

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

OFFICER DECISION REPORT

Report Title	COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund Scheme (CARF)			
Purpose of Report	To record the decision made with regards to adopting the scheme			
Decision(s)	A decision has been made to a. Adopt the COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund Scheme b. Section 151 officer is authorised to make technical scheme amendments			
Consultation and Feedback	Group Leaders of all four parties have been consulted together with the Chief Executive and Section 151 officer			
Report Author	Simon Killen Revenue and Benefits Manager Email: simon.killen@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	None			
Background Papers	Government Guidance https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-additional-relief-fund-carf-local-authority-guidance			
Appendices	Appendix A - COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund Scheme			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	Yes	No	No

1. **Background to the Additional Restrictions Grant**

- 1.1 This guidance is intended for businesses liable for business rates for the 2021/22 financial year within Stroud District Council who may be eligible for an award of discretionary rate relief through the COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) announced by the government on 15 December 2021.
- 1.2 This guidance sets out the criteria under which business will qualify to make an application and the evidence required to support.
- 1.3 The Government is not changing the legislation. Instead, funding is being provided to local authorities to use their discretionary relief powers under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (as amended) to grant relief in accordance with the guidance provided.

- 1.4 The relief can only be awarded in respect of the 2021/22 business rates liability and will be awarded after any other mandatory and discretionary reliefs.
- 1.5 Local authorities can determine how much relief to provide and which businesses to support but it should be directed at businesses adversely affected by the pandemic that have been unable to adequately adapt.
- 1.6 Stroud District Council has received £2,344,761 funding for the CARF scheme.
- 1.7 The guidance is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-additional-relief-fund-carf-local-authority-guidance>

2. Eligibility Criteria

- 2.1 Whilst the Council is able to determine its own scheme the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has issued guidance stipulating that if the funding is being used to award relief the Council:
 - a. must not award relief to ratepayers who for the same period of the relief (i.e. the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022) either are or would have been eligible for the Extended Retail Discount (covering retail, hospitality and leisure), the nursery discount scheme or the Airport and Grounds Operations Support Scheme (AGOSS).
 - b. must not award relief to a hereditament for a period when it is unoccupied (other than hereditaments which have become unoccupied temporarily due to the government's advice on COVID-19), and
 - c. should direct their support towards ratepayers who have been adversely affected by the pandemic and have been unable to adequately adapt to that impact.
- 2.2 In addition to 2.1 above, to be eligible businesses must meet the following criteria:
 - a. Business must be liable for a period of occupied business rates liability between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022.
 - b. Relief will only be awarded in respect of one period of liability for each eligible property.
 - c. Eligible properties must be in the rating list on 1 April 2021 and any entries entered in the list after this, including any backdated to an earlier date, will be ignored for the purposes of eligibility.
 - d. Businesses must be able to demonstrate that they have been adversely affected by the pandemic, have been unable to adequately adapt to the impact (e.g. staff unable to work from home or business not suitable for home working) and have suffered financially as a result.

e. Businesses eligible for small business rate relief, mandatory charitable relief or discretionary relief (excluding retail and nursery discounts), but liable to pay some business rates will be eligible subject to all other conditions and criteria being met.

3. Award Levels

- 3.1 Stroud District Council has been allocated £2,344,761 for the CARF scheme and will distribute to support businesses affected by the pandemic.
- 3.2 The level of relief to be awarded will be determined once all applications have been received and assessed.
- 3.3 The scheme will be open for applications from 13 July 2022 until 12 August 2022.
- 3.4 The level of relief awarded may be a percentage of rates payable or a fixed amount and a cap may be set to limit the maximum amount to any one business or property.
- 3.5 In determining the levels of relief to be awarded consideration will be given to the impact of the pandemic on certain business sectors, rateable value ranges and the amount of business rates due to be paid.
- 3.6 The relief will only be awarded in respect of the 2021/22 business rates liability after any other mandatory and discretionary reliefs. No cash payments will be made.
- 3.7 Where a business has paid the 2021/22 business rates liability any credit will be transferred to the 2022/23 liability and instalments recalculated for the balance due. A refund will only be made if the overall account is in credit.

4. Excluded businesses

- 4.1 In line with section 47(8) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 the Council cannot grant any relief under this scheme to itself or to either a local or major precepting authority.
- 4.2 The following businesses/hereditaments will not be eligible under this scheme:
 - Businesses in receipt of 100% Small Business Rates Relief,
 - Businesses in receipt of or would be eligible for Retail, Hospitality, Leisure Relief
 - Businesses that are not liable to pay any business rates during the 2021/22 financial period
 - Empty properties
 - Hospitals, and healthcare settings
 - Medical and healthcare providers (including dentists and vets)
 - Schools and other premises used for educational purposes
 - Police stations and other premises, Court premises
 - Financial Services (e.g. banks, building societies, cash points, bureaux de change, short term loan providers)

- Medical Services (e.g. vets, dentist, doctors, osteopaths, chiropractors)
- Post office, sorting offices and delivery services
- Professional services (e.g. solicitors, accountants, Insurance agents, employment/recruitment agencies financial advisors, chartered surveyors, architects)
- property management and property development companies (including letting agents and rating management/consultants)
- Advertising rights, Communication stations
- Utility providers and companies in the energy sector,
- Land only rating assessments
- Storage lockers and premises used for personal storage purposes
- Businesses that cannot satisfactorily demonstrate they have been adversely affected by the pandemic and have suffered financially
- Businesses that do not meet the eligibility criteria

4.3 Businesses listed in the Exclusions list may still apply if they can demonstrate they have been severely impacted and the Council will consider the application on a case-by-case basis.

5. Recommendation

The scheme is adopted and implemented by Stroud District Council with immediate effect.

6. Financial Implications

The scheme is fully funded by central government

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7. Legal Implications

This is a discretionary scheme to apply funding provided by Central Government and the discretionary element is covered by a policy which has been drafted by officers based on government guidance. Officers will need to apply the policy when administering grants, but a discretionary policy should not be treated as a rigid or strict rule and every case will be assessed on its particular circumstances.

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8. Equality Implications

There are not any specific changes to service delivery proposed within this decision.

9. Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category