
CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) TENANT GRANT FUND – OUTLINE OF FUND AND PROPOSALS FOR ADMINISTRATION OF FUND

Report by Director - Resilient Communities

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

16 November 2021

1 SUMMARY AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report describes the Scottish Government’s Tenant Grant Fund and requests delegated authority for the Director – Resilient Communities to allocate, monitor and evaluate the Scottish Borders allocation from the Fund.**
- 1.2 The Deputy First Minister announced on 23 June 2021, a new £10M Tenant Grant Fund as a way of preventing evictions as a result of COVID-19 related rent arrears.
- 1.3 The Scottish Government wrote to Local Authorities on 10 September 2021 outlining the aims of the Tenant Grant Fund and stating the level of award to each Local Authority, and again on 17 September 2021 with guidance to support Local Authorities in their administration of the Fund.
- 1.4 Scottish Borders Council has been awarded £175k Grant Fund and £9k for administration of the Fund. Officers are liaising with partners, including the 4 locally based RSLs, to assess the scale of demand for the Fund and to inform development of mechanisms for delivering the Fund appropriately and effectively.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Executive Committee:

- (a) Notes the aims of the Fund and the funding that has been awarded as per the Scottish Government letter of 10 September 2021 (Appendix 1).**
- (b) Delegates’ authority to the Director - Resilient Communities to allocate, monitor and evaluate funding in accordance with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Tenant Grant Fund Guidance for Local Authorities (Appendix 2).**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Deputy First Minister announced on 23 June 2021, a new £10M Tenant Grant Fund as a way of preventing evictions by supporting tenants who have fallen into rent arrears as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic.
- 3.2 The Scottish Government then wrote to Local Authorities on 10 September 2021 outlining the aims of the Tenant Grant and stating the level of award to each local authority, and again on 17 September 2021 with guidance to support local authorities in their administration of the fund.
- 3.3 Scottish Borders Council have been awarded £175k Grant Fund and £9k for administration of the Fund. The funding is for the 2021/2022 financial year only. The amount allocated to each Local Authority was based on a hybrid allocation methodology of 50% homelessness and 50% DHP (Other).
- 3.4 The aim of the Grant Fund is:
- Local Authority Officers will use the Grant Fund as one of the tools for saving tenancies, creating sustainable housing solutions for individuals and preventing homelessness.
 - To complement the range of options local authorities already use to prevent homelessness
 - Focus on supporting those most at risk of homelessness, where tenancies can be saved, and where this funding can support an agreement between the landlord and tenant.
- 3.5 The guidance on how the Grant Fund is to be used includes:
- a) It should be available to all tenants living in the private and social rented sector at risk of homelessness.
 - b) It should be targeted at highly vulnerable individuals/households.
 - c) Landlords must demonstrate that they are complying with the pre-action requirements for rent arrears and agree not to progress a repossession on the basis of rent arrears where a grant is paid and the tenant meets all future agreed rent and repayment obligations.
 - d) Further the Grant is specifically to help repay rent arrears that have arisen due to the Coronavirus pandemic between 23 March 2020 and 9 August 2021. Arrears before 23 March 2020 will not be covered.
 - e) Arrears after 9 August 2021 can only be covered in exceptional circumstances, where the local authority is satisfied that arrears relate to continued impact of the pandemic restrictions.

4. ADMINISTRATION OF THE FUNDING

- 4.1 The Tenant Grant Fund is intended to be flexible and the Guidance, whilst providing a framework for administering the funding, also encourages local authorities to exercise a large degree of discretion in administering it, as part of a broader holistic approach to homelessness prevention.
- 4.2 The emphasis on flexibility and local discretion is welcome. However, this also presents challenges in terms of, for example, setting criteria for prioritising awards in way that ensures fairness and equality for tenants, and across tenures and Local Authority areas.
- 4.3 Further, the Tenant Grant Fund has to be used this financial year, ending 31 March 2022. This is a very short timescale to develop and implement the necessary assessment and payment mechanisms.
- 4.4 The above concerns about the challenges are shared by Officers in other local authorities and have been raised in national groups. SBC Officers are liaising with colleagues in other Local Authorities to explore urgently how best to meet these challenges.
- 4.5 SBC officers are also liaising urgently with partners, including the 4 locally based RSLs, to assess the scale of demand for the Fund.
- 4.6 SBC Officers will, taking on board the results of communications with colleagues in other local authorities and with local partners, urgently develop mechanisms for delivering the Fund effectively and in accordance with the Guidance.
- 4.7 The distribution of funds in individual cases will abide by the core principles of maximising the number of cases assisted from all funding options balanced against maximising the long term sustainability of the tenancy being supported.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

Scottish Borders Council has been awarded £175k Grant Fund and £9k for administration of the Fund from the Scottish Government's £10M Tenant Grant Fund. Grant award criteria and process have to be developed and implemented urgently in order to ensure that grants are awarded in accordance with the Guidance and during financial year 2021/2022.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

If we do not action these proposals in accordance with the Guidance and during financial year 2021/2022 then we may not make full use of the Scottish Borders Council share of the £20m Tenant Grant Fund (£175k) which will increase the risk of more vulnerable people in becoming homeless.

5.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment**

This funding will go towards addressing some of the inequality and hardship experienced by tenants as a result of the pandemic and will reduce the risk of tenants becoming homeless. A 'light touch' Integrated Impact Assessment is attached (Appendix 3).

5.4 **Acting Sustainably**

It is anticipated that as a result of this funding there will be a positive effect on the following community outcomes:

- a) Include under-represented or excluded groups
- b) Improve community quality of life
- c) Improve community capacity
- d) Take into account equal opportunities

5.5 **Carbon Management**

There will be no impact on the Council's carbon footprint as a result of the recommendations in this report.

5.6 **Rural Proofing**

Not applicable.

5.7 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

No changes are required to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Director (Finance & Corporate Governance), Chief Legal Officer (including as Monitoring Officer), Chief Officer Audit & Risk, Director (People Performance & Change), Director (Resilient Communities), Clerk to the Council, Corporate Communications, Corporate Equalities and Diversity Officer, Customer Advice and Support Service Manager have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

6.2 The Corporate Management Team have been consulted and any comments received will be incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Jenni Craig
Director – Resilient Communities

Signature

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Jenni Craig	Director - Resilient Communities
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Background Papers:

Appendix 1 – Scottish Government letter of 10 September 2021 regarding Tenant Hardship Grant Fund

Appendix 2 – Coronavirus (COVID-19) Tenant Grant Fund Guidance for Local Authorities

Appendix 3 - 'light touch' Integrated Impact Assessment

Previous Minute Reference: n/a

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