

REPORT TO PICKMERE PARISH COUNCIL

2nd March 2021

AGENDA ITEM 7.3 – RECEIPT OF COVID BUSINESS GRANT FUNDS

1. Report

1.1 Members will recall that in 2020 the Parish Council (PC) received a Covid Business Grant award of £10,000, reflecting the Council's ownership of business rated properties – in particular the Village Hall. In the light of the Tier system that was adopted by Government late in 2020, and the subsequent lockdown that has taken place, the PC has now received further grant awards totalling £18,548.86 as follows:

- In respect of the Village Hall - £5274.43 (period 14 October 2020 - 15 February 2021) and £4000.00 (subsequent lockdown period not specified by CEC)
- In respect of the Pavilion - £5274.43 (period 14 October 2020 - 15 February 2021) and £4000.00 (subsequent lockdown period not specified by CEC)

1.2 It is understood that the length of the current lockdown may result in further awards being made.

1.3 There is apparently no particular discretionary or means test applied in relation to the PC's eligibility to receive such grants. The organisation ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), of which the PC is a member, has advised that the PC is perfectly eligible to receive such grants.

1.4 The communications from Cheshire East Council (CEC) notifying the Council of such payments state that by accepting the payments the PC confirms it is eligible to receive such grants.

1.5 The communication also contains a pro forma which is to be completed if the PC wishes to refuse these grants. Clearly there are cases where some private enterprises have for instance voluntarily returned or refused to receive furlough grants on the basis that they were not 'needed' by the enterprises in question.

1.6 The Cheshire division of ACRE have said that they are not aware of any other parish councils refusing or returning such grants, despite the fact that in many cases, like Pickmere, the grants received far outweigh the moneys lost to those councils through loss of rental income. However, this is a question for your Council to decide. Clearly if such windfall sums are retained, they can be used to maintain and enhance PC assets, to develop particular new projects, to be earmarked or held in reserve for future projects, or for any other reasonable purpose decided by the PC.

1.7 Council is therefore requested to note the receipt of these funds, to confirm that the Council is eligible to receive them, and to decide whether the funds should be retained, or if they should be returned to CEC and CEC be notified that the PC does not wish to receive further grants of this nature.

1.8 It is hoped to bring a report to Council's April meeting summarising the approximate financial outturn of the Council for 2020-21, taking into account the Covid grants and also the programmed expenditure on asset maintenance, including any implications for the 2021-22 budget.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That Council notes the receipt of these funds, and confirms that it is eligible to receive them.

2.2 That Council decides whether the funds should be retained, or whether they should be returned to CEC and CEC be notified that it does not wish to receive further grants of this nature.

Jack Steel

Clerk to the Parish Council