contains the following text:

Are you applying for: \*

Small Business Grant

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant

At the bottom of the form are 'Previous', 'Cancel', and 'Next' buttons. A reference number 'Reference: COVID-APP188307715' is displayed at the very bottom.

Coronavirus Business Support

https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus\_Business\_Support

Login

# mysouthribble

Home

Welcome Business Details Submit Application

Are you applying for: \*

Small Business Grant ✓

Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant

Date of birth of the ratepayer \*

Surname of Business Rates Liabale Person \*

Forename of business Rates Liabale Person \*

Middle Name of Business Rates Liabale Person

Business Postcode \*

Eligibility criteria met \*

Yes No

Previous Cancel Next

Reference: COVID-APP188307715

Coronavirus Business Support

https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus\_Business\_Support

Grant Value Applied for \*

Title of Applicant \*

Business Trading Name \*

Small Business Grant Reference Number \*

Business Rates Number

VAT Number \*

Companies House Number \*

Business name registered with Companies House \*

Bank Account Number \*

Bank Sort Code \*

Bank Account Name \*

Business Address \*

Contact Telephone

Phone 1 \*

Phone 2

main content

Coronavirus Business Support

https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus\_Business\_Support

Business name registered with Companies House \*

Bank Account Number \*

Bank Sort Code \*

Bank Account Name \*

Business Address \*

Contact Telephone

Phone 1 \*

Phone 2

Phone 3

Email Address \*

Other enquiry details

< Previous Cancel Next >

Reference: COVID-APP18830715

Coronavirus Business Support

https://southribble-dash.achieveservice.com/service/Coronavirus\_Business\_Support

**mysouthribble**

Home

Welcome Business Details Submit Application

The council would like to keep you informed about local business news, business support, development opportunities and business events, which are run by the council or our partners.

We will always treat your personal details with the utmost care and will never sell your information to external companies for marketing purposes. Please see our privacy policy below.

If you would like South Ribble Borough Council's Economic Development Team to hold your personal data and keep you up to date with business events, support and news, please opt in by signing up below.

Applicant Name \*

Applicant Position in Business \*

Select a choice \*

Yes I would like to hear about business news, support and events

No

The United Kingdom left the EU on 31 January 2020, nonetheless under the Withdrawal Agreement the State aid rules continue to apply during a transition period, subject to regulation by the EU Commission. Businesses should be aware that grant payments are currently subject to State Aid limits. This limit has recently increased to 500,000 Euros in order to take into account the additional support needed due to Covid-19. If you believe that by receiving this grant payment that you will exceed State Aid limits, please contact us.

The Government will not accept deliberate manipulation and fraud - and any business caught falsifying their records to gain additional grant money will face prosecution and any funding issued will be subject to claw back.

In applying for this grant, you will need to confirm that your business was occupying the premises for which you are applying on 11th March 2020 and that you are the ratepayer.

< Previous Cancel Submit

Reference: COVID-APP18830715