

Scrutiny Board Meeting

Tuesday, 13 June 2023

Dear Councillor

SCRUTINY BOARD - TUESDAY, 13TH JUNE, 2023

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Tuesday, 13th June, 2023 meeting of the Scrutiny Board, the following report that was unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No	Item
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6	<u>City West Relaunch Grant Scheme - Payments (Pages 3 - 288)</u>
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[To consider a report on City West Relaunch Grant Scheme – Payments].

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Scrutiny Team:

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Wolverhampton WV1 1RL

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Briefing Note

Title: City West Relaunch Scheme Evidence

Date: 13 June 2023

Prepared by: Isobel Woods

Job Title: Head of Enterprise

Intended Audience:

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Following the emergency Scrutiny Board meeting on 2 May 2023, a request was made by the Board to receive a further report to consider all relevant documentary evidence relating to the City Centre West Relaunch Grant scheme.

2. Background

- 2.1 The two specific actions requested by the Board were as follows:

- 1. The Board to receive a further report at a date to be agreed to consider all relevant documentary evidence relating the City West Grant Relaunch Scheme and discussions with representatives of the Westside Traders Group.*
- 2. The Board to invite, named Council employees and the Cabinet Member to give evidence in response to the concerns highlighted by representatives of the Westside Traders Group about the City West Grant Relaunch Scheme.*

- 2.2 Section three of this report , and linked **Appendices 1 - 15**, addresses **Action one** and highlights the work undertaken since the 13 March 2023 when council representatives presented initial proposals for the City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme to the Westside Traders Group. This consisted of a package of business support measures and a proposal for a one-off grant which businesses could access to invest in their business and seize upon the opportunities presented by £15 million investment in new public realm and space.

- 2.3 Section 4 of the report, sets out the points and issues that representatives of the Westside Traders group submitted to the Council on 5 June 2023 with responses from Council representatives included within the report for Scrutiny Board to consider. This helps to address **Action 2** as detailed at 2.1 above.

3. Relevant documentary evidence

3.1 The following sets out the activity and relevant documents or response related to the City West Relaunch Grant with accompanying communication to businesses and WSTG

Date	Activity	Appendix, documents or response
7 March	Council received the report from RSM on the review of the previous scheme and a recommendation to the council on how to implement a rigorous and robust framework to assess evidence of business loss.	Unable to make public as the doc contains commercially sensitive information
13 March	Council representatives met with the West Side Traders group. 6 members attended	1. Actions from the meeting 2. Email with actions To WSTG
14 March	Presentation to Scrutiny Board on a proposed way forward (City Centre West Relaunch grant) which received approval from board members	3. Presentation
16 March	Letters hand delivered or emailed. This included a copy of the presentation from Scrutiny Board and a request for businesses to give their views on two options: Option 1: adopt the extensive financial investigation approach recommended to the Council by independent experts RSM Option 2: A more inclusive, uniform and swifter Relaunch grant	4. Letter
22 March	Responses from traders to the options received	5. Outcome of Options
31 March	Cabinet Urgent decision relating to City Centre West Relaunch grant following the recommendations made by traders	6. Urgent Decision
4 April	Grant scheme go-live and letters hand delivered / emailed to all eligible businesses	7. Letter 8. Email
6 April	Letter (dated 4 April) and documents from WSTG objecting to the grant award received. Attached with an email along with documents and notes from WTSG	9. Letter 10. Email
21 April	Chief Executive response to WSTG letter of 6 April	11. letter
28 April	Follow up letter from Council to traders to extend the deadline for applications to the scheme to 31 March 2023	12. Letter
	Engagement and business visits to business in the area	No documents
2 May	Emergency Scrutiny Board	13 Paper 14 Minutes
24 May	extension of the closing date for grant applications to 30 June 2023	15 Cabinet decision
5 June	As at 9am on Monday 5 June 2023 – 37 applications have been received from eligible businesses (66% of total eligible businesses)	

4. Points Raised by the Traders in correspondence received 5 June 2023

4.1 As reference in 2.3, the correspondence received by the Traders has been included as **Appendix 16** of this report. A response to the points raised related to the Relaunch grant have been presented below.

4.1.1 Point One

Public realm work that took place during phase 1 which was deemed to be November 2021 to February 2023, in actual fact was Nov 2021 – May 2023

Response to Point One

The programme of works was regularly shared with the WSTG through engagement in the area. This included unforeseen changes to the programme due to either bad weather such as snow, when a broken sewer pipe was discovered, and a close down of works to open up the area as much as possible for Christmas trading (at the request of the traders). The works timetable was also moved where possible, to fit with business operating times and deliveries and the contractor would commence work before business opening times.

4.1.2 Point two

There has been a gross injustice to businesses of Victoria Street, Salop Street Skinner Street and School Street that the council did not provide WSTG business hardship relief as promised over 14 Months ago.

Response to Point two

Whilst the Council acknowledges the impact the works may have had on traders, there is no legal responsibility for the council to make any payments in these circumstances. We have however said on numerous occasions that we were (and are) committed to providing support for business and would look at disturbance payment where there was clear and auditable evidence of loss

In December 2022 business who met the requirements set out at that time received an urgent payment

The council has been working with WSTG since April 2022. We have considered a number of support options with traders which included the option for a very rigorous and robust evidence-based financial assessment as recommended by RSM. The other option proposed was a simpler grant scheme as part of a wider business support package.

In March 2023 traders unanimously voted for the latter option and a package of support totalling some £400,000 of taxpayer's money was put in place to deliver this.

The council is committed to supporting business. It has to balance this against its wider obligations and the legal duty to spend public funds responsibly and in an open, transparent and auditable way, backed by evidence to support funding support decisions.

4.1.3 Point three

Businesses have been dealt with in a total demeaning, insulting and inconsiderate way

Response to Point 3

The Council regrets that businesses feel this way, but both officers and Cabinet Members have tried their hardest to be responsive to traders concerns and have regularly organised and attended meetings with traders.

In supporting businesses, the Council has to balance this against its wider obligations and the legal duty to spend public funds responsibly and in an open, transparent and auditable way, backed by evidence to support funding support decisions.

The Council has put together a financial package of support totalling £400,000 – despite the fact that there is no legal responsibility for the council to provide any funding or make any direct support payments available in these circumstances. In other local authority areas with similar schemes, no financial support has been provided.

4.1.4 Point four

The least the council can do is to mitigate demonstrable businesses losses.

Councils Response

The Council has always acknowledged the impact the works may have had on traders and has committed to providing support.

Working with the traders, we have considered a number of support options with them. This included the option for a very rigorous and robust evidence-based financial assessment as recommended by RSM. The other option proposed was a simpler grant scheme as part of a wider business support package.

In March 2023 traders unanimously voted for the latter option and a package of support totalling some £400,000 of tax-payers money was put in place to deliver this.

The very rigorous approach recommended by independent financial consultants RSM, if implemented, may have taken years for businesses to complete (as in the case of Bilston Road) and the very robust criteria recommended for applications would have effectively excluded a significant number of traders from the process. That is why the Council, recognising the urgent need of traders, devised the Relaunch Grant and support package.

The other factor to consider, which was highlighted by Scrutiny Board members in the meeting on 14 March 2023 and would have had to have been factored into any detailed review, is that it is hard to quantify the impact of the works with other external factors such as cost of living, supply chain inflation, energy price increases and also changes to consumer behaviour, particularly following the pandemic.

4.1.5 Point 5

The actual calculated loss of the health check was never paid to the business. Is this not a legal agreement as it was provable demonstration of loss that has been validated through the financial health check?

Response to Point 5

There is no legal responsibility for the council to make any payment, but we have said we are committed to providing support to businesses.

The Council never agreed to cover losses or provide compensation for losses. It agreed to work with traders to develop a fair, transparent and evidence-based approach to calculating losses and then to develop an appropriate and proportionate financial support scheme for those that could clearly evidence loss. After only a fraction of businesses evidenced loss under the first scheme, the Council listened to trader's feedback and brought in independent consultants to advise on a much more rigorous, auditable and evidence-based approach.

The Council put this more rigorous option, along with an alternative option for a simpler, more inclusive grant scheme to businesses for feedback. In May 2023 traders unanimously voted for the latter option and a package of support totalling some £400,000 of tax-payers money was put in place to deliver this.

4.1.6 Point 6

Do the council not have a fiduciary responsibility to businesses as they contribute to the public purse?

Response to Point 6

There is no legal responsibility for the council to make any payment, but we have said we are committed to providing support to businesses.

In supporting businesses, the Council has to balance this against its wider obligations and the legal duty to spend public funds responsibly and in an open, transparent and auditable way, backed by evidence to support funding support decisions.

A total budget of £400,00 which included £350,000 for the Relight Grant Scheme was approved by cabinet in the urgent decision of 31 March 2023. This offered every eligible business a grant of £5,000. Cabinet agreed that this was a proportionate and appropriate amount and acknowledged it was part of a wider package of business support

4.1.7 Point Seven

Hence the 5k relaunch should be offered together with a financial hardship relief

Councils Response

Please see response to 4.1.6 above

The council has regularly shared information to the businesses and WSTG, on business rate hardship relief. Officers visiting businesses in the area have also provided details of the relief and included it in correspondence to business (appendix 7).

4.1.8 Point 8

Please note some long-standing businesses have already gone

Councils Response

The council is sorry to see businesses close or move out of the area. Officers have had individual meetings with some of the businesses who shared a wide range of factors that were contributing to the business either moving, changing ownership or in some cases closing. Officers are aware of 8 businesses who have either relocated or closed and 5 new businesses who opened whilst the works have taken place, and a further three who have been taken on by new owners.

Scrutiny Board members highlighted in the meeting on 14 March 2023 that it was hard to quantify the impact of the works with other external factors such as cost of living, supply chain, energy and also changes to consumer behaviour.

4.1.9 Point 9

The way WSTG was given a directed choice by the council at a meeting held on 13 March

Response to Point 9

At the meeting 13 March 2023 where the Portfolio member was present, officers presented two options for the Traders to consider.

Option 1 which came from the recommendations to the council from RSM of an intense and rigorous financial review would have required traders to submit detailed accounts and financial information – going back over multiple years – and to have met strict eligibility criteria to have been able to apply. This would then have had to have been verified and would have only been open to those who had a business prior to the works commencing.

Option 2, a one off grant for all businesses who could verify they were operational for a min of 6 months and intended to continue to trade in the area.

WSTG were asked to consider these options and provide views from businesses on the preferred approach.

In May 2023 traders unanimously voted for the latter option and a package of support totalling some £400,000 of tax-payers money was put in place to deliver this.

4.1.10 Point 10

At the meeting the level of grant was not shared

Response to Point 10

It was explained to traders that the Council's Cabinet would agree and approve funding for the preferred option.

In supporting businesses, the Council has to balance this against its wider obligations and the legal duty to spend public funds responsibly and in an open, transparent and auditable way, backed by evidence to support funding support decisions.

The level of grant on offer, along with the wider package of business support available, was communicated to businesses on 4 April 2023 (appendix 7). Officers visited business premises and emailed information to business owners in the area.

As of 5 June 2023, 37 businesses have applied to receive the grant which represents 66 % of those eligible to apply.

4.1.11 Point 11

Request to meet with businesses was ignored, (email 16 March).

Response to Point 11

On 15 March 2023, officers from the council individually visited all the businesses in the area to hand deliver the letter setting out the options and offering one-to-one support to discuss the options.

Where a business owner wasn't present or premises not open, officers shared the information via email with contact details. Regular visits and contacts have continued since 15 March with businesses who wish to speak to officers.

This resource intensive approach is far more direct and offers the businesses face to face personal assistance. This is felt to be a far more effective method of engagement than a large-scale meeting.

4.1.12 Point 12

Copy of RSM report request has been ignored

Response to Point 12

At the meeting on the 13 March and in Scrutiny Board on 14 March 2023 officers explained that RSM report contained sensitive commercial information from the businesses in the area that it was not possible to make the documents public.

The findings and the recommendations from RSM to the council were captured in the presentation to the Traders and also Scrutiny Board.

The Council has made representations to RSM to release a redacted version of the report, however under the terms of the contract signed with RSM this has not been possible.

4.1.13 Point 13

The IEDN was not shared with Traders and was found on the system

Councils Response

The council can only make a formal decision public once it has been approved by members. The Director of Resident Service wrote to WSTG on 24 March 2023 to share that the businesses had opted for Option 2 - the relaunch grant and officers were working quickly to move this forward.

Approval was granted and the document made public on 31 March 2023. A letter was hand delivered or emailed on 4 April (appendix 7) and the Director of Resident Service contacted WSTG to inform them that the Relaunch Grant was live.

4.1.14 Point 14

The council refused the request by the vice chair in relation to concerns

Response to Point 14

The request made by the vice-chair was for an urgent Scrutiny Board meeting which required the council to set up an extraordinary meeting. An email was sent to WSTG from Director of Resident Services (27 April 2023) to confirm the meeting had been arranged for 2 May 2023

4.1.15 Point 15

WSTG did express the whole of the sub-group to attend or at least 3 / 4 members. We heard nothing from the council

Response to 15

WSTG were contacted and advised that members of the group could attend the meeting and watch proceedings from the public gallery, or indeed view the meeting on-line. To ensure the voice of the traders was heard in the meeting, two members of the group were invited to speak and address councillors and these representatives were confirmed to Council officers beforehand.

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Westside Sub-Group 13 March 2023

Item	Action	Owner
Works update		
Issues with deliveries	Look at parking for lorries for deliveries Health & safety issues – double parking Public use bays for parking for free parking, there's a broken-down car and a warden told a member of the public they could park in the bays.	MP
	Parking permits required What furniture can Owen keep outside his premises – needs licensing to pick this up asap please P3's	CH
Events		
10 June Pride	Council to share Pride 23 promotional material with traders	KS
28 August Krazy Races	Find out what restrictions are on outdoor space from Krazy Races/how much space will business have to put furniture out etc.	IF
Christmas market events	Ian Fegan to pick up with Jo Huntbatch / events team re market providers to see what we can do with budget and also involve perhaps some live entertainment	IF
Victoria Street party for Kings Coronation	Look at potentially providing bunting across streets, street decorations and use small grants fund	IF
Options appraisal		
	Cllr Simkins requested everyone digest the options and comeback with feedback on way forward	Traders
Next steps		
	Report is published at 5pm for Scrutiny 14 March	
	How the slides/options documentation will be shared with all 47 traders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Send email to Billy/Des who will hand deliver if they need to those without email address - Traders to check their junk folders 	IW/Traders IW Traders
	Traders to meet Friday 17 March to discuss options and feedback	Traders
	Timeline setting out way forward to be developed Discussions with legal/finance and Cabinet on allocation of funding pot	IW IW
	Review and improvement plan to be produced at end once scheme has been delivered	JR/IW

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Martin Stevens

From: Sati Raju
Sent: 25 May 2023 17:02
To: Isobel Woods
Subject: FW: Westside Traders sub group actions
Attachments: Westside Sub.docx 13 March 2023.pdf

Sensitivity: PROTECT

See below

From: Sati Raju
Sent: 17 March 2023 16:05
To: westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com
Subject: Westside Traders sub group actions

Hello Des and Billy,

Please find attached the actions for your review following the Westside Traders subgroup meeting held Monday 13 March 2023.

Please let Ian and Isobel know if you have any queries.

Kindest Regards

Sati Raju
Executive Officer
Executive Support Team
City of Wolverhampton Council

Tel. Office: 01902 556153

ExecutiveSupportCity@wolverhampton.gov.uk
ExecSupportCentralResources@wolverhampton.gov.uk

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Scrutiny Board Meeting

Tuesday, 14 March 2023

Dear Councillor

SCRUTINY BOARD - TUESDAY, 14TH MARCH, 2023

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Tuesday, 14th March, 2023 meeting of the Scrutiny Board, the following presentation that was unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No	Item
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5	<u>Public Realm - Support for Businesses</u> (Pages 3 - 22)
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If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Scrutiny Team:

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Victoria Street Business Support Update for Scrutiny Board 14 March 2023

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Agenda Item No: 5

Summary timeline...

- **May 2022:** all parties came together to consider an approach to support businesses who had been impacted by the works.
- **June 2022:** SCA financial review begins
- **September 2022:** the outcome of the financial review was shared with the businesses who took part.
- **November 2022:** concerns raised, council asked to review approach
- **December 2022:** officers contacted all businesses to request permission to share financial information collected from the earlier scheme
- **December 2022:** five businesses receive interim support payments
- **December 2022:** RSM appointed to review
- **3 March:** RSM full report received with recommendations and comments for the Council to consider
- **13 March:** meeting with traders to discuss options

Business support options including RSM review...

RSM review...background / starting point...

- RSM were appointed to review the previous scheme and make recommendations for improvement for Council consideration / decision
- Their review took place between 3 January and 17 February
- The final report received on Friday 3 March 2023
- Acknowledged that in the Council's view there is **no legal requirement** on the Council to provide support
- Also acknowledged initial approach attempted a quick resolution and an immediate and urgent solution to issues.

- Whilst a reduction in turnover is often a good indicator of a loss of trade, any support **should be based on the loss of profits** a business has suffered as a result of a loss of trade caused by the works.
- The **financial review** is unlikely to have captured the true loss position, as it focuses solely on the fall in turnover of a business.
- Businesses need to be individually assessed, to understand the nature of the business and how the work may have affected their operations of loss of profit
- The **periods used** in the financial review are not adequate to assess the loss of trade and profits, noting that there is **no 'one size fits all' approach** to a loss of profits methodology.
- Unclear how the **financial information provided** by the traders has been verified.

Option one...

Having considered RSM's comments, the Council decides to implement the following approach utilising internal council resources to deliver

Suggested future approach...

To assesses the impact of works the council should focus on five criteria:

1. Eligibility criteria.
2. Evidence to be provided.
3. Validating information.
4. Examining evidence and calculating the loss.
5. Calculating disruption payments.

1. Suggested eligibility criteria

- A requirement to have been trading a certain number of years, of which proof acceptable to the council should be provided. For example, the business must have been trading for at least one full year prior to the works commencing.
- Businesses that only began trading during the period of the works are ineligible.
- The business must be physically located within the area of the works.
- Define company size thresholds; for example, large companies may be excluded from any assistance scheme, and any disruption payments may be capped for businesses over a certain size. Businesses are only eligible if not part of a larger group.
- Compliance with local regulations must be proved if requested, for example trading licences.
- Businesses are only eligible if there are no ongoing issues or outstanding payments due to the Council, for example business rates

2. Suggested evidence required

Traders should be able to provide the following information in order for the claim to be eligible:

- Financial statements including profit and loss accounts or other financial information showing annual value of sales and gross profit.
- The period for which this information is required would vary on a case-by-case basis, based on the impact of Covid-19, the works and other relevant factors. Ideally, this information should be provided from 2018/2019 onwards to corroborate any claimed impacts of Covid-19.
- Explanations from the business owner as to the nature of the business, any recent changes and the true extent of the impact on the business due to Covid-19, the works and any other relevant factors.
- A representative (and preferably an accountant or bookkeeper, if one was involved in preparing numbers) from the business should be made available to provide information and discuss any queries arising
- Details of any Government Covid-19 schemes utilised, including the amounts and effects of such measures.

3. Suggested validation process

The following steps should be undertaken to validate the information provided by the traders:

- Reconciling revenue to VAT returns for the same period.
- Agreeing financial statement amounts to accounts filed on Companies House, where applicable.
- If the business is a sole trader or general partnership, agreeing the figures provided to the relevant tax returns.
- Agreeing bank balances and large receipts and payments to bank statements, where applicable

4. Suggested approach to calculating loss

Total loss should be calculated based on the loss of gross profits and a consideration of any other impacts of the disruption not picked up at the gross profit level. Possible procedures may include:

- Gross profit margin review across comparative periods
- Review of cost base to ensure that the allocation of costs is appropriate
- Review of monthly performance to assess any impact that seasonality has on the results.
- Assess, as far as practicable, the impact of Covid-19.
- Analysis of the impact on the business, to validate (or not validate) the understanding obtained from the business owners.
- Review of business growth plans and likely maintainable gross profit during the year impacted.
- Calculation of loss of gross profit due to the works.
- Consideration of any other profit impact and of any failure to mitigate avoidable loss

5. Suggested approach to calculating payments

- Loss of gross profits calculated first
- Disruption payment then needs to be based on:
 - Total budget allocated
 - Number of businesses impacted
 - Total loss for each business
 - Allocation criteria for disruption payments: maximum cap and/or sliding percentage scale.

Implications / discussion points:

- Council acknowledges that the works have had an impact on traders
- Council recognises that no legal duty to provide payments but is committed to providing support where evidence is given
- RSM's comments and recommendations for Council consideration/decision are professionally and methodologically rigorous and robust and have been applied to other schemes in the West Midlands
- Adopting the approach is likely to take a considerable amount of time – the last payment for Bilston Road took place a few years after review started
- The eligibility criteria and information required is likely to be challenging for many small businesses to comply with and could exclude them
- The Council/taxpayer will have to incur further expense in implementing the recommendations

Option two...

Implement a more accessible, generic business support 'relaunch' grant based on less complicated key criteria

Victoria Street Relaunch Grant

- The overall aim is to minimise bureaucracy, and therefore the impact of the process on businesses and the Council, and to deliver the resulting financial support to businesses in the next few weeks/months.
- This will maximise the benefit to local businesses and delivering value for money for the public purse
- Proposal would be to support businesses to take the opportunity to relaunch and maximise benefits
- Proposal for fixed one-off payment for those businesses who have engaged with scheme and provided information
- Enhanced by wider programme of support including events to drive footfall and business advisor support

Victoria Street Relaunch Grant

This process supersedes all previous exercises, albeit where a business has already received a goodwill gesture that will be deducted from any new sum payable through this process.

To qualify for the grant businesses must.....

1. Currently be in business, open and actively trading and impacted by the works in Victoria Street or the accelerated Phase 3 works and undertaken during Phase 1
2. Be a local/Independent Business – employ less than 250 and not part of a larger organisation or parent company
3. Sign a grant agreement that includes, but not limited to:
 - That the payment is final and legally binding
 - Agreement that any business rate arrears would be offset before any grant was paid over
 - Confirmation that the business is not subject to any pending or active insolvency proceedings and intends to operate as a going concern for the foreseeable future
 - Confirmation from the business that any grant award would not breach subsidy control levels (although unlikely to be relevant due to low Rateable Value levels)
 - Commitment that intending to remain open for business at the current location for the foreseeable future
4. Business will be required to provide their latest utility bills and also their latest bank statement to demonstrate that the business is open and actively trading, to accompany their signed grant agreement

Implications / discussion points:

- Council acknowledges that the works have had an impact on traders, whilst in the medium term this significant investment will have a positive benefit
- Council has no legal duty to make payments but is committed to providing support where evidence to support this is provided
- Much quicker option, could be resolved in matter of weeks/months
- More businesses would benefit, although the amount payable needs to be affordable within council funds
- Similar approach to Covid grants, would need to undertake due diligence and checks, to meet council audit and finance regulations and prevent fraudulent activity.

Update on traders meeting 13/3/23:

- Deputy Leader and Council Officers met with representatives of the traders group on Monday 13 March
- Provided update on works, event programme and business support options
- Council has provided details of the options for the traders group to engage with their wider business network
- Traders planning to meet to discuss with their network this week
- Council officers have offered to then meet with the wider group to answer any questions on options and timelines.
- Council will then agree funding allocation with legal and finance so that proportionate, appropriate and affordable – given taxpayers money and no legal obligation.

Questions?

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Contact number: 01902 556879

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

20 March 2023

Dear Business Owner

Your feedback on Business Support options

As you know, the Council commissioned a firm of specialist accountants to conduct a review of the previous business support scheme for traders on Victoria Street and to make recommendations for a future possible scheme. This review took place between 3 January and 17 February. The final report was sent to us to consider on the 3 March. Over the last week, Council officers have reviewed these recommendations and assessed the implications of these for traders.

As a result, we are proposing two options for you to consider:

- Implement the very detailed, 'deep-dive' recommendations put forward by the specialist accountants, using council business support officers to work with traders
- Implement a more 'light touch' Relaunch Grant scheme – with processes similar to those used during the Covid support schemes.

We shared these options with the Westside Trader's Group on 13 March and at the Council's Scrutiny Board on 14 March. The presentation which includes outline details of the two options is attached and we are asking businesses who have been within phases 1 of the City Centre Public Realm works to consider them and give us their feedback.

You can do this by emailing the Council (via the email above) or by speaking to a representative from the Westside Traders group, chaired by Des Duggal, The Bed Company. **Responses to be received by 5pm on Wednesday 22 March.**

Your responses will be considered in the recommendations to be presented on 27 March to the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member Councillor Simkins.

I would also like to take this opportunity to update you on the current programme of works and to share with you an update on the planned events programme which is set to begin next month.

Programme of works for public realm

- Latest newsletter distributed to all businesses in March
- The public realm for phase 1 is on track for substantial completion by the end of March including the events square

- The contractor has been working nights and weekends to catch up with paving delays from the previous winter weather (this week is now our third occurrence of weather conditions too cold/snowy to pave)
- There has been a gas leak in Salop Street, Cadent Gas have excavated sections of the new carriageway – works ongoing, this work is not being undertaken by the Council and is not linked to the public realm project

Some minor works to continue into early April but will not affect the reopening of pedestrian areas or deliveries

- Landscaping and planter works have been scheduled for when the weather is more suitable for the planting of the remaining shrubs.
- The automated Hostile Vehicle Mitigation bollards will be installed and undergo the final commissioning and surfacing.

Events / footfall Programme

- 23 April – plans for a market are being progressed and set to be confirmed soon
- 6 May – Arts Festival weekend
- 10 June – Pride in Market Square with parade and wayfinding down Victoria St
- 28 August – Krazy Races
- Sept/Oct – discussions ongoing regarding possible events
- November – Christmas Lights switch on and discussions about a potential Christmas market
- Spring / summer 24 – Box Space live entertainment zone opens.

Finally, I'd like to remind you that, whilst the Council has no legal obligation to support businesses, we do acknowledge the impact of the works and are committed to supporting businesses affected. A key part of this process involves getting your feedback so we can now move things forward. And ultimately, whilst the final decision on any forward will be made by the Council's Cabinet member for City Economy, we are keen to listen and hear your views.

Yours sincerely

Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise

E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk
City of Wolverhampton Council

Appendix 5 – Summary of Business Support Options responses

A letter was hand delivered and emailed to 48 traders on 22nd March with 2 options for consideration

- Implement the very detailed, ‘deep-dive’ recommendations put forward by the specialist accountants, using council business support officers to work with traders
- Implement a more ‘light touch’ Relaunch Grant scheme – with processes similar to those used during the Covid support schemes

The letter also noted that these options were shared with the Westside Trader’s Group on 13 March and at the Council’s Scrutiny Board on 14 March.

Traders were asked to consider them and provide feedback by 5pm on 22nd March either by emailing the Council (via business.development@wolverhampton.gov.uk) or by speaking to a representative from the Westside Traders group, chaired by Des Duggal, The Bed Company.

A Westside Traders group meeting was held on 20th March at which the 2 options were reviewed. 23 traders attended and all voted for option 2. It was noted a further 17 traders had submitted pre votes ahead of the meeting all in favour of option 2. The City Council received 7 responses via its business development email address of which all were favouring option 2.

The following is a breakdown of the traders support for the 2 options (as advised to the Council by the Traders Group)

Attended the Traders Meeting – voted for option 2	Submitted a pre-vote for option 2	E-mailed the City Council – voted for option 2
23 votes for option 2 No votes for option 1	17 votes for option 2 No votes for option 1	3 votes for option 2 No votes for option 1

In total there were 43 traders in favour of option 2 - however it should also be noted that the Traders Group also advised that a further business (not on the Council list) also expressed a vote for option 2 to the Traders Group.

So, in respect of eligible businesses at the time of the letter delivery:

- **43 traders were in favour of option 2**
- **No traders in favour of option 1**
- **5 traders did not respond**

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Special Urgent Decision

Report title	Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Steve Simkins Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	St Peters	
Accountable Director	Richard Lawrence Director of Regeneration	
Originating service	Enterprise	
Accountable employee	Isobel Woods Tel Email	Head of Enterprise 01902 551848 Isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Directorate Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board Scrutiny Board	27 March 2023 22 March 2023 14 March 2023

Recommendations for decision:

In accordance with the provision of article 12.9 in Part 2 of the Council's constitution, the Leader (or in his absence Deputy Leader) in consultation with the Chair of Scrutiny Board, Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board and Chief Executive authorises the steps listed below

These matters are of immediate urgency making the prompt exercise of the powers of the Cabinet desirable and cannot await the next meeting of the Cabinet (26 April 2023).

These decisions will be reported to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

1. Approve the use of the urgent action powers outlined in Part 12.9 of the Council's constitution detailed in paragraphs 2,1 regarding the use of Urgent Decision.
2. Approve the City West Relaunch grant scheme, to support businesses in the Victoria Street area to relaunch their business and payments to eligible businesses as per the criteria set out in appendix 1.
3. Approve the use of the Our City, Our Plan reserve up to £350,000 to support the City West Relaunch grant and the establishment of supplementary budgets.

4. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy and Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital City in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Finance to allocate any balances from the £350,000 to provide additional further necessary business support once all payments have been made to eligible businesses.
5. Note that given the 'go-live' date for this scheme is within the designated pre-election period of heightened political sensitivity where public communications activity is restricted, ahead of the all-out elections in the city on May 4 2023, it is proposed that information regarding the scheme is limited specifically to the businesses affected and that any such communication is marked as private and confidential with further communication provided after the end of the pre-election period.
6. Note that businesses may be able to receive Business Rate relief through established processes such as hardship relief and have been encouraged to contact the Business Rates team if they find themselves in financial difficulty.

1.1 Purpose

- 1.2 To agree the City West Relaunch grant scheme and provide business support aimed at eligible businesses who may have been adversely impacted by the city west public realm work in Victoria Street, Salop Street School Street and North Street.
- 1.3 The payment offers small businesses who have been open during the works and intend to remain in the city, a one-off amount to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces.

1.4 Urgent Decision Making

- 1.5 The approach to decisions to be made under the Urgent Action powers is that the Council will use its urgent action powers for any urgent decisions that must be taken that cannot wait for the next formal meeting of the relevant Council body, in this case Cabinet. These powers are to be used sparingly and the guiding principles for any decisions are:
- A. Only those decisions that have to be made urgently (eg as a result of COVID-19 or related matters, including support of businesses or as a result of an immovable deadline) will be made
 - B. The decisions will be made or endorsed (where the decisions have to be made very urgently) using the Urgent Action powers
 - C. The decisions will be made available in a transparent way, as all decisions of Council bodies, such as Cabinet, are required to be, including through the relevant pages on the Council's website
- 1.6 Following receipt of the RSM report and their recommendations in relation to what would be involved in a detailed and complex profit and loss analysis, two options were offered to the Traders. Option 1 was to follow the consideration the council had received and option 2 was to pursue a one-off Relaunch grant as set out in this report.
- 1.7 By the deadline of the 22 March 2023, unanimous support for option 2 was subsequently forthcoming with specific reference that timely support was desperately needed in the area, indicating that this was to ensure businesses survived.
- 1.8 Prior to this deadline, council representatives met with the traders group on Monday 13 March to discuss the proposed options. It was clear, from the trader's feedback, that a swift scheme to support them would be favoured as they highlighted the challenging financial and ongoing trading position they faced and feared that some businesses in the area were at risk of ceasing to trade – without immediate support.
- 1.9 The Council acknowledges that the works may have had an impact on traders and while the Council has no legal obligation to provide support – it is committed to doing so and delivering a programme which meets the immediate requirement of traders to receive support. This immediate support will be augmented by a more medium-term plan of help

to bring footfall to the area to support the substantial investment made by the Government and Council to create new public spaces and transform this previously declining area to the west of the city centre. .

- 1.10 The need to process this decision and commence the scheme has led to the need to seek this urgent decision ahead of the next Cabinet meeting on the 26 April 2023.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The regeneration of the West side of the city centre, aimed at arresting the decline in retail footfall and transforming the environment to bring more homes, jobs, events and shops, has been a significant priority since the publication of the City Centre Area Action Plan in 2016 and has been referenced in subsequent Investment documents as a key opportunity site.
- 2.2 City Centre West is identified as a priority project forming part of a continued public sector partnership approach with the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, Homes England and the WMCA with a view to accelerating delivery, enhancing the quality of the project and maximizing outcomes for Wolverhampton. 3.2 The public realm works are an essential part of the overall masterplan and have been planned over a number of years. Preliminary works began in October 2021 with physical work beginning in January 2022.
- 2.3 In April 2022 local businesses and the Council met to discuss the impact of the works, it was agreed regular meetings would be held to update on; programme of works, business support and communication plan.
- 2.4 On 9 May 2022 the Cabinet Member for City Economy, the Director for City Housing and Environment, council officers leading the public realm improvements works project, Head of Enterprise and the Director of Wolverhampton City centre BID, met with 10 businesses representing the Westside Traders (WSTG).
- 2.5 At this meeting the Council shared that it was not legally required to provide compensation but that it was committed to supporting those businesses where there was clear evidence of impact and financial loss. The Council highlighted that it had to ensure it uses taxpayers' money legally, appropriately and in their best interest.
- 2.6 In May 2022 an Individual Executive Decision Notice gave approval for for £50,000 to provide business support to traders in the area. It was from this budget that an external consultancy was appointed supported by the local traders, to offer business support to assist businesses in the Victoria Street area. Businesses were invited to receive business advice and guidance and a review of their financial position which was captured in a cashflow statement.
- 2.7 The cashflow statement was an approach, agreed with the local traders, to identify if there had been a reduction in turnover in their business during the works, compared to a period prior to the start of the works work. The outcome showed that five businesses,

out of fifty one who came forward, who remained in the area, had evidence of an impact. The Council had committed to support those businesses where evidence could be shown. With the need to act at pace and with the information available at that time the approach was agreed with the traders ahead of the assessments.

- 2.8 In November 2022 following a meeting with local traders, where a new approach for the financial review was presented for the Council to undertake, the Council commissioned a specialist firm of accountants to review the process and present a consideration to the Council on a methodology. The company, RSM having previously worked on similar schemes presented their findings early March 2023
- 2.9 The Council was presented with a very detailed and robust methodology, to consider. The details of this and an alternative option for a 'relaunch' payment scheme were shared with the local traders at a meeting on 12 March 2023 and presented to Scrutiny Board on 13 March 2023. Letters with details of both options were delivered to all the businesses who took part in the previous exercise earlier in the year, to seek their views, for the Council to consider in its recommendations going forward.
- 2.10 Since October 2022, updates on the public realm improvement works and business support have been taken to:

A. Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel	28 September 2022
B. Resident, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel	17 November 2022
C. Scrutiny Board	27 January 2023
D. Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel	15 February 2023
E. Scrutiny Board	14 March 2023

3.0 Progress.

- 3.1 Having considered both options and the feedback from businesses in the area, a decision is being sought to establish a City Centre Relaunch Grant. This will offer small businesses who have been open during the works and remain in the area, a one-off grant to invest in their business

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 The Council was asked to consider:

Option 1, an alternative approach to assess the impact of the works presented to the Council through the work undertaken by RSM. RSM's comments and recommendations for Council consideration/decision are professionally and methodologically rigorous and robust and have been applied to other schemes in the West Midlands.

- They asked the Council to consider a detailed set of criteria including financial records and evidence and required to be provided by businesses to assess and evaluate the impact of the works.
- Adopting the approach is likely to take a considerable amount of time and the eligibility criteria and information required is likely to be challenging for many small businesses to comply with and could exclude them
- The Council/taxpayer will have to incur further expense in implementing the recommendations
- The traders were not in favour of this option.

4.2 Option 2 a 'Relaunch' grant. The aim to minimise administration for businesses to promote accessibility, and therefore the impact of the process on businesses and the Council and deliver financial support to businesses in the next few weeks/months. The scheme would be open to small businesses, with less than 50 employees, who have traded in the area for a minimum of 6 months, whose business was open during the works and who intend to remain open. Their premises must be in the area and frontages directly open onto the area of works, with their prime business being driven on site, in person and direct customer transactions. To offer £5,000 subject to assurance of being a valid business who are up to date with business rates or have a payment plan in place for any outstanding business rates.

- This would maximise benefit and provides support for businesses to take the opportunity to relaunch. It would be a quicker option, could be resolved in a matter of weeks/months and more businesses would benefit, recognising that the amount payable needs to be affordable within council funds. Whilst the grant scheme focuses on businesses that have been trading in the area for a minimum of six months, the wider support programme will benefit all business in the area. Those businesses that have been trading for less than six months will have opened in full knowledge of the works and will have been able to take mitigating actions.
- The Council would ensure due diligence and checks, to meet council audit and finance regulations and prevent fraudulent activity. This option was shared with the local traders for their views, and they have overwhelmingly feedback that Option 2 was their preferred approach.

4.3 Option 3, to not offer any support.

- The council has no legal obligation to provide support and would therefore not require the use of taxpayers money.
- However through the engagement with local traders it is clear that the improvement works, which are acknowledged will bring vitality to an area that has been in decline, have added to other issues businesses in the area are facing.

- Representatives of the council have been working closely with local traders for a number of months and made a commitment to support businesses affected by the impact of the works.
- There is a concern that some businesses are at risk of ceasing to trade, if support is not available

5.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 5.1 Council representatives met with the trader's group on Monday 13 March to discuss the proposed options. It was clear, from the trader's feedback, that a swift scheme to support them would be favoured as they highlighted the challenging financial and ongoing trading position they faced and feared that some businesses in the area were at risk of ceasing to trade – without immediate support.
- 5.2 The Council acknowledges that the works may have had an impact on traders and while the Council has no legal obligation to provide support – it is committed to doing so and delivering a programme which meets the immediate requirement of traders to receive support. This immediate support will be augmented by a more medium-term plan of help to bring footfall to the area to support the substantial investment made by the Government and Council to create new public spaces and transform this previously declining area to the west of the city centre.
- 5.3 The works carried out in the area are both unprecedented and intensive in their scale and have seen the comprehensive excavation and reconstruction of the streets. This has involved the use of high quality, high specification materials that needed to be laid by hand. This has meant that the scheme, covering approximately 20,000 square metres has been undertaken intensively.
- 5.4 The first option would require the council to invest between £200,000 - £250,000 to commission a firm of specialist accountants to carry out the forensic accounting assessment. A further budget would be required by the council to award a sum to those, who through this process could demonstrate a loss to their business. This approach does not offer the council value for money
- 5.5 The second option would significantly reduce the requirement for public funds to oversee the process. The council would use the system in place used to make payments during Covid, which means the process would be quicker and still retain key governance and audit assurance check.
- 5.6 The Council has taken into consideration the impact on public funds and its resources, and the views from local Traders, the council is seeking approval to take forward Option 2

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 As detailed in section 6, the recommended option for the City West Relaunch Grant Scheme is to award eligible businesses a grant of £5,000. It is estimated that there are

around 64 businesses who are open in the area, who are classified as small businesses and whose main custom is conducted by their premises fronting the Victoria Street and North Street area, and may be eligible for support. Payments will be made subject to the meeting the eligibility criteria and that supportive evidence is present and correct.

- 6.2 This report therefore seeks approval to allocate a total of £350,000 from the Our City, Our Plan Reserve and the establishment of supplementary budgets to fund the City West Relaunch Grant scheme and make payments to eligible businesses and provide additional business support.
- 6.3 In addition, approval is also sought to delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy and Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital City in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Finance to allocate any balances from the £350,000 to provide additional business support once all payments have been made to eligible businesses.

[AS/30032023/J]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council is under no statutory or legal duty to award payments to businesses affected by road works, in comparison, for example, to certain utility companies under relevant statutory regimes.
- 7.2 The Council, at its discretion and to support the businesses has decided to offer the 'relaunch payment' providing the business meets the eligibility criteria required. In addition, financial checks will be carried to ensure that the business is not facing bankruptcy or liquidation.
- 7.3 It will be a condition of receiving the payment that the business intends to remain at its current location and continue trading. The nature of the payments is such that it does not contravene the Subsidy Control Act 2023. Those businesses who are in arrears with their business rates will be required to work with the Council to agree a payment plan and directed to other support available for businesses.
- 7.4 Businesses will need to agree to the terms and conditions in order to receive payment.
- 7.5 The provision of the proposed grant is lawful and has a legal basis under the general power of competence at S.1 of the Localism Act 2011.

SZ/29032023/P

8.0 Equalities implications

- 9.1 The focus of the grant is to support businesses in the location to help them prepare for the new events and other activities scheduled for the forthcoming year. The grants will support small and micro businesses in the locations, subject to meeting the terms of the grant. These businesses represent the diverse culture and sectors for our city centre.

9.0 All other implications

- 9.1 The focus for the Future High Street Funds is to be a catalyst to support the regeneration of this area of the city, to bring economic prosperity and improve the environmental conditions. The scheme has a detailed events plan running for the next 12 months, aimed at attracting footfall from visitors and communities to the city.
- 9.2 Given that the 'go-live' date for this scheme will be within 24 hours of this urgent decision being approved, it is within the designated pre-election period of heightened political sensitivity. Public communications activity is restricted, ahead of the all-out elections in the city on May 4 2023 and it is proposed that communications regarding the scheme are targeted specifically to the businesses affected and that any such communication is marked as private and confidential. There will be no general communications issued, however, it may be necessary to respond to any press enquiries should we be approached.

10.0 Schedule of background paper

- 10.1 <https://wolverhamptonintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=7216>

12.0 Appendices

Appendix 1

City Centre Public Realm Relaunch Support Grant scheme

Scope of the support scheme

The City Centre Public Realm Relaunch Support Grant is aimed at eligible businesses who may have been most adversely impacted by the city west public realm work in Victoria Street, Salop Street and North Street. The grant offers businesses a one-off grant payment of £5,000 to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces.

Scheme Details

1. The grants are only available for businesses that have been invited to apply
2. Only fully completed applications will be processed.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to receive the City Centre Public Realm Relaunch Support Grant, businesses must be able to demonstrate that they:

- 1 Are physically located within the identified area of the works and business frontages directly open *onto* the area of the works.
- 2 Were legally trading during the works for at *least* six months and are currently trading
- 3 Are a business primarily driven by on-site, in-person, face-to-face, direct customer transactions and services rather than on-line or postal sales or professional services predominantly delivered by planned appointments or by off-site visits to customers
- 4 Are a locally-based business and not part of a wider regional or national corporation which employs more than 50 people in total
- 5 Comply with national and local regulations, for example valid trading licences and registrations
- 6 Do not have outstanding invoices or payments due to the Council, for example business rates arrears unless a payment plan has been agreed with the City Council
- 7 Are not in liquidation, administration, are insolvent or are subject to a striking off notice
- 8 Are not planning to cease/close trading within the location or move their premises out of the city centre

Information required to validate eligibility/compliance

1. Evidence of trading, for example recent monthly rental invoice, business insurance or monthly utility, telephone, internet invoice
2. Evidence of certificate of incorporation or unique tax reference number
3. Evidence of last accounts filed at Companies House or last tax return filed with HMRC

4. Evidence of business bank accounts which contains your business transactions
5. Evidence of one month's recent bank statements (redacted statements will not be accepted)
6. Details of business bank account name, bank account number and bank sort code

Timelines

Once we have received a completed application we will:

- Process eligibility of claims and approve/reject/seek clarification within five working days of receipt of application
- Conduct financial checks on approved applications within three working days
- Make payments within five working days of a successful finance check.

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Email contact: Business.Development@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Address: Civic Centre, St Peters Square, Wolverhampton WV1 1RP

Contact number: 01902 556879

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Address line 1
Address line 2
Wolverhampton
Postcode

03 April 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

Subject: City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme open for applications

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank you for providing views on the support options we presented in our letter to you dated 15 March 2023.

Feedback from traders was unanimous and, following approval by the Council's Cabinet, we are moving forward with a simple and generic 'Relaunch Grant' to provide support. This is part of a wider package of taxpayer funded investment to support businesses.

1. City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme summary

The City Centre West Relaunch Grant and wider business support scheme is aimed at eligible businesses who may have been adversely impacted by the city centre west public realm work in Victoria Street, Salop Street, School Street and North Street.

The grant offers small businesses a one-off grant payment of £5,000 to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces.

The application process opens today at 3pm (03 April 2023) and businesses must complete the steps set out below. The closing date for applications is Friday 12 May 2023 and you can find out more details about the scheme, including eligibility requirements in Appendix 1.

We have tried to make the process as simple as possible but if you do need help, please call 01902 555572 between 9am – 5pm, and ask to speak to a business support advisor. You will need to:

- Log onto <https://www.apply4.online/Requests/QuickSchemeLink/679BTA> which is the application portal. Register with your e-mail address, password and date of birth.
- You will then be required to put in your name, date of birth, address and telephone.
- After the registration you will need to select "Start Request" (in green) to begin your application where you need to put in your property reference number **XXXXX**, your business rates account number **XXXXX**, and your password **XXXXXXXXXX**.
- Follow the steps to complete the application process.

2. Wider business support on offer

The Wolverhampton Employer Support (WES) team can provide direct and indirect help. For more information go to: <https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/business/wolverhampton-employer-support>.

You can also email the team at business.development@wolverhampton.gov.uk, call on 01902 555572 or visit iGNITE, the city business hub in i10 by the station.

We are also in active discussions with our colleagues at the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) to see how they may also be able to offer support to traders.

3. Business Rates relief

As we have mentioned before, you may be eligible for some form of business rates relief. Please visit <https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/business/business-rates> for more information or contact a member of the team on 01902 551155 to discuss your individual circumstances. This could include hardship relief and further information, including eligibility and how to apply, can be found at <https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/business/business-rates/hardship-relief>.

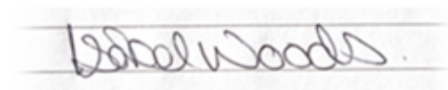
4. Events / footfall programme

As part of our commitment to generate footfall in the local area, the Council has directly invested in the following events and opportunities:

- 06 May – Arts Festival weekend to coincide with the King’s Coronation and organised by local business, Framers Gallery.
- 10 June – Pride 2023 in Market Square with the Pride Parade and wayfinding down Victoria Street.
- June – Food and drink market (please see proposed details circulated with this letter)
- June – Reopening of The Halls Wolverhampton which is likely to be bring 300,000 visitors a year to the city.
- 28 August – Krazy Races.
- November – Christmas Lights switch on and potential Christmas market as recommended by the Traders Group.
- Spring 2024 – Bell Street Box Space live entertainment zone due to open.

If you would like any help with any of the support measures detailed above, including support with your grant application, please email business.development@wolverhampton.gov.uk or call us on 01902 555572.

Yours faithfully,



Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise
E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk
City of Wolverhampton Council

Appendix 1: City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme Scope, Details, Eligibility, Information needed and Timeline.

1. Scope of the support scheme

The City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme is aimed at eligible businesses who may have been most adversely impacted by the city centre west public realm work in Victoria Street, Salop Street, School Street and North Street.

The grant is a £5,000 one-off grant payment to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces.

2. Scheme Details

- The application process opens on Monday 3rd April 2023 at 3pm.
- The grants are only available to businesses that have been invited to apply.
- Only completed applications which meet the criteria with the required evidence will be processed.

3. Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to receive the City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme, businesses must be able to demonstrate that they:

- Are physically located within the identified area of the works and business frontages directly open onto the area of the works.
- Were legally trading during the works for at least six months and are still currently trading.
- Are a business primarily driven by on-site, in-person, face-to-face, direct customer transactions and services rather than on-line or postal sales or professional services predominantly delivered by planned appointments or by off-site visits to customers.
- Are a locally based business and not part of a wider regional or national corporation which employs more than 50 people in total.
- Comply with national and local regulations, for example valid trading licences and registrations.
- Do not have outstanding invoices or payments due to the Council, for example business rates arrears unless a payment plan has been agreed with the City Council.
- Are not in liquidation, administration, are insolvent or are subject to a striking off notice.
- Are not planning to cease/close trading within the location or move their premises out of the city centre.

4. Information required to validate eligibility/compliance

Applicants must provide all of the following:

- Evidence of trading, for example recent monthly rental invoice, business insurance or monthly utility, telephone, internet invoice.
- Evidence of certificate of incorporation or unique tax reference number.
- Evidence of last accounts filed at Companies House or last tax return filed with HMRC.
- Evidence of business bank accounts which contains your business transactions.

- Evidence of one month's recent bank statements (redacted statements will not be accepted).
- Details of business bank account name, bank account number and bank sort code.

5. Timelines following receipt of completed applications

Once we have received your completed application we will:

- Process eligibility of claims and approve/reject/seek clarification within five working days of receipt of application.
- Conduct financial checks on approved applications within three working days .
- Approve payments within five working days of a successful finance check (payments will then take three-five working days to reach your bank account).

Martin Stevens

From: Business Development
Sent: 03 April 2023 17:18
To: markie3@icloud.com
Cc: Business Development
Subject: City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme open for applications
Attachments: Markies Barbers.pdf; Food festival in Vic St June 23.pdf

Sensitivity: RESTRICTED

Dear Sir/ Madam,

We were not able to deliver the attached letter to your business premises today.

Also included was the leaflet outlining the first event in June, which is part of the programme at increasing the footfall that will complement, not compete with trading activities. These are opportunities to connect to the event space with creative thinking and marketing

We would welcome feedback on the design of the leaflet as we are keen to launch the events programme.

Thanks and regards,

Business Development Team

The City of Wolverhampton Council works flexibly to meet the needs of the services we provide, so you could be receiving this email at any time. However, we do not expect you to read and respond to this email outside of your own working arrangements.



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Any views or opinions expressed within this email are those of the writer and may not necessarily reflect those of City of Wolverhampton Council. No contractual commitment is intended to arise from this email or attachments.

Date: 4th April 2023

To Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

CC: CEO Tim Johnson
Cllr Ian Brookfield (Council Leader)
Richard Lawrence – Director Regeneration
Cllr Stephen Simkins (Deputy Leader)
Ian Fegan
Cllr Steve Evans

Cllr Lynn Moran

MP Stuart Anderson
MP Pat Mcfadden
MP Jane Stevenson

Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Simon Bennett

Cherry Shine – BID Director

Scrutiny Panel:

Contact: Martin Stevens
Chair : Paul Sweet
Vice Chair Ellis Turrell

Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel

Contact: Martin Stevens
Chair: Jacqueline Sweetman
Vice Chair: Sohail Khan

URGENT ATTENTION

Re: City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme

Following receipt of letters disseminated by the council dated 3rd April to some of the traders on Westside. **We write on behalf of Westside Traders Group, those who have received letters, that we are absolutely insulted by the offer of £5000 that has been made. Its ludicrous.** There is a lot of anger and we are confused as to how Council think it would be acceptable.

This offer is more suited as a gesture as a support package POST PEDESTRIANISATION and not the hardship support that was requested in 7th April 2022. Council directly taken away footfall through the works without due diligence of impact. Businesses were not consulted or given any time to prepare for this.

At the meeting held 12th March 2023 it was clearly agreed with Isobel Woods, Cllr Stephen Simkins and Ian Fagen that a meeting would be held at council chambers with all Westside Traders to present options directly to traders and address issues. **This has been retracted**

and instead Council have rushed ahead without discussion and any address to the attachment sent dated 20th March 2023 for relevant points that needed to be considered for the directed choice that has been forced on businesses. All members above received this via email.

Email response received from Tim Johnson 22nd March 2023 stating that Isobel Woods and John Roseblade would respond to concerns. For the record **Concerns Arising From Scrutiny meeting have been ignored by all as it represents the truth and we have had no response.**

We are aware that the pre-elections are coming and that the council would like to quickly rush this to demonstrate that they are helping businesses. This is, as the Scrutiny chair said “a shambles”, no formal apology and now this insulting our intelligence with a poor offer.

Its been 12 months since we had a meeting April 2022 when we raised issues following **5 months of disruption.** (See Enclosure 1) To date Westside have faced 17 months of disruption. The council came to the meeting of 12th March 2023 with-holding information. It was clear that decisions had already been made. Council should have been honest and told us 12months ago that businesses were going to have their time wasted by the council. How can there be fairness in what is being put on the table. **Businesses who have suffered and evidenced proper accounts proving loss are being ignored hardship as a consequence of road works.**

Westside have been nothing but co-operational during this whole process. The council need to honour what Westside suggested and proved the real windows of losses businesses have suffered because of a plethora of mistakes and cover ups by council members & Eurovia.

SCA Management Accounts were employed to undertake Financial Health Check and gather financial data to identify financial impact incurred by businesses during the Phase 1 development works of the Westside area (Victoria Street -upper and lower, Salop St, School Street and Skinner St. – NOT North Street). They were instructed by Council to use 9-month window of comparison between periods Jan 2021–Sept 2021 & Oct 2021–Jun 2022. **Please note businesses, in particular Retail were still in lockdown until start of April 2021.**

WSTG raised errors/anomalies/concerns in spreadsheet and conduct of how data was being collected. WSTG proposed a more realistic window showing impact of works on businesses which was more inclusive of all businesses within westside. WSTG also were aware that no auditing was carried out by Council. WSTG proposed that new window Apr 2021 – Dec 2021(period 1) & Jan 2022 – Sep 2022 (period 2) be adopted to correctly show disruption and resolve the errors found. In council minutes it was made clear that there would be no legal issues if this was altered. Again retracted by Council.

25th May 2022 a statement of fact was sent to council. (See attached Enclosure 3)

When Cllr Simkins was brought back to the table to discuss with WSTG in October 2023, Cllr Simkins admitted that he did not have sight of the spreadsheet and requested Council accounts department should look into the realistic window that Westside proposed. Cllr Simpkins requested Ian Fagen to look into the cashflow spreadsheet window that council had commissioned SCA Management to identify business losses incurred as a result of the roadworks with consideration to new realistic window. Isobel Woods followed this up with an email stating this was her action not Ian Fagen’s and Council finance team were not accountants. THIS WAS IGNORED by Council.

The reason for retraction of this action was that the realistic window demonstrated true losses and that would mean Council would have to pay hardship and request a budget that would be closer to 4 times that which they requested(350k) without the knowledge of traders. Isobel woods was sent updated spreadsheets by Westside traders showing exact losses in November 2022. It was clearly known exactly the amount that council would have to find for the poor planning and management by the Council. Council deliberately perverted justice for Westside traders by them introducing RSM to look into methodology, deliberately delaying the outcome and making the process longer so businesses would be forced to take option 2 as a directed choice, which reframed financial hardship caused by road works. We have a clear paper trail which proves the justification of hardship.

Council did not share the fact with Westside that they would present to the Economic board on 14th February and have the panel believe that traders refused SCA Management cashflow spreadsheet. This is NOT TRUE. Repeatedly the solutions were demonstrated to the council to move forward with realistic view of losses. This was damage limitation to save face for what traders proved to have been poor decisions planning and management of westside development. It was clear that they did not want to set this as a precedence as other phases of development move forward. Westside has to be dealt with separately and hence should not have genuine financial hardship DENIED.

Westside worked with council for over a year, with the mental stress and how this has affected the mental health of businesses is being undermined and insulted with this proposal. Council have put some businesses into debt some of which are irrecoverable. If business footfall is drastically affected by the disruption, then disruption payments should be made accordingly. **Council have wasted taxpayers monies when in fact they should have and still have the opportunity to rectify the situation to allow businesses to mitigate losses.**

We formally request a meeting and review with all traders of the proposal with either a revised offer which is tier based or an audience with the scrutiny panel, where general public/press will see how the businesses have been failed by the Council.

Should the tiered approach be considered, amounts should be reflective of losses that were either demonstrated in the accounting data that the Council collected and have in their possession.

We look forward to a solution which takes into consideration.

- Financial Hardship inflicted November 2021-April 2023
- Post pedestrianisation support (5k currently offered)

As businesses, if the offer is not revised and reflective of the hardship then the council will definitely have a vote of no confidence from businesses who they have failed.

We have requested a copy of the RSM report and if they are not willing to show this to us traders then it should be shown to the **scrutiny board**. We have taken the liberty to share this with them and MP Stuart Anderson and scrutiny panel.

Cllr Evans to explain as he stated on public TV how exactly has he and his fellow councillors listened and have been working with the traders and where loss is evidenced disruption payments considered. We make no apologies for this being scathing as Westside have been made fools off for entertaining that the council will listen.

Deputy leader Simkins stated that he promised to ensure he supported businesses and **that has not been fulfilled**. The council have no allegiance to businesses and have ruined, not supported but destroying businesses, several of which have already been lost.

Where has there been contingency built into this project because if there hasn't, then the competence here is questionable of the very authority that has been put there by general public/business who pay their taxes. Why should we accept and suffer the consequences of the council mistakes.

We request that **scrutiny panel is there to perform a function**, now is the time to challenge and restore public and business confidence in the council. **We would welcome counsel with scrutiny panel to put WSTG case across**. We can evidence in some cases contrary information to what has been portrayed by council.

Why did the council think that there would be no major impact on businesses when they decided to do 5years of development in 17months without any repercussions. Failure to do impact analysis and consultation has led to this. Where is the evidence to show businesses were consulted individually. It is stated in the Briefing Note (See Enc 4) dated 15.Feb.2023 Point 2.5 that -

2.5 By the end of 2018 all businesses in the phase 1 (Victoria Street) and phase 2 (Queen Square / Lichfield Street) areas that were directly affected by the proposals were contacted on an individual basis.

This not a true statement and is refuted by WSTG. Furthermore WSTG disagree with how some of the information is miscommunicated in this document. We have formally responded to this in Enc 5, which clearly demonstrates the misrepresentation of facts.

WSTG provided Isobel/John a list of businesses that the group represent in the Westside area. Can you please provide a list a complete list of who has been invited to apply for this grant as some of the businesses in WSTG have neither received an email or letter in case there is any confidentiality issues that may arise.

Enclosures:

Enc 1: Original document(s) WSTG Meeting Minutes 7.Apr.2022

Enc 2: WSTG Subgroup Council Meeting 9.May.2022

Enc 3: Statement of Fact 25.May.2023 - traders letter 2.pdf

Enc 4: Public Realm Support Packages for Businesses (Briefing Note) - 15 February 2023

Enc 5: WSTG response to Enc 4 – Briefing Note 15.Feb.23

Martin Stevens

From: des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>
Sent: 06 April 2023 23:41
To: Tim Johnson; Labour Leaders Office; Richard Lawrence; Councillor Stephen Simkins; Ian Fegan (he/him); Councillor Steve Evans; John Roseblade; Isobel Woods
Cc: Martin Stevens; Councillor Paul Sweet; Councillor Ellis Turrell; Councillor Simon Bennett; Councillor Lynne Moran; cherry; jane.stevenson.mp@parliament.uk; mcfaddenp@parliament.uk; Councillor Wendy Thompson; Stuart Anderson; Councillor Sohail Khan; Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman
Subject: WSTG Response to Relaunch Grant
Attachments: Response to Council Options-3-4Apr23-2-5ENCS.pdf; Enc1- WestsideRetailerMeetingMinutes7Apr22.pdf; Enc2- WestsideSubGroup-Mtg-9May22Council.pdf; Enc3- STATEMENT-OF-FACT-TO-COUNCIL.pdf; Enc4- Public Realm - Support Package to Businesses-Briefing Note.pdf; Enc5- WSTG Response to Enc4 - Briefing Note.pdf

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To Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

**CC: Tim Johnson
Ian Brookfield
Richard Lawrence
Stephen Simkins
Ian Fegan
Steve Evans
Lynn Moran**

**MP Stuart Anderson
MP Pat Mcfadden
MP Jane Stevenson
Wendy Thompson
Simon Bennett**

Cherry Shine - BID

Scrutiny Panel:

**Contact: Martin Stevens
Chair : Paul Sweet
Vice Chair Ellis Turrell
Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel**

**Contact: Martin Stevens
Chair: Jacqueline Sweetman
Vice Chair: Sohail Khan**

URGENT ATTENTION

Martin Stevens

From: Lucy Spedding on behalf of Tim Johnson
Sent: 21 April 2023 14:37
To: des duggal
Cc: Labour Leaders Office; Richard Lawrence; Councillor Stephen Simkins; Ian Fegan (he/him); Councillor Steve Evans; John Roseblade; Isobel Woods; Councillor Paul Sweet; Councillor Ellis Turrell; Councillor Simon Bennett; Councillor Lynne Moran; cherry; jane.stevenson.mp@parliament.uk; mcfaddenp@parliament.uk; Councillor Wendy Thompson; Stuart Anderson; Councillor Sohail Khan; Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman; Martin Stevens; Tim Johnson
Subject: RE: WSTG Response to Relaunch Grant

Sensitivity: RESTRICTED

Dear WSTG,

Thank you for your response to my message which I received on 19 April.

Whilst I acknowledge that you may still have issues, I firmly believe we now need to put our collective energies into ensuring businesses benefit from the support on offer. Once the deadline has past, no new schemes will be created and no new money will be made available. We want to ensure that as many businesses as possible benefit from the £350,000 funding pot put aside for this purpose. Indeed, 18 businesses have now already applied for Relaunch Grant support.

In terms of the points you have raised, I would like to summarise my responses as follows:

- The Scrutiny Board meeting on 14 March included an agenda item for a 'verbal' update to councillors on Victoria Street Business Support. The presentation, which was shared with WSTG the day before, was used to update councillors on the full position for complete openness and transparency. This included the details of RSM's feedback and their recommendations for a potential future scheme. It also included the option of the Relaunch Grant and set out that traders had agreed to feedback on the two options by 22 March. For complete transparency, the presentation to Scrutiny Board was shared with councillors, the public and WSTG on 14 March on the council's website. It is also important to note that scrutiny is not a decision-making body – that power rests with the Council's Cabinet which ultimately approved the approach after careful consideration
- Information on the two proposed support options were shared with *all* traders soon after the Scrutiny Board meeting. WSTG provided feedback on the unanimously preferred option on 22 March. The Council then wrote out to all traders to begin to implement the support package. This included personal visits to all traders and numerous options to ask questions / raise issues with the business support team. Indeed, we had a large number and have responded to all of these. So, we would contend that traders have had significant opportunities to ask questions and raise concerns
- I want to be clear again, that the Council has **no legal responsibility to provide support** in these circumstances and that the support we always intended to provide and, indeed are now providing through the grant scheme, is categorically **not** compensation and was never intended to be compensation
- Whilst some traders may disagree with the size of the grant payment, the total amount of funding available has been determined by the Council's Cabinet as previously mentioned. It is a significant sum of tax-payers money - £350,000 in total for the grants alone. This

amount is proportionate and non-negotiable and will be evenly spread between eligible businesses to benefit more traders

- We have always accepted that the investment in the area may have had an impact on trade, that's why we have listened to traders at every stage of the process and have put funding into business support. I would categorically disagree that there has been no consultation. Comprehensive evidence of consultation undertaken by both Eurovia and the Council has previously been provided to WSTG.
- The cost of the SCA review was not £50k, it was £16,000 and led to five businesses in need receiving urgent funding in December 2022 of £5,000 each. WSTG's concerns about the SCA review and request to change the assessment window led to the commissioning of experts RSM. RSM's recommendations were professionally and methodologically rigorous and robust and were applied to other schemes in the West Midlands which we explained to WSTG. The implications of using the RSM methodology – which the Council would have pursued if traders had opted for this – would have taken a considerable amount of time and businesses may have had to wait years to receive financial support as the eligibility criteria and information required would have been extremely challenging for many traders to comply with and would have excluded many from any financial support.
- The relaunch grant is not a U-turn. It is a pragmatic and swift solution to the issues raised by traders. It's backed by a significant £350,000 sum of tax-payers money and aims to provide fast support to traders. Again, I want to reiterate the intention behind the relaunch grant is to offer eligible businesses a one-off amount to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces. It is not intended to recompense for loss or hardship.
- Since the scheme went live on 5 April 2023 18 businesses have come forward with their application. As of today, 2 businesses who have provided the requested information have been approved and will be paid this week.
- The change in status of the report scheduled for cabinet on 24 April was because it was brought forward to be an Urgent Decision. This fast tracked the decision to avoid delays in getting the support in place.
- You mention that WSTG will 'go to the press' if you do not get a satisfactory response. I hope that the information I have provided clarifies things but want to stress that any decision to go to the press is entirely a decision for WSTG. Although this will simply serve to exacerbate the situation, it will not resolve anything, and the Council will of course reserve the right to respond in full.

Once again, with all of this in mind it is considered that the offer is fair, proportionate and constitutes a justifiable use of public funds. The Relaunch Grant Scheme and wider business support offer remains the council's final position. I would ask that you again encourage all WSTG businesses that are eligible to apply for the funding before the scheme closes. On that point I am conscious that we do have bank holidays between now and the existing closing date of the 12 May. With this in mind we are extending the closing date to the 31 May with the intention that this should give sufficient time for all eligible companies to make their applications. I do have to reiterate that the funding will not be available after this date.

My sincere hope is that we can all look forward and establish this area as a thriving part of our City Centre.

Regards

Tim

Tim Johnson
Chief Executive
City of Wolverhampton Council

Email: Tim.Johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Tel: 01902 554500

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From: des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

Sent: 19 April 2023 00:16

To: Tim Johnson <Tim.Johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk>

Cc: Labour Leaders Office <Labourleadersoffice@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Richard Lawrence

<Richard.Lawrence@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Stephen Simkins

<Stephen.Simkins@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Ian Fegan (he/him) <Ian.Fegan@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor

Steve Evans <Steve.Evans4@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; John Roseblade <John.Roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk>;

Isobel Woods <Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Paul Sweet

<Paul.Sweet@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Ellis Turrell <Ellis.Turrell@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor

Simon Bennett <Simon.Bennett@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Lynne Moran

<Lynne.Moran@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; cherry <cherry@wolverhamptonbid.co.uk>;

jane.stevenson.mp@parliament.uk; mcfaddenp@parliament.uk; Councillor Wendy Thompson

<Wendy.Thompson@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Stuart Anderson <stuart.anderson.mp@parliament.uk>; Councillor

Sohail Khan <Sohail.Khan@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman

<CouncillorJacqueline.Sweetman@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Martin Stevens

<Martin.Stevens@wolverhampton.gov.uk>

Subject: Re: WSTG Response to Relaunch Grant

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Dear Tim

Further to email received 13th April, we have included a response from WSTG, with a 3 further enclosures.

Kind Regards

On and behalf of WSTG

On Thursday, 13 April 2023 at 15:30:42 BST, Tim Johnson <tim.johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk> wrote:

Sensitivity: RESTRICTED

Dear WSTG

Thank you for your message that was received at 23.41 on the 6 April.

I want to reiterate the intention behind the relaunch grant scheme is to offer eligible businesses a one-off amount to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces. It is not intended to recompense for loss or hardship.

It has been developed following consideration at Scrutiny Board on the 14 March and unanimous support from the traders to pursue the option of a one off payment. The Urgent Cabinet decision supporting the scheme was approved following due process which included the consultation of the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board.

The scheme involves the substantial investment of £350,000 of taxpayers money into the direct support of the businesses in question, despite there being no legal obligation for the council to do so.

As has been mentioned local businesses can also apply for a form of Business Rate relief and support that could include hardship relief, and a wider package of business support is underway as officers begin to visit businesses to look at other programmes of business support.

With all of this in mind it is considered that the offer is fair and constitutes justifiable use of public funds.

This is the councils final position so I would encourage all businesses that are eligible to apply for the funding before the scheme closes on 12 May.

Regards

Tim Johnson

Chief Executive

City of Wolverhampton Council

Email: Tim.Johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Tel: 01902 554500

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From: des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

Sent: 06 April 2023 23:41

To: Tim Johnson <Tim.Johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Labour Leaders Office <Labourleadersoffice@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Richard Lawrence <Richard.Lawrence@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Stephen Simkins <Stephen.Simkins@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Ian Fegan (he/him) <Ian.Fegan@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Steve Evans <Steve.Evans4@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; John Roseblade <John.Roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Isobel Woods <Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk>

Cc: Martin Stevens <Martin.Stevens@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Paul Sweet <Paul.Sweet@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Ellis Turrell <Ellis.Turrell@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Simon Bennett <Simon.Bennett@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Lynne Moran <Lynne.Moran@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; cherry <cherry@wolverhamptonbid.co.uk>; jane.stevenson.mp@parliament.uk; mcfaddenp@parliament.uk; Councillor Wendy Thompson <Wendy.Thompson@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Stuart Anderson <stuart.anderson.mp@parliament.uk>; Councillor Sohail Khan <Sohail.Khan@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman <CouncillorJacqueline.Sweetman@wolverhampton.gov.uk>

Subject: WSTG Response to Relaunch Grant

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To Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

CC: Tim Johnson

Ian Brookfield

Richard Lawrence

Stephen Simkins

Ian Fegan

Steve Evans

Lynn Moran

MP Stuart Anderson

MP Pat Mcfadden

MP Jane Stevenson

Wendy Thompson

Simon Bennett

Cherry Shine - BID

Scrutiny Panel:

Contact: Martin Stevens

Chair : Paul Sweet

Vice Chair Ellis Turrell

Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel

Contact: Martin Stevens

Chair: Jacqueline Sweetman

Vice Chair: Sohail Khan

URGENT ATTENTION

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Email contact: Business.Development@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Address: Civic Centre, St Peters Square, Wolverhampton WV1 1RP

Contact number: 01902 556879

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

«Liable_party»
«Business»
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«Address_Line_2»
«Postcode»

28 April 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

Subject: City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme deadline extended

We are writing to give an update on the Relaunch grant scheme and to both reiterate the rationale for the grant and the Council's position on it.


Since the scheme went live on 5 April 2023, 21 businesses have come forward with their application. As at the end of last week, 2 businesses who provided the requested information have been approved and paid.

However, we also note that a number of businesses have yet to apply. We are conscious that there are bank holidays between now and the existing closing date of the 12 May 2023 which is why we have taken the decision to extend the closing date until **31 May 2023**. This will give eligible businesses more time to submit their applications and benefit from the scheme. We would reiterate that the funding will not be available after this date.

We understand that some traders disagree with the size of the grant payment. However, the total amount of funding available has been determined by the Council's Cabinet. It represents a significant sum of tax-payers money - £350,000 in total for the grants alone. This amount is proportionate and non-negotiable and will be evenly spread between eligible businesses to benefit more traders. Although the level of total funding for the support scheme has been agreed and set, the rationale for this decision-making will be discussed at the Council's Scrutiny Board on Tuesday 2 May 2023. You can find out more about the meeting here <https://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=144&MId=20035&Ver=4>. It is important to note that Scrutiny Board is not a decision-making body, it does however review decisions that have already been made and make recommendations for consideration.

As we have also mentioned before, you may be eligible for some form of business rates relief. Please visit <https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/business/business-rates> for more information or contact a member of the team on 01902 551155 to discuss your individual circumstances. This could include hardship relief and further information, including eligibility and how to apply, can be found at <https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/business/business-rates/hardship-relief>

Finally, we want to be clear again, that the Council has **no legal responsibility to provide support** in these circumstances and that the support we always intended to provide and, indeed are now providing through the grant scheme, is categorically **not** compensation and was never intended to be

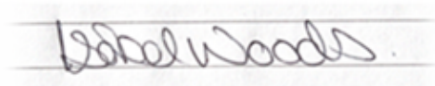
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compensation. The rationale behind the relaunch grant is to offer eligible businesses a one-off amount to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces. It is not intended to recompense for loss or hardship. If you require any support with the application, you can contact one of the Employer Support team by calling 01902 555572 or emailing business.development@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Yours faithfully,



Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise
E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk
City of Wolverhampton Council

Scrutiny Board Meeting

Tuesday, 2 May 2023

Dear Councillor

SCRUTINY BOARD - TUESDAY, 2ND MAY, 2023

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Tuesday, 2nd May, 2023 meeting of the Scrutiny Board, the following report that was unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No	Item
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3	<u>City West Grant Relaunch Scheme - Payments</u> (Pages 3 - 20)
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[To consider a report on the City West Grant Relaunch Scheme – Payments].

[The urgent decision made on 31 March 2023 by Cabinet, relating to the City West Grant Relaunch Scheme can be found at the following link - [Decision - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme :: Wolverhampton City Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)].

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Scrutiny Team:

Contact Martin Stevens DL

Tel 01902 550947

Email martin.stevens@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Address Scrutiny Office, Civic Centre, 1st floor, St Peter's Square,
Wolverhampton WV1 1RL

Encs

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Briefing Note

Title: City Centre West Business Support Scheme Grant Funding Allocation

Date: 27 April 2023

Prepared by: Richard Lawrence **Job Title:** Director of Regeneration

Intended Audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this briefing is to clearly set out the rationale for determining the funding level for business support grant payments to traders operating in the west of the city centre who may have been adversely affected by the impact of the £15 million Future High Street Fund investment to improve public realm spaces and increase footfall.

1.2 The report concisely sets out the background to the current position, sets out the legal and financial considerations to the funding decision and balances this against the Council's commitment to support affected businesses whilst using taxpayers money in an appropriate, responsible and proportionate way.

1.3 This report to Scrutiny Board follows a challenge from Victoria Street traders to the level of payment proposed through the urgent decision made on 31 March 2023 relating to the City Centre West Grant Relight Scheme – [Decision - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme :: Wolverhampton City Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

2.0 Background

2.1 The regeneration of the West side of the city centre, aimed at arresting the decline in retail footfall and transforming the environment to bring more homes, jobs, events and shops, has been a significant priority since the publication of the City Centre Area Action Plan in 2016 and has been referenced in subsequent Investment documents as a key opportunity site.

2.2 City Centre West is also a priority project forming part of a continued public sector partnership approach with the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, Homes England and the WMCA with a view to accelerating delivery, enhancing the quality of the project and maximizing outcomes for Wolverhampton.

2.3 The public realm works are an essential part of the overall masterplan and have been planned over a number of years. Preliminary works began in October 2021 with physical work beginning in January 2022.

2.4 In April 2022, local businesses and the Council met to discuss the impact of the works, it was agreed regular meetings would be held to update on the programme of works, business support and events/communication plan.

2.5 On 9 May 2022, the Cabinet Member for City Economy, the Director for City Housing and Environment, council officers leading the public realm improvements works project, Head of Enterprise and the Director of Wolverhampton City centre BID, met with 10 businesses representing the Westside Traders (WSTG).

2.6 At this meeting the Council shared that it was not legally required to provide compensation but that it was committed to supporting those businesses where there was clear evidence of impact and financial loss. The Council highlighted that it had to ensure it uses taxpayers' money legally, appropriately and in their best interest.

2.7 In May 2022 an Individual Executive Decision Notice gave approval for £50,000 to provide business support to traders in the area. It was from this budget that an external consultancy was appointed supported by the local traders, to offer business support to assist businesses in the Victoria Street area. Businesses were invited to receive business advice and guidance and a review of their financial position which was captured in a cashflow statement.

2.8 The cashflow statement was an approach, agreed with the local traders, to identify if there had been a reduction in turnover in their business during the works, compared to a period prior to the start of the works. The outcome showed that five businesses, out of fifty-one who came forward, who remained in the area, had evidence of an impact. The Council had committed to support those businesses where evidence could be shown.

2.9 In November 2022, following a meeting with local traders where a new approach for the financial review was presented for the Council to consider, the Council commissioned a specialist firm of accountants to review the process and present recommendations to the Council on a methodology. The company, RSM having previously worked on similar schemes, presented their findings in early March 2023.

2.10 The Council was presented with a very detailed, robust, but lengthy, process and methodology to consider. The details of this and an alternative option for a 'relaunch' payment grant scheme were shared with the local traders at a meeting on 13 March 2023 and presented to Scrutiny Board on 14 March 2023. Letters with details of both options were delivered to all the businesses who took part in the previous exercise earlier in the year, to seek their views, for the Council to consider in its recommendations going forward.

2.11 On 22 March 2023, having considered the options, representatives of the traders fed-back that their preferred option was to establish a City Centre West Relaunch Grant. This reported of the 41 businesses who voted, 41 were in favour of the option of a one-off grant. The grant offers small businesses who were open during the works and remain in the area, a one-off payment to invest in their business. At this time traders asked for a wide scale meeting to include all relevant traders to discuss the recommended package. It is also important to note that the amount of grant had not been determined at this stage.

2.12 To facilitate the urgent implementation of the scheme and to allocate the agreed level of funding, an urgent decision was made on 31 March 2023 - [Decision - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme : Wolverhampton City Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#). [Business support officers were also allocated to the scheme to personally visit each business to advise on the scheme and offer individual assistance in making applications, rather than in a large-scale public meeting.](#)

2.13 The urgent decision identified up to 59 businesses who, if they were eligible and met certain simple due diligence criteria, could receive a swift, one-off grant payment of £5,000 to invest in their business. The aim of this was to support them to seize upon the opportunities presented by the £15 million Future High Street Fund investment to improve public realm spaces outside their premises and to increase footfall to the area.

2.14 The scheme went live on 3 April 2023 and business advisors from the Council's Enterprise Team hand-delivered (wherever possible) details of the scheme to potentially eligible businesses and engaged with them to offer support.

2.15 Although the opportunity to apply to the scheme was originally due to come to an end on 12 May 2023, the closing date was extended to 31 May 2023 to allow businesses more time to make an application.

2.16 As at 8am on 25 April 2023, 21 businesses out of a potential total of 59 that may be eligible, have applied to receive the grant. This represents around a 37% current take-up of the Relaunch Grant Scheme offer.

3.0 Evaluation of alternative options

3.1 The evaluation of alternative options are set out in the urgent decision made on 31 March 2023 relating to the City Centre West Grant Relight Scheme – [Decision - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme :: Wolverhampton City Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

4.0 Reason for decision

4.1 Although **there is no legal requirement for the Council to make any form of grant payment**, the Council has made it clear on numerous occasions – and through its actions in engaging with businesses – that it is committed to supporting traders who may have been adversely affected by the £15 million investment in public realm improvements.

4.2 In doing so, the Council is also very clear about its financial duties to manage tax-payers money well. This is set out in *Roberts v Hopwood [1925] AC 578*, which established the principle that:

"[A] local authority owes a fiduciary duty to the ratepayers from whom it obtains moneys needed to carry out its statutory functions, and ...this includes a duty not to expend those moneys thriftlessly but to deploy the full financial resources available to it to the best advantage" (at paragraph 37).

4.3 Officers are not aware of any other local authority areas where similar works have taken place, that have made similar grant payments or who have compensated for the inevitable disruption that this has caused.

4.4 An example of similar plans is given in the recent express and star article which describes the recent similar investment in Leicester City Centre and the benefits this has delivered. [A tale of two cities – Wolverhampton should learn from Leicester's reinvention | Express & Star \(expressandstar.com\)](#). Sir Peter Soubry, the Mayor of Leicester, is quoted as saying that their plans received significant criticism at first but very similar public realm

investment in high quality materials, and pedestrianising connections to key destinations has been key to the cities rejuvenation.

4.5 City of Wolverhampton Council, however, has agreed to provide business support, backed by significant funding to City Centre West traders. This has been based on regular engagement with businesses throughout the process as evidenced in 2.4 to 2.14 above. Moreover, following the conclusion of review work by RSM, businesses were offered two support options to consider as set out above at 2.10 and 2.11. Following feedback from businesses, the Council agreed to move forward with the traders preferred option and pressed ahead with the process of agreeing and establishing a proportionate funding pot.

4.6 Again, it is important to note that the Council has **no legal responsibility to provide funding support** in these circumstances and that the support we intended to provide and are now providing, is categorically **not** compensation and was never intended to be compensation.

4.7 In determining the funding pot, council officers considered the following factors.

4.8 Firstly, proportionality. The cost to implement a more detailed review (as recommended by the expert independent financial advisors) would have involved businesses in a complex process where they would have had to provide extensive financial records and information, going back over a number of years, to evidence profit loss. The cost of this was estimated to be approximately £4,000 to £6,000 per business to complete, therefore totalling a maximum sum of £354,000 if all eligible businesses at the time were involved. This expenditure would have not included any payments to cover lost profits, it would have been an accounting exercise to establish clear evidence of loss in the first place and would have considered the additional affects on businesses such as the national and regional reduction in retail activity, the cost of living crisis and inflation etc. It was therefore considered more proportionate to allocate this considerable sum of taxpayers money to a grant scheme, than to pay consultants for a very thorough, time-consuming and robust accounting exercise.

4.9 Secondly, comparability. The most recent, similar scheme in the city where a process was implemented to provide support payments to traders affected by road/ metro works was the Bilston Road Scheme in 2017. A very robust and thorough process was implemented by expert independent accountants which took a number of years to complete and for payments to be made based on lost profits. Sixteen businesses in total received an average of £6,500 each, although based on the criteria applied some business received a lot more than this average amount, whilst others received a lot less. In the case of the City Centre West scheme, the level of payment is less than the average but comparable, whilst the size and scale of the overall funding pot allocated for the City Centre West scheme is significantly larger.

4.10 Based on the legal, financial, proportionality and comparability considerations, the total amount of funding was recommended to, and then determined by the Council's Cabinet. It represents a significant sum of tax-payers money - £350,000 in total for the grants alone.

4.11 In terms of the total package of support provided to businesses in the area, if you include the grants awarded to struggling businesses in December 2022 and the proposed expenditure in a series of 'reopening events' in Victoria Street, the total package of support is closer to £400,000.

This excludes the considerable amount of officer time expended upon working to resolve this issue.

Appendix 1 - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme

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Special Urgent Decision

Report title	Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Steve Simkins Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	St Peters	
Accountable Director	Richard Lawrence Director of Regeneration	
Originating service	Enterprise	
Accountable employee	Isobel Woods Tel Email	Head of Enterprise 01902 551848 Isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Directorate Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board Scrutiny Board	27 March 2023 22 March 2023 14 March 2023

Recommendations for decision:

In accordance with the provision of article 12.9 in Part 2 of the Council's constitution, the Leader (or in his absence Deputy Leader) in consultation with the Chair of Scrutiny Board, Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board and Chief Executive authorises the steps listed below

These matters are of immediate urgency making the prompt exercise of the powers of the Cabinet desirable and cannot await the next meeting of the Cabinet (26 April 2023).

These decisions will be reported to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

1. Approve the use of the urgent action powers outlined in Part 12.9 of the Council's constitution detailed in paragraphs 2,1 regarding the use of Urgent Decision.
2. Approve the City West Relaunch grant scheme, to support businesses in the Victoria Street area to relaunch their business and payments to eligible businesses as per the criteria set out in appendix 1.
3. Approve the use of the Our City, Our Plan reserve up to £350,000 to support the City West Relaunch grant and the establishment of supplementary budgets.

4. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy and Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital City in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Finance to allocate any balances from the £350,000 to provide additional further necessary business support once all payments have been made to eligible businesses.
5. Note that given the 'go-live' date for this scheme is within the designated pre-election period of heightened political sensitivity where public communications activity is restricted, ahead of the all-out elections in the city on May 4 2023, it is proposed that information regarding the scheme is limited specifically to the businesses affected and that any such communication is marked as private and confidential with further communication provided after the end of the pre-election period.
6. Note that businesses may be able to receive Business Rate relief through established processes such as hardship relief and have been encouraged to contact the Business Rates team if they find themselves in financial difficulty.

1.1 Purpose

- 1.2 To agree the City West Relaunch grant scheme and provide business support aimed at eligible businesses who may have been adversely impacted by the city west public realm work in Victoria Street, Salop Street School Street and North Street.
- 1.3 The payment offers small businesses who have been open during the works and intend to remain in the city, a one-off amount to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces.

1.4 Urgent Decision Making

- 1.5 The approach to decisions to be made under the Urgent Action powers is that the Council will use its urgent action powers for any urgent decisions that must be taken that cannot wait for the next formal meeting of the relevant Council body, in this case Cabinet. These powers are to be used sparingly and the guiding principles for any decisions are:
- A. Only those decisions that have to be made urgently (eg as a result of COVID-19 or related matters, including support of businesses or as a result of an immovable deadline) will be made
 - B. The decisions will be made or endorsed (where the decisions have to be made very urgently) using the Urgent Action powers
 - C. The decisions will be made available in a transparent way, as all decisions of Council bodies, such as Cabinet, are required to be, including through the relevant pages on the Council's website
- 1.6 Following receipt of the RSM report and their recommendations in relation to what would be involved in a detailed and complex profit and loss analysis, two options were offered to the Traders. Option 1 was to follow the consideration the council had received and option 2 was to pursue a one-off Relaunch grant as set out in this report.
- 1.7 By the deadline of the 22 March 2023, unanimous support for option 2 was subsequently forthcoming with specific reference that timely support was desperately needed in the area, indicating that this was to ensure businesses survived.
- 1.8 Prior to this deadline, council representatives met with the traders group on Monday 13 March to discuss the proposed options. It was clear, from the trader's feedback, that a swift scheme to support them would be favoured as they highlighted the challenging financial and ongoing trading position they faced and feared that some businesses in the area were at risk of ceasing to trade – without immediate support.
- 1.9 The Council acknowledges that the works may have had an impact on traders and while the Council has no legal obligation to provide support – it is committed to doing so and delivering a programme which meets the immediate requirement of traders to receive support. This immediate support will be augmented by a more medium-term plan of help

to bring footfall to the area to support the substantial investment made by the Government and Council to create new public spaces and transform this previously declining area to the west of the city centre. .

- 1.10 The need to process this decision and commence the scheme has led to the need to seek this urgent decision ahead of the next Cabinet meeting on the 26 April 2023.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The regeneration of the West side of the city centre, aimed at arresting the decline in retail footfall and transforming the environment to bring more homes, jobs, events and shops, has been a significant priority since the publication of the City Centre Area Action Plan in 2016 and has been referenced in subsequent Investment documents as a key opportunity site.
- 2.2 City Centre West is identified as a priority project forming part of a continued public sector partnership approach with the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, Homes England and the WMCA with a view to accelerating delivery, enhancing the quality of the project and maximizing outcomes for Wolverhampton. 3.2 The public realm works are an essential part of the overall masterplan and have been planned over a number of years. Preliminary works began in October 2021 with physical work beginning in January 2022.
- 2.3 In April 2022 local businesses and the Council met to discuss the impact of the works, it was agreed regular meetings would be held to update on; programme of works, business support and communication plan.
- 2.4 On 9 May 2022 the Cabinet Member for City Economy, the Director for City Housing and Environment, council officers leading the public realm improvements works project, Head of Enterprise and the Director of Wolverhampton City centre BID, met with 10 businesses representing the Westside Traders (WSTG).
- 2.5 At this meeting the Council shared that it was not legally required to provide compensation but that it was committed to supporting those businesses where there was clear evidence of impact and financial loss. The Council highlighted that it had to ensure it uses taxpayers' money legally, appropriately and in their best interest.
- 2.6 In May 2022 an Individual Executive Decision Notice gave approval for for £50,000 to provide business support to traders in the area. It was from this budget that an external consultancy was appointed supported by the local traders, to offer business support to assist businesses in the Victoria Street area. Businesses were invited to receive business advice and guidance and a review of their financial position which was captured in a cashflow statement.
- 2.7 The cashflow statement was an approach, agreed with the local traders, to identify if there had been a reduction in turnover in their business during the works, compared to a period prior to the start of the works work. The outcome showed that five businesses,

out of fifty one who came forward, who remained in the area, had evidence of an impact. The Council had committed to support those businesses where evidence could be shown. With the need to act at pace and with the information available at that time the approach was agreed with the traders ahead of the assessments.

- 2.8 In November 2022 following a meeting with local traders, where a new approach for the financial review was presented for the Council to undertake, the Council commissioned a specialist firm of accountants to review the process and present a consideration to the Council on a methodology. The company, RSM having previously worked on similar schemes presented their findings early March 2023
- 2.9 The Council was presented with a very detailed and robust methodology, to consider. The details of this and an alternative option for a 'relaunch' payment scheme were shared with the local traders at a meeting on 12 March 2023 and presented to Scrutiny Board on 13 March 2023. Letters with details of both options were delivered to all the businesses who took part in the previous exercise earlier in the year, to seek their views, for the Council to consider in its recommendations going forward.
- 2.10 Since October 2022, updates on the public realm improvement works and business support have been taken to:

A. Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel	28 September 2022
B. Resident, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel	17 November 2022
C. Scrutiny Board	27 January 2023
D. Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel	15 February 2023
E. Scrutiny Board	14 March 2023

3.0 Progress.

- 3.1 Having considered both options and the feedback from businesses in the area, a decision is being sought to establish a City Centre Relaunch Grant. This will offer small businesses who have been open during the works and remain in the area, a one-off grant to invest in their business

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 The Council was asked to consider:

Option 1, an alternative approach to assess the impact of the works presented to the Council through the work undertaken by RSM. RSM's comments and recommendations for Council consideration/decision are professionally and methodologically rigorous and robust and have been applied to other schemes in the West Midlands.

- They asked the Council to consider a detailed set of criteria including financial records and evidence and required to be provided by businesses to assess and evaluate the impact of the works.
- Adopting the approach is likely to take a considerable amount of time and the eligibility criteria and information required is likely to be challenging for many small businesses to comply with and could exclude them
- The Council/taxpayer will have to incur further expense in implementing the recommendations
- The traders were not in favour of this option.

4.2 Option 2 a 'Relaunch' grant. The aim to minimise administration for businesses to promote accessibility, and therefore the impact of the process on businesses and the Council and deliver financial support to businesses in the next few weeks/months. The scheme would be open to small businesses, with less than 50 employees, who have traded in the area for a minimum of 6 months, whose business was open during the works and who intend to remain open. Their premises must be in the area and frontages directly open onto the area of works, with their prime business being driven on site, in person and direct customer transactions. To offer £5,000 subject to assurance of being a valid business who are up to date with business rates or have a payment plan in place for any outstanding business rates.

- This would maximise benefit and provides support for businesses to take the opportunity to relaunch. It would be a quicker option, could be resolved in a matter of weeks/months and more businesses would benefit, recognising that the amount payable needs to be affordable within council funds. Whilst the grant scheme focuses on businesses that have been trading in the area for a minimum of six months, the wider support programme will benefit all business in the area. Those businesses that have been trading for less than six months will have opened in full knowledge of the works and will have been able to take mitigating actions.
- The Council would ensure due diligence and checks, to meet council audit and finance regulations and prevent fraudulent activity. This option was shared with the local traders for their views, and they have overwhelmingly feedback that Option 2 was their preferred approach.

4.3 Option 3, to not offer any support.

- The council has no legal obligation to provide support and would therefore not require the use of taxpayers money.
- However through the engagement with local traders it is clear that the improvement works, which are acknowledged will bring vitality to an area that has been in decline, have added to other issues businesses in the area are facing.

- Representatives of the council have been working closely with local traders for a number of months and made a commitment to support businesses affected by the impact of the works.
- There is a concern that some businesses are at risk of ceasing to trade, if support is not available

5.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 5.1 Council representatives met with the trader's group on Monday 13 March to discuss the proposed options. It was clear, from the trader's feedback, that a swift scheme to support them would be favoured as they highlighted the challenging financial and ongoing trading position they faced and feared that some businesses in the area were at risk of ceasing to trade – without immediate support.
- 5.2 The Council acknowledges that the works may have had an impact on traders and while the Council has no legal obligation to provide support – it is committed to doing so and delivering a programme which meets the immediate requirement of traders to receive support. This immediate support will be augmented by a more medium-term plan of help to bring footfall to the area to support the substantial investment made by the Government and Council to create new public spaces and transform this previously declining area to the west of the city centre.
- 5.3 The works carried out in the area are both unprecedented and intensive in their scale and have seen the comprehensive excavation and reconstruction of the streets. This has involved the use of high quality, high specification materials that needed to be laid by hand. This has meant that the scheme, covering approximately 20,000 square metres has been undertaken intensively.
- 5.4 The first option would require the council to invest between £200,000 - £250,000 to commission a firm of specialist accountants to carry out the forensic accounting assessment. A further budget would be required by the council to award a sum to those, who through this process could demonstrate a loss to their business. This approach does not offer the council value for money
- 5.5 The second option would significantly reduce the requirement for public funds to oversee the process. The council would use the system in place used to make payments during Covid, which means the process would be quicker and still retain key governance and audit assurance check.
- 5.6 The Council has taken into consideration the impact on public funds and its resources, and the views from local Traders, the council is seeking approval to take forward Option 2

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 As detailed in section 6, the recommended option for the City West Relaunch Grant Scheme is to award eligible businesses a grant of £5,000. It is estimated that there are

around 64 businesses who are open in the area, who are classified as small businesses and whose main custom is conducted by their premises fronting the Victoria Street and North Street area, and may be eligible for support. Payments will be made subject to the meeting the eligibility criteria and that supportive evidence is present and correct.

- 6.2 This report therefore seeks approval to allocate a total of £350,000 from the Our City, Our Plan Reserve and the establishment of supplementary budgets to fund the City West Relaunch Grant scheme and make payments to eligible businesses and provide additional business support.
- 6.3 In addition, approval is also sought to delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy and Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital City in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Finance to allocate any balances from the £350,000 to provide additional business support once all payments have been made to eligible businesses.

[AS/30032023/J]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council is under no statutory or legal duty to award payments to businesses affected by road works, in comparison, for example, to certain utility companies under relevant statutory regimes.
- 7.2 The Council, at its discretion and to support the businesses has decided to offer the 'relaunch payment' providing the business meets the eligibility criteria required. In addition, financial checks will be carried to ensure that the business is not facing bankruptcy or liquidation.
- 7.3 It will be a condition of receiving the payment that the business intends to remain at its current location and continue trading. The nature of the payments is such that it does not contravene the Subsidy Control Act 2023. Those businesses who are in arrears with their business rates will be required to work with the Council to agree a payment plan and directed to other support available for businesses.
- 7.4 Businesses will need to agree to the terms and conditions in order to receive payment.
- 7.5 The provision of the proposed grant is lawful and has a legal basis under the general power of competence at S.1 of the Localism Act 2011.

SZ/29032023/P

8.0 Equalities implications

- 9.1 The focus of the grant is to support businesses in the location to help them prepare for the new events and other activities scheduled for the forthcoming year. The grants will support small and micro businesses in the locations, subject to meeting the terms of the grant. These businesses represent the diverse culture and sectors for our city centre.

9.0 All other implications

- 9.1 The focus for the Future High Street Funds is to be a catalyst to support the regeneration of this area of the city, to bring economic prosperity and improve the environmental conditions. The scheme has a detailed events plan running for the next 12 months, aimed at attracting footfall from visitors and communities to the city.
- 9.2 Given that the 'go-live' date for this scheme will be within 24 hours of this urgent decision being approved, it is within the designated pre-election period of heightened political sensitivity. Public communications activity is restricted, ahead of the all-out elections in the city on May 4 2023 and it is proposed that communications regarding the scheme are targeted specifically to the businesses affected and that any such communication is marked as private and confidential. There will be no general communications issued, however, it may be necessary to respond to any press enquiries should we be approached.

10.0 Schedule of background paper

- 10.1 <https://wolverhamptonintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=7216>

12.0 Appendices

Appendix 1

City Centre Public Realm Relaunch Support Grant scheme

Scope of the support scheme

The City Centre Public Realm Relaunch Support Grant is aimed at eligible businesses who may have been most adversely impacted by the city west public realm work in Victoria Street, Salop Street and North Street. The grant offers businesses a one-off grant payment of £5,000 to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces.

Scheme Details

1. The grants are only available for businesses that have been invited to apply
2. Only fully completed applications will be processed.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to receive the City Centre Public Realm Relaunch Support Grant, businesses must be able to demonstrate that they:

- 1 Are physically located within the identified area of the works and business frontages directly open *onto* the area of the works.
- 2 Were legally trading during the works for at *least* six months and are currently trading
- 3 Are a business primarily driven by on-site, in-person, face-to-face, direct customer transactions and services rather than on-line or postal sales or professional services predominantly delivered by planned appointments or by off-site visits to customers
- 4 Are a locally-based business and not part of a wider regional or national corporation which employs more than 50 people in total
- 5 Comply with national and local regulations, for example valid trading licences and registrations
- 6 Do not have outstanding invoices or payments due to the Council, for example business rates arrears unless a payment plan has been agreed with the City Council
- 7 Are not in liquidation, administration, are insolvent or are subject to a striking off notice
- 8 Are not planning to cease/close trading within the location or move their premises out of the city centre

Information required to validate eligibility/compliance

1. Evidence of trading, for example recent monthly rental invoice, business insurance or monthly utility, telephone, internet invoice
2. Evidence of certificate of incorporation or unique tax reference number
3. Evidence of last accounts filed at Companies House or last tax return filed with HMRC

4. Evidence of business bank accounts which contains your business transactions
5. Evidence of one month's recent bank statements (redacted statements will not be accepted)
6. Details of business bank account name, bank account number and bank sort code

Timelines

Once we have received a completed application we will:

- Process eligibility of claims and approve/reject/seek clarification within five working days of receipt of application
- Conduct financial checks on approved applications within three working days
- Make payments within five working days of a successful finance check.

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Attendance

Members of the Scrutiny Board

Cllr Paul Sweet (Chair)
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Val Evans
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Ellis Turrell (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN
Cllr Louise Miles
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman

In Attendance

Cllr Stephen Simkins

Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy

Witnesses

Bilivir Chander Kumar
Esme Sackhouse

Westside Traders Group
Westside Traders Group

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
David Pattison
Ian Fegan

Scrutiny Officer
Chief Operating Officer
Director of Communications and External
Relations
Director of Regeneration
Head of Strategic Transport
Director of Resident Services
Programme Manager – Connected Places

Richard Lawrence
Marianne Page
John Roseblade
Ruth Taylor

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1** **Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Simon Bennett.
- 2** **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.

3 **City West Grant Relaunch Scheme - Payments**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the extraordinary meeting of the Board and advised it was being live streamed using the Council's website. A recording of the meeting would be available for the viewing after the meeting has taken place.

The Chair reminded everyone in attendance that the Council was in a pre-election period and care should be taken to avoid during debates showing any bias or support to any candidate or political party which could impact on public perception or voting intentions.

The Chair advised that if the debate moved into areas of either criticism of an individual Councillor and or a political party then the Chief Operating Officer will ask for the broadcast of the meeting to be paused and decision taken about future proceedings.

The Chair welcomed Bilivir Chander Kumar and Esme Sackhouse as representatives of Westside Traders Group to contribute to the discussion on the agenda item City West Grant Relaunch Scheme.

The Chair invited David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, to comment on the meeting proceedings.

The Chief Operating Officer advised the Board that the forthcoming election did not mean that Councillors could not engage in a robust debate but reminded everyone that the meeting should not be used to publicly support and or endorse any election candidate or to promote their own candidacy. The meeting should focus on the report City West Grant Relaunch Scheme for comment and discussion.

The Chair invited the Vice Chair to briefly explain the reasons for calling an extraordinary meeting of the Board and listed the running order of speakers for the meeting.

The Vice Chair advised the Board of the reasons for wanting to review the Cabinet's urgent decision as regards the amount of £5,000 offered to eligible businesses affected by the pedestrianisation works on Victoria Street and surrounding streets in the city centre. There were also concerns about new grant scheme offer following publication of the documents related to the urgent decision.

The request to call an extraordinary meeting of the Board met the conditions detailed in the Council's Constitution.

A Board member asked for further details about the reasons for wanting an extraordinary meeting to better understand the 'urgency' of the issue and the timing of the meeting before the election, while accepting the importance of the issue to the traders affected by the redevelopment work.

The Vice Chair commented that as the decision was made under urgent powers it warranted the need to have an urgent meeting of the Board to scrutinise the reasons for this decision.

The Chief Operating Officer accepted that it is unusual for a meeting of the Board to be held at short notice just before an election.

The Chief Operating Officer added that legal advice was sought from a KC about if a meeting could be held in such circumstances. The advice was that as the basis of the decision was that it was a decision made under urgent action powers then a meeting would need to take place immediately before the election date.

The Chief Operating Officer advised the Board that the Council followed the advice of the KC in arranging the date of the meeting before the election.
The Board thanked the Chief Operating Officer for the information.

The Chief Operating Officer added that the decision was also made in response to representations from traders who considered the amounts proposed under the scheme were not adequate when considering the level of financial hardship experienced because of the pedestrianisation work.

The Chair invited Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration, to present the report.

The Director advised the Board that the briefing notes sets out the rationale for determining the level of the business support grant payment offered to City Centres traders who may have been affected by improvement works funded by £15 million investment from the Future High Street Funds.

The Director gave a short presentation of the key points in the City West Grant Relaunch Scheme briefing note, which detailed the legal and financial considerations and key dates in the decision-making timeline.

The Director commented on the level of funding provided by the Future High Street Fund improvement works to transform the physical environment of the area as part of a wider strategic redevelopment plan for the city centre.

The Director advised the Board that the briefing paper was drafted in response to the challenge from the City Centre West traders about the level of grant payment proposed in the urgent decision made on the 31 March 2023.

The Director advised the Board that the current position is that 21 applications have been received for the city centre grant reward scheme. The Director added that 20 of these applications are being processed and seven applications have been approved and five traders have received a payment of £5,000 pounds each.

The Chair invited Steve Simkins, Cabinet Member, to make some introductory comments before the Board discussed the report.

The Cabinet Member commented that the issue of grant scheme to traders has been presented to scrutiny members to review on five different occasions since September 2022. The Cabinet Member queried the reason for the requesting an urgent meeting as there was already a previous commitment following the Scrutiny Board meeting 14 March 2023 to present an update report on the scheme to a future meeting.

The Cabinet Member advised the Board that there is no legal requirement for the Council to provide financial support to businesses affected the development work and listed examples of similar work in other authorities where no funds were offered

to businesses whose trading was affected by large scale improvements to the public realm.

The Cabinet Member commented on the consultations with traders over the previous 12 months and the changes made to the scheme over time in response to concerns about the eligibility criteria and the level of the financial support.

The traders supported Option 2 that was proposed in the report presented to the Board on 14 March 2023 for comment. The Cabinet Member advised the Board that the deadline for submitting applications to the current scheme has since been extended to 31 May 2023 to allow more time for applicants to prepare. The Chair invited Bilivir Chander Kumar and Esme Sackhouse, as representatives of Westside Traders Group, to present their evidence to the Board.

Bilivir Chander Kumar presented a detailed timeline of meetings with Council officials and the Cabinet Member since December 2021.

Bilivir Chander Kumar expressed concerns about long delays in responding to requests from Council officials and the Cabinet Member for information and non-attendance at meetings about the timescale and extent of pedestrianisation works on Victoria Street and surrounding streets.

Bilivir Chander Kumar expressed further concerns about the overall approach of the Council when consulting with traders since December 2021 highlighting the lack of consultation with individual businesses about the impact on businesses of the redevelopment scheme before work began. In addition, there were concerns about the way traders were informed about changes to the scheme, the eligibility criteria, the process for applying for financial support and the tight deadline for submitting applications.

A Board Member expressed concern that they were not aware of the issues raised by the representatives of the traders and proposed a motion that the discussion on the report be deferred to a further meeting. A Board Member added that this would allow for the issue to be properly considered by members who could then make more informed comments in response to the concerns of trader representatives about key decisions relating to the scheme.

The motion was seconded, and it was suggested that witnesses named in the evidence by the trader representatives should be asked to attend the meeting to respond directly to the concerns raised.

The Board debated the proposed motion and Chief Operating Officer was asked to advise on whether any proposed adjournment to the debate was lawful in a situation where presenters had not finished giving their evidence.

The Chief Operating Officer confirmed the process for presenting a motion to the Board had been correctly followed and advised that an adjournment would be lawful if there is good reason for that decision to be made.

The Chief Operating Officer recommended to Board that the motion should be withdrawn to allow the representatives to present their evidence in full and then if having considered information there would be option then to re-submit the motion to adjourn the meeting.

A Board Member commented on the resolution from the previous meeting where it was agreed that a further report on the progress of the rollout of the scheme would be presented at a future meeting.

In addition, it was agreed that the report should include the responses of the traders to the scheme.

A Board member queried the reason arranging the meeting at short notice in view of this decision.

The Board further debated the proposed motion and differing views were expressed.

The Chair accepted the advice of the Chief Operating Officer and recommended that the representatives of the traders' groups be allowed to present the rest of their evidence to help inform what, if any, additional information is needed and then to consider re-submitting the motion for an adjournment at the end. This advice and recommendation was then accepted by the Board.

The representatives presented their evidence to the Board.
The Chair thanked the presenter for their presentation.

A Board member resubmitted the motion for the meeting to be adjourned and a new date set to present all the information for further decision. The motion was seconded, and the majority voted in support.

Esme Sackhouse queried the timeframe for agreeing a date for the meeting to reconsider the information. The Chair commented that the intention would be to have the meeting date agreed as soon as possible before the deadline for applications to be submitted of 31 May 2023.

The Cabinet Member commented that to allow time for the all the relevant information and witnesses to prepare their evidence that the deadline for applications to the scheme would be extended. In addition, the Cabinet Member agreed to provide copies of reports, minutes and email correspondence between the Council and the traders about the scheme to allow Board members to have a fully informed discussion about the issues raised during the meeting.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and closed the meeting.
Resolved:

1. The Board to receive a further report at a date to be agreed to consider all relevant documentary evidence relating the City West Grant Relaunch Scheme and discussions with representatives of the Westside Traders Group.
2. The Board to invite, named Council employees and the Cabinet Member to give evidence in response to the concerns highlighted by representatives of the Westside Traders Group about the City West Grant Relaunch Scheme.

City of Wolverhampton Council – Decisions taken by the Cabinet on Wednesday, 24 May 2023

Item 4	
Title	Public Spaces Protection Order 2023 - Dog Control
Status	Recommendations Approved
Record of Decision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the renewal of the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) – Dog Control be approved. 2. That the recommendations for a city-wide PSPO, subject to the mandatory six-week legal challenge period allowed, which includes the same proposals as the previous Order and additional measures be approved.
Options Considered	<p>Option 1: Extension of the PSPO in its current form. This is relatively straightforward and the existing control measures continue to have strong support within the community. However, this option would fail to embrace new opportunities to create changes that are deemed reasonable, proportionate and appear well supported by the wider community in Wolverhampton.</p> <p>Option 2: To extend and vary the PSPO as outlined above. The longer 12-week consultation period has demonstrated strong support for the additional controls.</p> <p>Option 3: To allow the PSPO to lapse without renewal in October 2023. This would be the least favourable option and would undermine the priorities in the Council’s Our City: Our Plan set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report.</p>
Reasons for Decision	For the reasons outlined in the report Option 2 is the preferred option.
Record of Conflicts of Interest	None
Dispensation Granted	Not applicable
Decision available for implementation (subject to call-in)	30 May 2023

City of Wolverhampton Council – Decisions taken by the Cabinet on Wednesday, 24 May 2023

Item 5	
Title	Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme
Status	Recommendations Approved
Record of Decision	That the decision made under Urgent Decisions for Cabinet be noted.
Options Considered	As detailed in the Urgent Decision Report
Reasons for Decision	As detailed in the Urgent Decision Report
Record of Conflicts of Interest	None
Dispensation Granted	Not applicable
Decision available for implementation (subject to call-in)	25 May 2023

City of Wolverhampton Council – Decisions taken by the Cabinet on Wednesday, 24 May 2023

Item 6	
Title	Exclusion of press and public
Status	Recommendation Approved
Record of Decision	That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
Options Considered	Not applicable
Reasons for Decision	Not applicable
Record of Conflicts of Interest	Not applicable
Dispensation Granted	Not applicable
Decision available for implementation (subject to call-in)	Not applicable

City of Wolverhampton Council – Decisions taken by the Cabinet on Wednesday, 24 May 2023

Item 7	
Title	Children's Social Care Reform Project
Status	Recommendations Approved
Record of Decision	That the recommendations as detailed in the exempt report be approved.
Options Considered	As detailed in the exempt report.
Reasons for Decision	As detailed in the exempt report.
Record of Conflicts of Interest	None
Dispensation Granted	Not applicable
Decision available for implementation (subject to call-in)	30 May 2023

For Attn of :

Chief operating officer.

Newly Elected Scrutiny Panel May 2023

Councillor Philip Bateman MBE (Chair)	Labour
Councillor Ellis Turrell (Vice-Chair)	Conservative
Martin Stevens (Clerk)	
Councillor Valerie Evans	Labour
Councillor Rita Potter	Labour
Councillor Wendy Thompson	Conservative
Councillor Simon Bennett	Conservative
Councillor Susan Roberts MBE	Labour
Councillor Barbara McGarrity QN	Labour
Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman	Labour
Councillor Qaiser Azeem	Labour
Councillor Jacqui Coogan	Labour
Councillor Anwen Muston	Labour
Councillor John C Reynolds	Labour

Following the emergency scrutiny meeting held 2nd May 2023, it was requested to be reconvened by Councillor Bateman as he and other councillors expressed a need to have all background information in order to understand fully the situation raised by WSTG to scrutiny. The request was upheld for it to reconvene to post elections allowing sufficient time to circulate relevant information to the newly elected scrutiny board by WSTG.

We hereby bring to your urgent attention all relevant information for you to review prior to the next scrutiny meeting of 13th June. We have presented it as a paper trail in an endeavor to make it more coherent and understandable on account of the volume of correspondence. We appreciate your patience and cooperation in reading it particularly as some of you are newly elected.

In order for the panel to scrutinize Council's decisions and failings during the course of the public realm work that took place during Phase 1 which was deemed to be November 2021 to February 2023, in actual fact was Nov 2021 – May 2023. Westside Traders Group (WSTG) feel that it has been a gross injustice to businesses of Victoria St, Salop St, Skinner St & School St. in that the council did not provide WSTG businesses hardship relief as promised over 14months ago. We have catalogued correspondence which clearly demonstrates that there is and was justifiable cause for financial hardship since WSTG first presentation to Council

March 2022. We are giving you a true representation of the reality of the situation encountered by WSTG.

Please find attached all correspondence between Council and WSTG which has already been sent to Scrutiny and has been included here for completeness and for you to have all necessary background information to scrutinize.

Background

To put into context, following the appalling way that WSTG was given a directed choice by the Council at a meeting held on 13th March, gave rise to a huge amount of anger and frustration of how businesses had been dealt with in a total demeaning, insulting and inconsiderate way. The consequence of which WSTG realized the economic way of how the truth was being portrayed by the Council and that WSTG businesses and their livelihoods were of very little consequence to the Council. Hence the reason why WSTG wrote into the scrutiny panel to challenge what has been portrayed and communicated to members of the council and cabinet.

In order to understand the chain of events, we have given a timeline presentation of facts to give perspective to the dire strait's businesses find themselves in. See Attachments:

1. **WSTG-Followup-Scrutiny2May23-Detailed-Log-1.pdf**
This covers the correspondence and communication during the period 13th March 2023 to date.
2. **paper trail for scrutiny-Concerns – 1June23.pdf**
This covers the period when WSTG was formed to April 2023
3. **We have forwarded all correspondence inclusive of attachments that has been sent to Cabinet and to Councillors. We apologise if there has been duplication as some of you have received have already received it.**

List of attachments sent :

Response to Council Options-3 4Apr23-2-5ENCS

Enc1-WestsideRetailerMeetingMinutes7Apr22

Enc2-WSTG Subgroup Council Meeting 9.May.22Council

Enc3- STATEMENT-OF-FACT-TO-COUNCIL

Enc4- Public Realm Support Packages for Businesses (Briefing Note) - 15 February 2023

Enc5- WSTG response to Enc4 – Briefing Note 15.Feb.23

Response to Council Options-16Apr-3WSTG-Resp

Enc6- Westside Business Survey 31st Oct 2022

Enc7- Westside traders actions issues update June 28 22

Enc8- Minutes 5th Dec 2022 WSTG-Response To Council

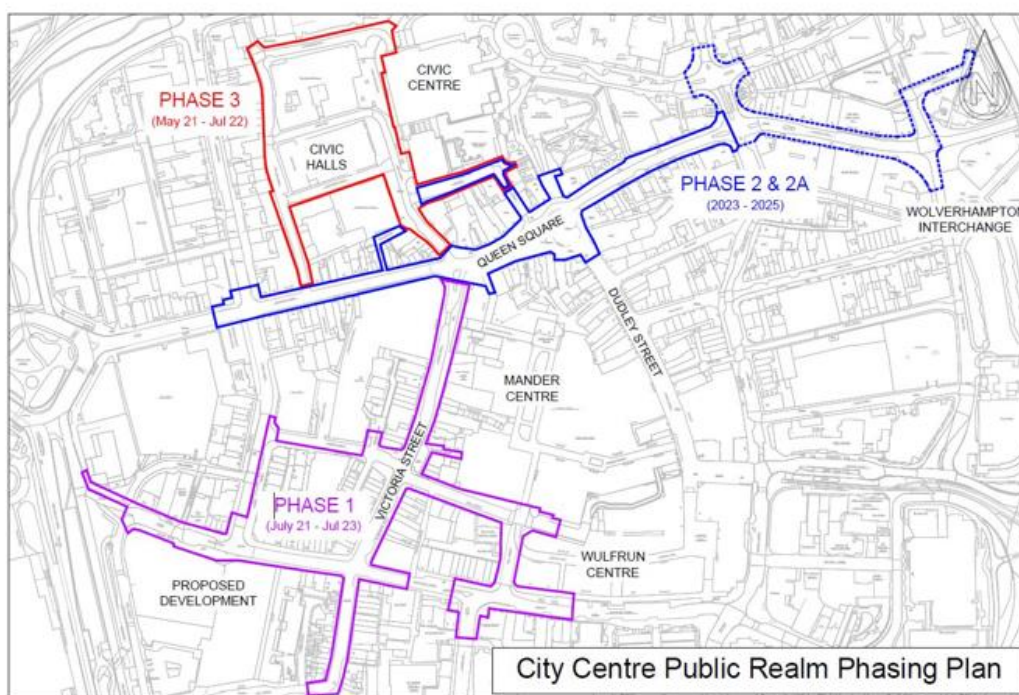
Enc9-BriefingNote27Apr23-Suppleet City Centre West Relaunch Grant
Exceptional Scrutiny Report

Enc10- WSTG-Scrutiny 2May23 - Board Response

Again, we thank you for taking the time to read and understand comprehensively what WSTG have endured.

Whilst the council cannot mitigate the mental stress that they put WSTG through, the aftermath of which businesses are still suffering from and may never recover from. The least the council can do is **mitigate demonstrable business losses**. Bearing in mind following the health check conducted by SCA Management, 11 businesses were found to have demonstrated loss between the 2 comparative windows. Had the realistic window been used, there would have been a greater percentage of businesses showing the real true losses. It was **clearly accepted by the council that financial impact had occurred**, hence an initial payment of £5k was paid to 5 of the 11 businesses as a **business support payment**. As stated by Isobel Woods in her letter dated 26th October, it was for businesses affected during Phase 1 of the works. The actual calculated losses of the health check were never paid to those 5 businesses. **Is this not a legal agreement as it was a provable demonstration of loss that has been validated through the financial health check process?**

Sensitivity: PROTECT



Phase 3 ,2 &2a

The council has shown and demonstrated a diminished responsibility over the consequential impact on businesses of Westside.

WSTG has demonstrated fairness and integrity in their approach to resolve what council created by poor consultation and lack of impact analysis both financially and mentally. All this duress is unnecessary, however, with respect to fiduciary WSTG would not have taken it to this level if the situation did not warrant it. Do the council not have a fiduciary responsibility to businesses as they contribute to the public purse?

It must also be clarified that WSTG are not setting any precedence for other current and future developments. Does the council not have a fiduciary to those customers to allow continued services with minimum disruption.

We take issue with comparison to Bilston Rd as a comparison. An A Road cannot be compared to city centre as business rates model is totally different as are the rents. Yes, disruption to flow of traffic, WSTG has had all of that, together with busses, taxis etc removed permanently. Bilston Rd still has a flow of traffic WSTG doesn't particularly Victoria St.

WSTG have shown transparency, if there had been transparency from council to the Scrutiny panel and its own members, then perhaps it wouldn't have been such a shock to members that WSTG have raised all these issues.

There has to be accountability and measures to put right what has been caused to WSTG businesses. This does not mean a lesson learnt as businesses are still carrying forward their losses, that won't ever be recovered from.

Hence the 5k relaunch should still be offered together with a FINANCIAL HARDSHIP RELIEF based on the realistic window that was suggested Apr21-Dec21 compared to Jan22-Sep22 based on sales turnover and NOT Jan21-Sep21 compared to Oct21-Jun22, where general retail was not open until April and Hospitality much later. The calculated average loss of the 2nd period should then be reflected forward to the date of completed works, which was May 2023 when it should have been February 2023. This is the realistic window. This is particularly relevant for businesses who have already demonstrated losses and had to bear the brunt for whole duration of the roadworks.

The relaunch grant is offered to those who have suffered and includes other businesses new to the area who have not had to endure the hardship but chose to invest in the area knowingly of the works being done whereas WSTG had already been enduring works since November 2021. Where is the fairness? The Re-launch grant also has been expanded to other areas when the issues WSTG raised were to do with Phase 1. Please note we do not begrudge new businesses but are raising an important point of fairness.

We would like a fair and honest resolve on this matter.

This has gone on long enough. What's clear is that there is little understanding or comprehension of businesses and their operations, hence why they had to employ a 3rd person like SCA to understand impact. WSTG don't want to waste any more time in pleading and **demonstrating the true reality of events and losses incurred** by businesses. This is costing and having further impact on not only our livelihoods but on our mental health as business traders.

The financial hardship request is to assist those long-term businesses that have suffered extensively from works throughout the whole period from start to finish. Particularly lower Victoria St/ Salop St/Skinner St, who have suffered the brunt for the duration of the works.

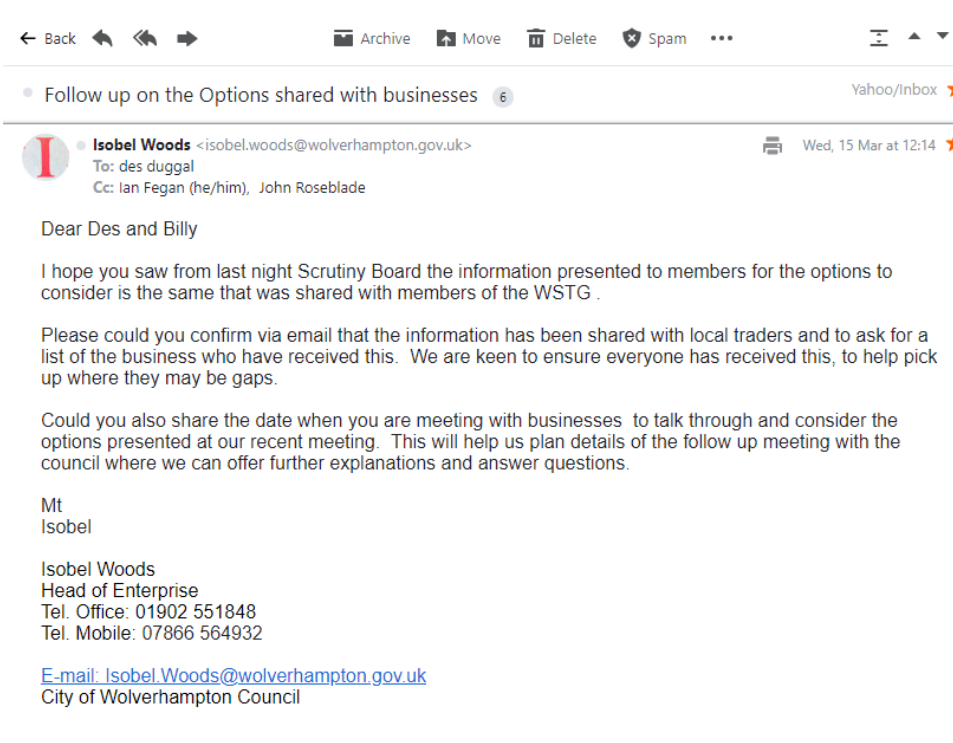
Please note some long-standing businesses have already gone.

Kind Regards

WSTG



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WSTG-Followup-Scrutiny2May23-Detailed-Log

<p>13th March Meeting held Council Offices</p>	<p>First insight of presentation of options where WSTG were informed of 2 options on the table. Either RSM or Relaunch. WSTG saw this as a <u>directed choice</u>, where so much time and money had been wasted (almost 18 months at present) and the delays culminating to ignoring hardship relief and presenting an option which was seen as “take it or leave it”. No figure was disclosed to WSTG as amount for Relaunch as Council knew this would have been categorically rejected.</p> <p>WSTG stated that we would ask businesses and feedback to Council concerns etc. The council agreed that they would host a meeting to present options to Westside businesses and answer any questions. This was supposedly to be a must as businesses are independent and WSTG could not make a decision for independent businesses.</p> <p>Councillor Simkins suggested attendance of WSTG/businesses to Scrutiny meeting or view online for 14th March.</p>
<p>14th March Scrutiny Panel held meeting to approve Relaunch amount.</p>	<p>This was viewed and attended, but not received well by WSTG.</p>
<p>15th March</p>	<p>Response from Isobel:</p>  <p>Dear Des and Billy</p> <p>I hope you saw from last night Scrutiny Board the information presented to members for the options to consider is the same that was shared with members of the WSTG .</p> <p>Please could you confirm via email that the information has been shared with local traders and to ask for a list of the business who have received this. We are keen to ensure everyone has received this, to help pick up where they may be gaps.</p> <p>Could you also share the date when you are meeting with businesses to talk through and consider the options presented at our recent meeting. This will help us plan details of the follow up meeting with the council where we can offer further explanations and answer questions.</p> <p>Mt Isobel</p> <p>Isobel Woods Head of Enterprise Tel. Office: 01902 551848 Tel. Mobile: 07866 564932</p> <p>E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk City of Wolverhampton Council</p> <p>The City of Wolverhampton Council works flexibly to meet the needs of the services we provide, so you could be receiving this email at any time. However, we do not expect you to read and respond to this email outside of your own working arrangements.</p>

<p>WSTG Acknowledged Council with response 15th March</p>	<p>Council suggested a meeting to be held following our request on 13th March</p>  <p>Dear Isobel,</p> <p>We have circulated information as agreed. Please find attached the updated spreadsheet with comments against some of the businesses.</p> <p>A lot of the traders saw the scrutiny meeting last night and were under the impression that there were issues with lack of transparency from sub-group to the traders. This was clearly demonstrated by councillors at the meeting.</p> <p>Traders subgroup was formed by Des and every opportunity was given to all traders to have a seat at the sub group table to work as a team player and participate and represent traders in working with the council to resolve the issues traders faced as a result of the roadworks. The remit of the subgroup was to keep channels of communication open in a conducive professional manner.</p> <p>We want to be clear that all information has always been circulated to all businesses via the traders whatsapp group. The councillors have clearly stated there were 2 businesses or possibly 5. Sub-group members were volunteered/selected to represent a wide variety of businesses across the sectors of hospitality, retail, services and charity and someone from each side of the street surrounding Victoria St. i.e School St, Salop St, Skinner St. Upper & Lower Victoria St.</p> <p>We therefore suggest that one meeting be held at the Council offices to accommodate all traders to hear their feedback and decision on which option to take. This will fast track the decision making process and avoid any discrepancies that individuals and Council think that may arise.</p> <p>Please could you arrange the meeting as you kindly offered for Monday evening.</p> <p>Kind Regards</p> <p>Again, we requested a date for the meeting with all traders of Westside. Again, the council ignored the request.</p> <p>This request again repeated that we should hold a meeting on 20th March at council offices.</p>
<p>16th March</p>	<p>Response from Isobel Woods agreeing to host meeting with all businesses. Date moved from 20th March as this was not acknowledged.</p>

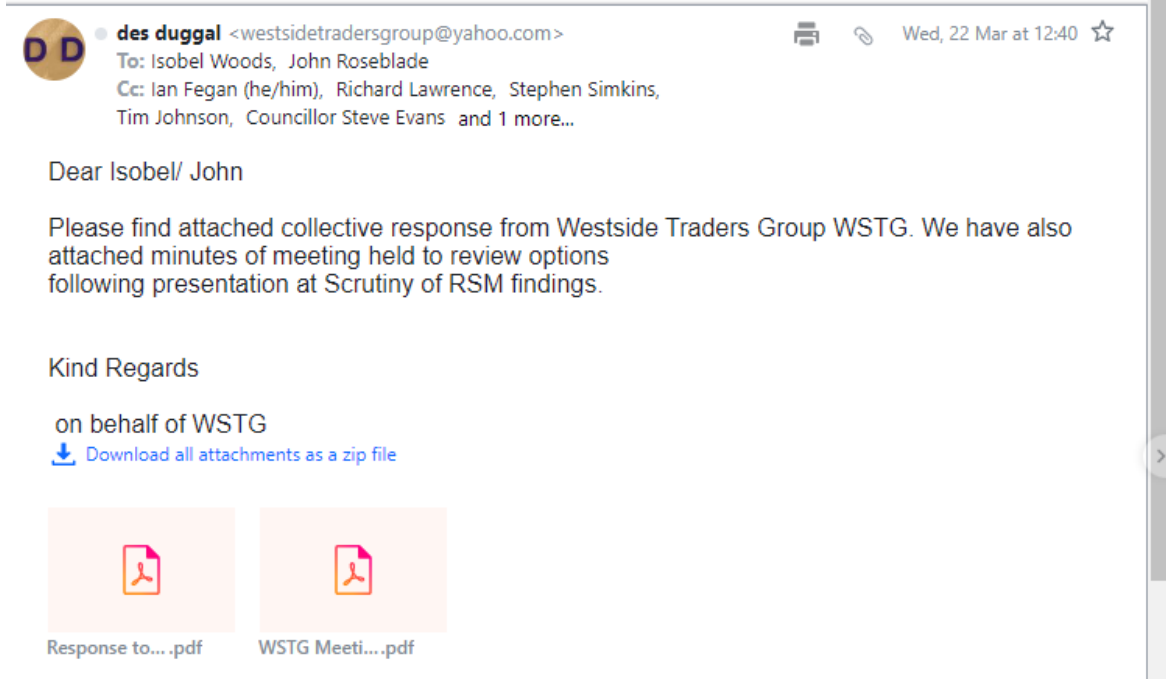
	<div></div> <p>Isobel Woods <isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk> Thu, 16 Mar at 11:40 ★ To: des duggal Cc: Ian Fegan (he/him), Councillor Stephen Simkins, Councillor Steve Evans, John Roseblade</p> <p>Dear Des and Billy</p> <p>I would like to share that from an officers perspective and the cabinet members, Councillor Evans and Councillor Simkins we know the Traders group have been working closely with the council throughout this time.</p> <p>The views expressed at Scrutiny came from opposition councillors and don't represent those of the council. We are aware information is coming from one business in the area.</p> <p>Officers have provided regular updates to members and a detailed report on the joint working and business support was presented at the recent Economy and Growth Scrutiny panel 15 February. This is a public meeting and the report was received by councillors from both parties.</p> <p>Today, officers are out on Victoria Street delivering the presentation that will also be sent via email, to ensure every business has received this information. We have asked for responses to be received by Wednesday 22 March, which will be captured as part of the consideration for the council.</p> <p>Across the council officers are working to prepare the required approvals for the council, that will inform this process. This work will involve officers time next week, they must ensure they satisfy the councils governance arrangements. The council is happy to host a meeting with all the businesses and I will come back with details and a date.</p> <p>Mt Isobel</p> <p>Isobel Woods Head of Enterprise Tel. Office: 01902 551848 Tel. Mobile: 07866 564932</p> <p>E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk City of Wolverhampton Council</p>
<p>16th March</p>	<p>Councillor Simkins acknowledged WSTG as being transparent with all traders.</p> <div></div> <p>Councillor Stephen Simkins <stephen.simkins@wolverhampton.gov.uk> Thu, 16 Mar at 13:58 ★ To: Isobel Woods, des duggal Cc: Ian Fegan (he/him), Councillor Steve Evans, John Roseblade</p> <p>Dear Des / Billy, I know that the information has been passed on. I know that this group is transparent, in fact I did say so at the meeting.</p> <p>However, we have now got the right to make a case to the finances to give the support of the reopening grant.</p> <p>Steve</p> <p>Sent from Outlook for iOS</p>
<p>20th March response from WSTG</p>	<p>WSTG expressed concerns and stated that a formal response will be forwarded to council and will need consideration.</p>





	<p> des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com> Mon, 20 Mar at 15:56 ★ To: Isobel Woods, Councillor Stephen Simkins Cc: Ian Fegan (he/him), Councillor Steve Evans, John Roseblade, Tim Johnson, Richard Lawrence</p> <p>Dear Stephen,</p> <p>Thank you for your response and bringing to our attention that you have the "right to make the case to finances to give the support of the reopening grant".</p> <p>The right for the case is just one aspect. The criteria for making the case to finances is where a clear understanding has to be transparent to businesses as well as how the "reopening grant" will be applied for by them and administered. Following the scrutiny link that was shared to all traders, there have been a number of concerns/points which we will follow-up in a formal response, which will need consideration.</p> <p>We have our traders meeting and will forward outcome of the vote for option 1 or 2. This will enable Council & WSTG to have a clear understanding of the direction in how and what council will need to consider when making case for finances.</p> <p>Also a gentle reminder for Council to hold a meeting with all traders at a mutual agreeable time at their council offices as agreed at the meeting 13th March by Isobel and Cllr Simkins.</p> <p>Kind regards</p> <p>Des & Billy on behalf of WSTG</p> <p>> Show original message</p>
<p>17th March</p>	<p>Minutes from 13th March Meeting sent which was not a true reflection of meeting. Clear omissions of what WSTG stated. It does not express that we stated that feedback will need to be considered. The council had agreed to speak to WSTG with options. Minutes received 17th March from council.</p> <p> Sati Raju <sati.raju@wolverhampton.gov.uk> Fri, 17 Mar at 16:05 ☆ To: westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com</p> <p>Sensitivity: PROTECT</p> <p>Hello Des and Billy,</p> <p>Please find attached the actions for your review following the Westside Traders subgroup Monday 13 March 2023.</p> <p>Please let Ian and Isobel know if you have any queries.</p> <p>Kindest Regards</p> <p>Sati Raju Executive Officer Executive Support Team City of Wolverhampton Council</p> <p>Tel. Office: 01902 556153</p> <p>ExecutiveSupportCity@wolverhampton.gov.uk ExecSupportCentralResources@wolverhampton.gov.uk</p>








See minutes below.



Westside Sub-Group 13 March 2023

Item	Action	Owner
Works update		
Issues with deliveries	Look at parking for lorries for deliveries Health & safety issues – double parking Public use bays for parking for free parking, there's a broken-down car and a warden told a member of the public they could park in the bays.	MP
	Parking permits required What furniture can Owen keep outside his premises – needs licensing to pick this up asap please P3's	CH
Events		
10 June Pride	Council to share Pride 23 promotional material with traders	KS
28 August Krazy Races	Find out what restrictions are on outdoor space from Krazy Races/how much space will business have to put furniture out etc.	IF
Christmas market events	Ian Fegan to pick up with Jo Huntbatch / events team re market providers to see what we can do with budget and also involve perhaps some live entertainment	IF
Victoria Street party for Kings Coronation	Look at potentially providing bunting across streets, street decorations and use small grants fund	IF
Options appraisal		
	Cllr Simkins requested everyone digest the options and comeback with feedback on way forward	Traders
Next steps		
	Report is published at 5pm for Scrutiny 14 March	
	How the slides/options documentation will be shared with all 47 traders: - Send email to Billy/Des who will hand deliver if they need to those without email address - Traders to check their junk folders	IW/Traders IW Traders
	Traders to meet Friday 17 March to discuss options and feedback	Traders
	Timeline setting out way forward to be developed Discussions with legal/finance and Cabinet on allocation of funding pot	IW IW
	Review and improvement plan to be produced at end once scheme has been delivered	JR/IW

<p>22nd March</p>	 <p>des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com> To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade Cc: Ian Fegan (he/him), Richard Lawrence, Stephen Simkins, Tim Johnson, Councillor Steve Evans and 1 more...</p> <p>Dear Isobel/ John</p> <p>Please find attached collective response from Westside Traders Group WSTG. We have also attached minutes of meeting held to review options following presentation at Scrutiny of RSM findings.</p> <p>Kind Regards</p> <p>on behalf of WSTG Download all attachments as a zip file</p> <p>Response to... .pdf WSTG Meeti... .pdf</p> <p>2 attachments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Response to Council Options-2 - WSTG Meeting 200323
<p>22nd March</p>	<p>Received response from Tim Johnson -Documents received by all. Expected response from John Roseblade & Isobel Woods, however, no response was received to WSTG feedback.</p>

	<p> Tim Johnson <tim.johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk>  Wed, 22 Mar at 17:22 </p> <p>To: des duggal, Isobel Woods, John Roseblade Cc: Ian Fegan (he/him), Richard Lawrence, Councillor Stephen Simkins, Tim Johnson, Councillor Steve Evans and 1 more...</p> <p>Sensitivity: RESTRICTED</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>We are able to open these documents. So John and Isobel will respond.</p> <p>Kind regards</p> <p>Luce</p> <p>Lucy Spedding Executive Officer – Chief Executive Theme Executive Support Team City of Wolverhampton Council</p> <p>07901 643048 01902 554500 lucy.spedding@wolverhampton.gov.uk</p>
<p>23rd March</p>	<p>WSTG Feedback from traders meeting held Monday 20th where we requested council to attend and present options. No responses from council to date. Hence why it was raised at the Scrutiny 2nd May 2023.</p> <p>Forwarded message</p> <p>From: Tunwalls <tunwallsenglishkitchen@gmail.com> Date: Thu, 23 Mar 2023 at 16:00 Subject: Feedback Report To: <Business.Development@wolverhampton.gov.uk>, <john.roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk></p> <p>Dear John and team,</p> <p>The attached report is a compilation of feedback, comments and queries that traders have raised since the meeting held on Monday 20th.</p> <p>Hopefully this will assist you at the meeting when you speak to all the traders as I'm sure some of these questions will be asked again.</p> <p>If you have any queries or comments, please get in touch.</p> <p>Thanks again,</p> <p>Esme</p> <p> WSTG - FEE... .pdf 147 KB</p> <p>Attachment: WSTG-Feedback</p>

<p>24th March</p>	<p> ● John Roseblade <john.roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk>  Fri, 24 Mar at 18:26 ☆</p> <p>To: des duggal, Isobel Woods Cc: Ian Fegan (he/him), Richard Lawrence, Councillor Stephen Simkins, Tim Johnson, Councillor Steve Evans and 1 more...</p> <p>Hi Des</p> <p>Thank you for the confirmation below and the unanimous decision to pursue option 2. Over the last few days we have been working up the proposals on that basis which we will put forward for approval. This will be done over the early days of next week and so I will be in touch again once I have this confirmation. I will address the further questions you have raised at that time.</p> <p>Rest assured that we will be working as quickly as possible to move this forward.</p> <p>I hope you have a good weekend.</p> <p>Regards</p> <p>John</p> <p>John Roseblade Director of Resident Services Tel. Office: 01902 555755 Tel. Mobile: 07825 530368</p> <p>E-mail: John.Roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk City of Wolverhampton Council</p>
<p>24th March</p>	<p> ● des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>  Fri, 24 Mar at 18:46 ☆</p> <p>To: John Roseblade</p> <p>Hi John Thank you for the update looking forward to a timely response. You enjoy your weekend too . Kind Regards Des</p>
<p>29th March</p>	<p> ● Isobel Woods <isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk>   Wed, 29 Mar at 08:23 ☆</p> <p>To: des duggal Cc: Ian Fegan (he/him), John Roseblade, Councillor Stephen Simkins</p> <p>Hi Des and Billy</p> <p>Along with the information on the options for business support that have been shared with businesses on 16 March, please find attached the slides that from our meeting on 13 March, on the programme of works and the events programme.</p> <p>Mt Isobel</p> <p>Isobel Woods Head of Enterprise Tel. Office: 01902 551848 Tel. Mobile: 07866 564932</p> <p>E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk City of Wolverhampton Council</p> <p>Isobel attached: 13th March 2023 Victoria St Traders Comms and works.pptx</p>

<p>3rd April</p>	<p>WSTG Requested a copy of the RSM Report</p> <hr/> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin-left: 10px;"> <p>des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com> To: John Roseblade</p> </div> </div> <div style="text-align: right;"> <p>Mon, 3 Apr at 16:15 ☆</p> </div> </div> <p>Hi again John , Please can we have a copy of the RSM Report of findings. Kind Regards Des</p> <p>Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone</p> <p>Show original message</p>																																				
<p>4th April</p>	<p>WSTG came across following document:</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 20px 0;"> <p>This report is PUBLIC [NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 20px;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>Special Urgent Decision</p> </div> </div> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%;">Report title</td> <td colspan="2">Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Decision designation</td> <td colspan="2">AMBER</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</td> <td colspan="2">Councillor Steve Simkins Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Key decision</td> <td colspan="2">Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>In forward plan</td> <td colspan="2">No</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wards affected</td> <td colspan="2">St Peters</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accountable Director</td> <td colspan="2">Richard Lawrence Director of Regeneration</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Originating service</td> <td colspan="2">Enterprise</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accountable employee</td> <td>Isobel Woods Tel Email</td> <td>Head of Enterprise 01902 551848 Isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Report to be/has been considered by</td> <td>Directorate Leadership Team</td> <td>27 March 2023</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Strategic Executive Board</td> <td>22 March 2023</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Scrutiny Board</td> <td>14 March 2023</td> </tr> </table> <p>Recommendations for decision:</p> <p>In accordance with the provision of article 12.9 in Part 2 of the Council's constitution, the Leader (or in his absence Deputy Leader) in consultation with the Chair of Scrutiny Board, Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board and Chief Executive authorises the steps listed below</p> <p>These matters are of immediate urgency making the prompt exercise of the powers of the Cabinet desirable and cannot await the next meeting of the Cabinet (26 April 2023).</p> <p>These decisions will be reported to the next meeting of the Cabinet.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the use of the urgent action powers outlined in Part 12.9 of the Council's constitution detailed in paragraphs 2,1 regarding the use of Urgent Decision. 2. Approve the City West Relaunch grant scheme, to support businesses in the Victoria Street area to relaunch their business and payments to eligible businesses as per the criteria set out in appendix 1. 3. Approve the use of the Our City, Our Plan reserve up to £350,000 to support the City West Relaunch grant and the establishment of supplementary budgets. 	Report title	Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme		Decision designation	AMBER		Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Steve Simkins Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy		Key decision	Yes		In forward plan	No		Wards affected	St Peters		Accountable Director	Richard Lawrence Director of Regeneration		Originating service	Enterprise		Accountable employee	Isobel Woods Tel Email	Head of Enterprise 01902 551848 Isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk	Report to be/has been considered by	Directorate Leadership Team	27 March 2023		Strategic Executive Board	22 March 2023		Scrutiny Board	14 March 2023
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	Scrutiny Board	14 March 2023																																			

	<p style="text-align: center;">This report is PUBLIC [NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy and Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital City in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Finance to allocate any balances from the £350,000 to provide additional further necessary business support once all payments have been made to eligible businesses. 5. Note that given the 'go-live' date for this scheme is within the designated pre-election period of heightened political sensitivity where public communications activity is restricted, ahead of the all-out elections in the city on May 4 2023, it is proposed that information regarding the scheme is limited specifically to the businesses affected and that any such communication is marked as private and confidential with further communication provided after the end of the pre-election period. 6. Note that businesses may be able to receive Business Rate relief through established processes such as hardship relief and have been encouraged to contact the Business Rates team if they find themselves in financial difficulty.
<p>6th April</p>	<div style="display: flex;"> <div style="width: 25%; border-right: 1px solid #ccc; padding-right: 10px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings, agendas and minutes Calendar Meetings Decisions Forthcoming Decisions Forward Plans Document Library Search documents Subscribe to updates Democracy Your Councillors Consultations Council's Constitution Council's election results ePetitions Outside bodies Your MPs What's new </div> <div style="width: 75%; padding-left: 10px;"> <h2 style="margin: 0;">Issue details</h2> <p style="margin: 0;">Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme</p> <p style="margin: 0;"> Issue Details Issue History Related Decisions </p> <p style="margin: 0;">To agree the City West Relaunch grant scheme and provide business support aimed at eligible businesses who may have been adversely impacted by the city west public realm work in Victoria Street, Salop Street School Street and North Street.</p> <p style="margin: 0;">The payment offers small businesses who have been open during the works and intend to remain in the city, a one-off amount to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces.</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Decision type: Non-key</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Decision status: Recommendations Approved</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Notice of proposed decision first published: 03/04/2023</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Decision due: 31 Mar 2023 by Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Lead member: Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Lead director: John Roseblade, Director of Resident Services</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Contact: Isobel Woods, Head of Enterprise Email: isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk.</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 03/04/2023 - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme <p style="margin: 0;">Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme PDF 128 KB </div> </div>
	<p>WSTG came across this briefing note Public Realm - Support Package to Businesses dated 15th February. This was the <u>first time WSTG saw this and can categorically state that it was not received very well at all.</u></p>

INTERNAL - PROTECT

Briefing Note

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Title: Public Realm Support Packages for Businesses Date: 15 February 2023

Prepared by: Isobel Woods, Head of Enterprise

Intended Audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

1. Purpose or recommendation

- 1.1 To update City Economy Scrutiny Panel on the business engagement and support undertaken before and during the city centre public realm improvement works along Victoria Street and surrounding roads.
- 1.2 To outline the approach for business support in future phases of the city centre public realm improvements works.

2. Background

- 2.1 The regeneration of the West side of the city centre, aimed at arresting the decline in retail footfall and transforming the environment to bring more homes, jobs, events and shops, has been a significant priority since the publication of the City Centre Area Action Plan in 2016 and has been referenced in subsequent Investment documents as a key opportunity site.
- 2.2 The Council has proactively sought to assemble a strategic regeneration opportunity through land acquisition and subsequent enabling works such as demolition to present a 'development-ready' opportunity. City Centre West will represent a comprehensive mixed-use masterplan approach to bring the site forward in context with wider transformation and plans for the city centre.
- 2.3 City Centre West is identified as a priority project forming part of a continued public sector partnership approach with the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities and Homes England with a view to accelerating delivery, enhancing the quality of the project and maximizing outcomes for Wolverhampton.
- 2.4 The public realm works are an essential part of the overall masterplan and have been planned over a number of years. Following completion of concept plans for the work, and Cabinet endorsement to consult on the project in September 2018, engagement with the public, businesses and stakeholders began in October 2018. During this time extensive consultation was undertaken with a variety of specific interest groups including local businesses, taxis, disabled groups, Wolverhampton BID and cycle forum.


- 2.5 By the end of 2018 all businesses in the phase 1 (Victoria Street) and phase 2 (Queen Square / Lichfield Street) areas that were directly affected by the proposals were contacted on an individual basis.
- 2.6 In March 2020 work on the project paused as the country went into lockdown during the pandemic. Whilst detailed design work and business case development was undertaken during the early months of the year, contact with businesses was limited as most premises were shut down and only a limited amount of contact via email was possible.
- 2.7 As a response to the pandemic and to help facilitate social distancing and increase walking and cycling as a means to travel safely, the Council was mandated to create wider open spaces for safe walking and cycling routes. This led to the early intervention to close Victoria Street to traffic other than time restricted servicing and as part of the Government Reopening the High Street initiative, pavement build outs were created in Victoria Street to assist the hospitality sector to reopen safely with extra areas for outdoor dining. In Lichfield Street, Queen Square and Darlington Street pavements were widened, bus stops were built out, traffic movement restricted to one way westbound and a new segregated cycleway was created as part of these Emergency Active Travel Fund measures.
- 2.8 In July 2021 preliminary enabling works began on site. Occupiers of affected areas were informed by letter drop of the works and traffic management arrangements around the area. Media coverage through the Express and Star and Council social media channels also allowed for a wider audience to be made aware of the works. Ongoing communication with key stakeholders continued through the usual channels including BID meetings and social media.
- 2.9 In November 2021, prior to the start on site of the main contract works, all occupiers in the area were visited and contact / information cards distributed to ensure that occupiers had 7 day per week contact details for the Customer Relationship Manager (or her team). The project website was fully up and running and social media links went live.
- 2.10 On 7 April 2022 officers were invited by the businesses on Victoria Street to attend a business meeting. The meeting had over 50 local traders, ward councillors, Cabinet Member for City Economy and the local MP. At this meeting the business agreed a subgroup with a chair that would represent the businesses in the area and provide a conduit to keep the wider network informed. This subgroup would meet regularly with representatives from the council and agreed to take on the responsibility to feedback information and actions, to and from the meeting.
- 2.11 On 9 May the Cabinet Member for City Economy, Assistant Director for City Transport and Environment, council officers leading the public realm improvements works project, Head of Enterprise and the Director of Wolverhampton City centre BID, met with 10 businesses of the subgroup. At this meeting information on the programme of works and forthcoming events was shared. Businesses fed back the impacts of the work on their premises and access issues that were relayed to the main contractor Eurovia.
- 2.12 The meeting on 9 May also invited businesses to shape the approach for business support. The council outlined that this work needed to be undertaken by an independent party. Traders agreed that it was important the offer included a package of support; advice and guidance on current business needs, support to help the businesses prepare for when the

	<p>works completed, and a financial review. Details of the tender specification were shared with the traders, who provided oversight and input.</p> <p>2.13 At the same meeting the council also shared the point that it was not legally required to provide compensation but that it was committed to supporting those businesses where there was clear evidence of impact and financial loss. The council highlighted that it had to ensure it uses taxpayers money legally, appropriately and in their best interests.</p> <p>2.14 The next meeting took place on 6 June. At this meeting with the traders, officers provided an update on the progress with the tender, information on the programme of works and the city centre events programme, including the forthcoming Commonwealth Games and Krazy Races. Officers also stated the council's commitment to invest £20,000 in a future events programme for Victoria Street upon completion of the works. Officers responded to requests from the traders to promote footfall to this area of the city. A social media campaign and signs around the city, saying Victoria Street 'businesses are open' were actioned and have carried on throughout the time of the works. Later in June, the council procured a local business, SCA Consultancy, to undertake the business support.</p> <p>2.15 On 23 June a representative from SCA met with the subgroup, supported by Head of Enterprise, to talk through the approach to engage with businesses and to agree the reporting timeline period for the financial information. The financial information would be captured in a cashflow statement and would identify if a business had evidence of a financial loss arising from the public realm improvement works.</p> <p>2.16 The decision to use a cashflow statement for the financial evidence followed a discussion with the traders. It had been identified that business owners in the area had varying accounts and ways of recording their financial position. To bring a fair and consistent approach, and enable independent businesses to participate, it was agreed with the traders that the cashflow statement was the best approach. Both the Council and traders were keen for SCA to begin their work swiftly and so it was agreed that the financial assessment period would be from January 2021 – September 2021, the 9 months before the works commenced, and October 2022 – June 2022, the 9 months from the start of the works up to that point in time</p> <p>2.17 The meeting on 28 June with the council and traders was cancelled at the trader's request, because a meeting with the business consultant was planned to take place later that week.</p> <p>2.18 On 30 June SCA consultancy attended a business meeting with local traders from Victoria Street and areas where the works were taking place. Around 45 businesses attended, they received information on the engagement with SCA, the service they would offer and the financial evidence for the time periods, set by the traders sub-group.</p> <p>2.19 During July SCA, made contact with local traders in the area. From the 74 independent businesses who had been identified, 52 came forward to meet with SCA.</p> <p>2.20 On 26 July, the council and traders met. The meeting was attended by SCA who fed back the number of responses and shared challenges contacting some traders, having emailed, phoned and walked around the area. The traders were asked when they wanted to bring to a close the business engagement activity. They made it clear this was to be Friday 29 July and confirmed they would inform all the businesses of this deadline.</p>
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- 2.21 On 1st August SCA concluded engagement with the businesses in the area where the public realm works were underway.
- 2.22 The meeting on 22 August was cancelled at the trader's request
- 2.23 At the meeting on 26 September SCA presented their findings to the group. From the 74 independent businesses within the identified area, 52 engaged with the consultants, of these 11 showed financial evidence of a drop in turnover.
- 2.24 On 12 October individual letters were hand-delivered to every business who had participated in the business review with details of the financial information for the first and second period, showing the percentage difference.
- 2.25 On the 17 October, after the findings of the initial business review work had been shared, the traders presented concerns to the council regarding the financial review process methodology. Comments were received that businesses had not been able to provide all the financial information which had been requested by SCA
- 2.26 On 28 October the council hand delivered letters to the 52 businesses who had taken part, to invite any missing information for the work which had been undertaken by SCA, to come forward. It was made clear that this information was for the cashflow statement.
- 2.21 On 7 November 2022, the council met with the traders. The traders presented a new approach for the financial review they wanted the council to undertake. They requested that the financial review should be re-done with different financial information and over a revised period, to include the three months since the original financial review with SCA had concluded in July. At no point was December 2022 or the forthcoming Christmas trading period mentioned. Some concerns were raised about the level of support received and this matter is being examined.
- 2.22 Although traders were originally involved in agreeing the terms of the initial review, the council acknowledged the feedback and subsequently commissioned, at pace, a specialist firm of accountants, RSM to review the process and methodology. They were fast-tracked through procurement and started their work before Christmas. They have experience of working on previous similar schemes, both here in the city and West Midlands. This work is being progressed and the council is expecting a report on their findings shortly.
- 2.23 On 16 December the council made disruption payments to 5 of the 11 businesses who had evidenced a loss of turnover. The remaining six businesses did not meet eligibility requirements either because they provided erroneous information when validated or ceased trading.
- 3. Current Position**
- 3.1 The council is currently awaiting the outcome of the review from RSM which is due early February.
- 3.2 With regards to political oversight, updates on the public realm works have been shared at Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel in October 2022, Residents, Housing and

	<p>Communities Scrutiny Panel on 17 November, at Scrutiny Board on 27 January 2023, and also at Full Council in January 2023.</p> <p>3.3 A report on the outcome of the consultation on the Phase 2 (Lichfield Street / Queen Square) of the city improvement programmes is due at Cabinet on 22 February 2023. The report recognises the need to have early engagement with businesses and regular channels of communication between all parties – council businesses and the contractor will be established. This will inform businesses about the programme of works and help to identify business support that may be needed.</p> <p>3.4 The RSM review work will also provide a robust methodology that can be applied to future schemes, necessary to the transformation of the city centre, which may impact upon local businesses.</p> <p>4. Going Forward</p> <p>4.1 Current business support is undergoing significant transformation as EU funded programmes come to a close. The council is working with key partners and stakeholders including the WMCA to establish a new local employer support programme, which will meet the needs of the businesses in the city.</p> <p>4.2 The council will review the report recommendations made by the financial experts currently reviewing the methodology and approach and this will inform future policy.</p> <p>Following the reading of the briefing note and what WSTG witnessed at the scrutiny panel we had no choice to basically present our side of what WSTG has encountered without it being watered down and misconstrued and not give a true representation of the facts.</p>
6 th April	WSTG Formal address to raise major concerns.

WSTG Response to Relaunch Grant 11 Yahoo/Sent ☆

 **des duggal** <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com> 🖨️ 🔗 Thu, 6 Apr at 23:41 ☆

To: Tim Johnson, Labour Leaders Office, Richard Lawrence, Stephen Simkins, Ian Fegan (he/him) and 3 more...

Cc: martin.stevens@wolverhampton.gov.uk, paul.sweet@wolverhampton.gov.uk, Ellis.Turrell@wolverhampton.gov.uk, Simon.Bennett@wolverhampton.gov.uk, Lynn Moran, Cherry Shine, jane.stevenson.mp@parliament.uk, mcfaddenp@parliament.uk, wendy.thompson@wolverhampton.gov.uk, Stuart Anderson, Sohail.khan@wolverhampton.gov.uk, cllrsweetman@wolverhampton.gov.uk [Hide](#)

To Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

CC: Tim Johnson
Ian Brookfield
Richard Lawrence
Stephen Simkins
Ian Fegan
Steve Evans
Lynn Moran

MP Stuart Anderson
MP Pat Mcfadden
MP Jane Stevenson

Wendy Thompson
Simon Bennett

Cherry Shine - BID

Scrutiny Panel:

Contact: Martin Stevens
Chair: Paul Sweet
Vice Chair: Ellis Turrell







Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel

Contact: Martin Stevens
Chair: Jacqueline Sweetman
Vice Chair: Sohail Khan

URGENT ATTENTION

Re: City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme

[Download all attachments as a zip file](#)

 Response to... .pdf 261.8kB	 Enc1- Westsi... .pdf 243.2kB	 Enc2- Wests... .pdf 141.1kB	 Enc3- STATE... .pdf 1010.9kB	 Enc4- Public... .pdf 321.7kB
 Enc5- WSTG... .pdf 120.4kB				

We have included attachments:-

Response to Council Options-3 4Apr23-2-5ENCs

Enc1-WestsideRetailerMeetingMinutes7Apr22

Enc2-WSTG Subgroup Council Meeting 9.May.22Council

Enc3- STATEMENT-OF-FACT-TO-COUNCIL

Enc4- Public Realm Support Packages for Businesses (Briefing Note) - 15 February 2023

Enc5- WSTG response to Enc 4 – Briefing Note 15.Feb.23

I have included Enc5 here as WSTG feel information is not presented in the interest of WSTG.

ENC 5: WSTG – In response to Enc4 : Public Realm Support Packages for Businesses Date: 15 February 2023 Briefing Note

From WSTG: To All in reference to Enc 4 - Briefing Note: Please find a detail response from Westside which reflects discrepancies in what is being reported here.

2.5 - There was no contact. This can be confirmed by businesses.

2.6 - Using Covid as a reason for lack of communication from the supposed contact in 2018 to when works commenced in 2021 is not a valid excuse

2.8 – Businesses had notice of the Bell Street/traffic management from the express and star article

<https://www.expressandstar.com/news/local-hubs/wolverhampton/2021/07/07/work-on-wolverhampton-city-centre-transformation-to-start-next-week/> and no letters/leaflets were received by businesses

2.9 – Some businesses were visited by Megan (and a lady Rose) but was only given one letter and no contact numbers or anything like that. Also was given no specific detail as to what was going on, just that they were starting the work.

2.12 - The meeting on 9/5 was only arranged because of the Statement of Fact that was sent to the council in May. It states that work was to be undertaken by an independent party - SCA were not independent of the council. The tender specifications were not shared and still have not been shared. Actions PDF of this meeting was also not received.

2.15 - Reporting timeline period not agreed (we were getting clarification of this at the next council meeting as the meeting was Des/Owen/Sam/ Billy and Isobel - it was also on the 16th June, not 23rd)




2.16 - Dates were not agreed (in fact minutes/actions from meeting on 6/6 show Isobel checking with legal that comparison periods could be changed without having to re-tender)

2.17 -The meeting on 28th June was cancelled as Des had Covid, not because of the business meeting with consultant - the meeting with the consultant and traders had already happened on the 20th June, after the meeting mentioned in point 2.16

2.18 - No. SCA rep (Sam) met with traders on the 20th and gave out paper copies of the spreadsheet. There were insufficient supplied even though Sam new of the number of businesses involved. No electronic versions sent to traders as promised. There was no discussion about the dates - although this was challenged again at the time, and questions about business rates being involved were met by "it's up to the council" More importantly the traders sub-group did NOT at any time, set any dates!!!!

<p>2.20 - Council met with the subgroup not the traders. We were not asked when we wanted to close off the activity - we were told that some businesses had not provided information by 15th July cut-off date and suggested to extend until the 29th - Please note, some meetings with SCA wasn't scheduled until the 13th July!!!! How much of the delay was caused by SCA - another failing on their part.</p> <p>2.22 - The meeting on 22/8 went ahead as planned. It detailed was it stated in point 2.23. The council proposed a "Discretionary business disruption payment" Please note - regarding the agreement to pay all 52 businesses at that meeting, the Action PDF sent showed that letters were to be sent out by John Roseblade. The September meeting was cancelled at that meeting because of the fact that the council had proposed the disruption payment, and this allowed them time to approach the relevant parties regarding this, it was evident that no clear decision /direction could be made by the end of September and letters were set to be send by mid October (as per the action to JR)</p> <p>2.23 - Not correct as there was no meeting - on 23rd September, Isobel emailed her "council response template" and we had a subgroup meeting. A formal response was sent to her about this on 4/10 and chased on 13/10</p> <p>2.24 - The letters were hand delivered on 14/10 there were no details just two figures and a percentage</p> <p>2.25 - Incorrect. Traders had a meeting of their own on 17/10 - council were requested to attend but declined.</p> <p>2.25 - (again) At the council meeting on 18/10 subgroup advised council that while SCA had assured that all circumstances would be taken into account that this was clearly not the case. Tender information was requested again. No Action PDF was received from this meeting.</p> <p>2.26 - Letters requested additional verified financial information by 10/11. Westside also sent in updated information showing revised window to save time and allow council to assess asap.</p> <p>2.21 - (this is the number directly after 2.26) 7th November subgroup reps Billy, Des and Esme met with Isobel Woods and John Roseblade. We did not want the financial review to be re-done with any different information!! We suggested ways that used the information collected by SCA and some additional information to illustrate a fairer and more realistic viewpoint of losses. An email was sent to JR and IW detailing these! Concerns were raised about how SCA conducted the review/health check. (There was NO support received at all!!!) On the 14/11 the meeting set for 15/11 was delayed to the end of November and didn't take place until 5/12. Delay was by the Council.</p> <p>2.22 - At the meeting between council and subgroup on 5/12 we were told by the council that they were commissioning a company to evaluate the work done by SCA and the process that was used. All of our suggestions were completely disregarded, and we were told that even moving the comparison periods was classed as a "material change" (see earlier regarding IW checking with legal about changing dates earlier, even though it was in the minutes that legal had said dates could be changed without implications) A formal response was sent to the council on 13/12. No Action PDF was received from this meeting.</p> <p>WSTG raised the fact that westside was totally dark and appeared closed, still looking like a building site. We were informed no work will be done during Xmas period – suggestion for barriers to be rearranged in order to make it more welcoming and perhaps some Xmas lights as there was only 10 days of shopping remaining. It was disappointing as we were informed that event would be held to drum up Xmas trade, but delays in acquiring raw materials by contractor removed this possibility.</p> <p>2.23 - Businesses were given less than 48 hours to respond to offer letters which stated initial payment. More importantly - businesses did not provide erroneous information! SCA did not collate/present the information correctly! Errors are the responsibility of SCA and the fact that the council did not audit/check the work that they had done.</p>

<p>11th April</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px;">  <p>Councillor Ellis Turrell <ellis.turrell@wolverhampton.gov.uk> Tue, 11 Apr at 11:54 ☆</p> <p>To: David Pattison Cc: Tim Johnson, Councillor Wendy Thompson, Councillor Simon Bennett, westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com</p> <p>Dear David</p> <p>In light of the very serious concerns raised by the Westside Traders Group about the Relaunch Grant Scheme, can I request an urgent meeting of Scrutiny Board where the traders group can come and speak to us directly about this important issue.</p> <p>Kind regards Ellis</p> <p>Councillor Ellis Turrell Conservative Councillor for Tettenhall Wightwick Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board City of Wolverhampton Council</p> <p>Mobile: 07971 843840 Email: ellis.turrell@wolverhampton.gov.uk</p> <p style="text-align: right;">> Show original message</p> </div>
<p>13th April</p>	<p>WSTG understood that the Council refused the above request by the vice-chair in relation to concerns raised by WSTG.</p>

<p>13th April</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="flex: 1;">  <p>Tim Johnson <tim.johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk> To: des duggal Cc: Labour Leaders Office, Richard Lawrence, Councillor Stephen Simkins, Ian Fegan (he/him), Councillor Steve Evans, John Roseblade, Isobel Woods, Councillor Paul Sweet, Councillor Ellis Turrell, Councillor Simon Bennett, Councillor Lynne Moran, cherry, jane.stevenson.mp@parliament.uk, mcfaddenp@parliament.uk, Councillor Wendy Thompson, Stuart Anderson, Councillor Sohail Khan, Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman, Martin Stevens Hide</p> </div> <div style="text-align: right;">  Thu, 13 Apr at 15:30  </div> </div> <p>Sensitivity: RESTRICTED</p> <p>Dear WSTG</p> <p>Thank you for your message that was received at 23.41 on the 6 April.</p> <p>I want to reiterate the intention behind the relaunch grant scheme is to offer eligible businesses a one-off amount to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces. It is not intended to recompense for loss or hardship.</p> <p>It has been developed following consideration at Scrutiny Board on the 14 March and unanimous support from the traders to pursue the option of a one off payment. The Urgent Cabinet decision supporting the scheme was approved following due process which included the consultation of the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board.</p> <p>The scheme involves the substantial investment of £350,000 of taxpayers money into the direct support of the businesses in question, despite there being no legal obligation for the council to do so.</p> <p>As has been mentioned local businesses can also apply for a form of Business Rate relief and support that could include hardship relief, and a wider package of business support is underway as officers begin to visit businesses to look at other programmes of business support.</p> <p>With all of this in mind it is considered that the offer is fair and constitutes justifiable use of public funds.</p> <p>This is the councils final position so I would encourage all businesses that are eligible to apply for the funding before the scheme closes on 12 May.</p> <p>Regards</p> <p>Tim Johnson <i>Chief Executive</i></p>
<p>19th April</p>	<p>In response to Tim Johnson.</p>

	<div> </div> <div> <p>des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com></p> </div> <div> <p>Wed, 19 Apr at 00:15 ☆</p> </div> <div> <p>To: Tim Johnson Cc: Labour Leaders Office, Richard Lawrence, Councillor Stephen Simkins, Ian Fegan (he/him), Councillor Steve Evans, John Roseblade, Isobel Woods, Councillor Paul Sweet, Councillor Ellis Turrell, Councillor Simon Bennett, Councillor Lynne Moran, cherry, jane.stevenson.mp@parliament.uk, mcfaddenp@parliament.uk, Councillor Wendy Thompson, Stuart Anderson, Councillor Sohail Khan, Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman, Martin Stevens Hide</p> </div> <div> <p>Dear Tim</p> </div> <div> <p>Further to email received 13th April, we have included a response from WSTG, with a 3 further enclosures.</p> </div> <div> <p>Kind Regards</p> </div> <div> <p>On and behalf of WSTG</p> </div> <div> <p>Show original message Download all attachments as a zip file</p> </div> <div> <table border="0"> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>Response to... .pdf 205kB</p> </td> <td> <p>Enc6 -Wests... .pdf 1.2MB</p> </td> <td> <p>Enc7 -Wests... .pdf 1.8MB</p> </td> <td> <p>Enc8- Minut... .pdf 937.5kB</p> </td> </tr> </table> </div> <div> <p>Formal response to Tim John together with another 4 further attachments sent in response:-</p> <p>Response to Council Options-16Apr-3WSTG-Resp Enc6- Westside Business Survey 31st Oct 2022 Enc7- Westside traders actions issues update June 28 22 Enc8- Minutes 5th Dec 2022 WSTG-Response To Council</p> </div>					<p>Response to... .pdf 205kB</p>	<p>Enc6 -Wests... .pdf 1.2MB</p>	<p>Enc7 -Wests... .pdf 1.8MB</p>	<p>Enc8- Minut... .pdf 937.5kB</p>
<p>Response to... .pdf 205kB</p>	<p>Enc6 -Wests... .pdf 1.2MB</p>	<p>Enc7 -Wests... .pdf 1.8MB</p>	<p>Enc8- Minut... .pdf 937.5kB</p>						
<p>19th April</p>	<p>WSTG forwarded all correspondence with enclosures to Cabinet Members for their address to the situation.</p>								



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>



Wed, 19 Apr at 00:45 ☆

To: paula.brookfield@wolverhampton.gov.uk,
Chris.Burden@wolverhampton.gov.uk,
Beverley.Momenabadi@wolverhampton.gov.uk,
linda.leach@wolverhampton.gov.uk,
jasbir.jaspal@wolverhampton.gov.uk,
bhupinder.gakhal@wolverhampton.gov.uk,
Obaida.Ahmed@wolverhampton.gov.uk Hide

Dear Sir/Madam

We are writing to bring to your attention, issues that are being encountered by Westside and the devastating impact of roadworks on the business traders and their livelihoods since Nov 2021. Following scrutiny meeting held 14th March it became apparent that Westside have been misled by Council and that there has been a gross injustice in the misrepresentation of facts.

We are requesting support from the cabinet members to address this as matters were highlighted to Council members, MPs, Scrutiny Panels and others.

We have forwarded email and enclosures for your perusal together with the most recent email response following a reply from Tim Johnson date 13th April. We feel very strongly that our voices are not being heard.

Kind Regards

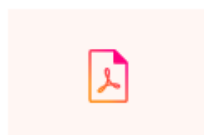
Westside Traders Group (WSTG)

Response to Council Options-3-4Apr23
Enc 1-5

Response to Council Options - 16Apr-3-WSTG
Enc 6-8

> [Show original message](#)

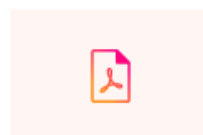
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Response to... .pdf
261.8kB



Enc1- Westsi... .pdf
243.2kB



Enc2- Wests... .pdf
141.1kB



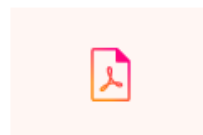
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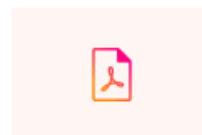
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Enc5- WSTG... .pdf
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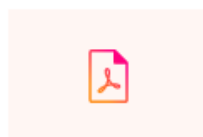
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Enc7 -Wests... .pdf
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Enc8- Minut... .pdf
937.5kB

21st April

Response from Tim Johnson



● **Tim Johnson** <tim.johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk>

🖨️ Fri, 21 Apr at 14:36 ☆

To: des duggal

Cc: Labour Leaders Office, Richard Lawrence, Councillor Stephen Simkins, Ian Fegan (he/him), Councillor Steve Evans, John Roseblade, Isobel Woods, Councillor Paul Sweet, Councillor Ellis Turrell, Councillor Simon Bennett, Councillor Lynne Moran, cherry, jane.stevenson.mp@parliament.uk, mcfaddenp@parliament.uk, Councillor Wendy Thompson, Stuart Anderson, Councillor Sohail Khan, Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman, Martin Stevens, Tim Johnson Hide

Sensitivity: RESTRICTED

Dear WSTG,




Thank you for your response to my message which I received on 19 April.

Whilst I acknowledge that you may still have issues, I firmly believe we now need to put our collective energies into ensuring businesses benefit from the support on offer. Once the deadline has past, no new schemes will be created and no new money will be made available. We want to ensure that as many businesses as possible benefit from the £350,000 funding pot put aside for this purpose. Indeed, 18 businesses have now already applied for Relaunch Grant support.

In terms of the points you have raised, I would like to summarise my responses as follows:

- The Scrutiny Board meeting on 14 March included an agenda item for a 'verbal' update to councillors on Victoria Street Business Support. The presentation, which was shared with WSTG the day before, was used to update councillors on the full position for complete openness and transparency. This included the details of RSM's feedback and their recommendations for a potential future scheme. It also included the option of the Relaunch Grant and set out that traders had agreed to feedback on the two options by 22 March. For complete transparency, the presentation to Scrutiny Board was shared with councillors, the public and WSTG on 14 March on the council's website. It is also important to note that scrutiny is not a decision-making body – that power rests with the Council's Cabinet which ultimately approved the approach after careful consideration
- Information on the two proposed support options were shared with *all* traders soon after the Scrutiny Board meeting. WSTG provided feedback on the unanimously preferred option on 22 March. The Council then wrote out to all traders to begin to implement the support package. This included personal visits to all traders and numerous options to ask questions / raise issues with the business support team. Indeed, we had a large number and have responded to all of these. So, we would contend that traders have had significant opportunities to ask questions and raise concerns

- I want to be clear again, that the Council has **no legal responsibility to provide support** in these circumstances and that the support we always intended to provide and, indeed are now providing through the grant scheme, is categorically **not** compensation and was never intended to be compensation
- Whilst some traders may disagree with the size of the grant payment, the total amount of funding available has been determined by the Council's Cabinet as previously mentioned. It is a significant sum of tax-payers money - £350,000 in total for the grants alone. This amount is proportionate and non-negotiable and will be evenly spread between eligible businesses to benefit more traders
- We have always accepted that the investment in the area may have had an impact on trade, that's why we have listened to traders at every stage of the process and have put funding into business support. I would categorically disagree that there has been no consultation. Comprehensive evidence of consultation undertaken by both Eurovia and the Council has previously been provided to WSTG.
- The cost of the SCA review was not £50k, it was £16,000 and led to five businesses in need receiving urgent funding in December 2022 of £5,000 each. WSTG's concerns about the SCA review and request to change the assessment window led to the commissioning of experts RSM. RSM's recommendations were professionally and methodologically rigorous and robust and were applied to other schemes in the West Midlands which we explained to WSTG. The implications of using the RSM methodology – which the Council would have pursued if traders had opted for this – would have taken a considerable amount of time and businesses may have had to wait years to receive financial support as the eligibility criteria and information required would have been extremely challenging for many traders to comply with and would have excluded many from any financial support.
- The relaunch grant is not a U-turn. It is a pragmatic and swift solution to the issues raised by traders. It's backed by a significant £350,000 sum of tax-payers money and aims to provide fast support to traders. Again, I want to reiterate the intention behind the relaunch grant is to offer eligible businesses a one-off amount to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces. It is not intended to recompense for loss or hardship.
- Since the scheme went live on 5 April 2023 18 businesses have come forward with their application. As of today, 2 businesses who have provided the requested information have been approved and will be paid this week.
 - The change in status of the report scheduled for cabinet on 24 April was because it was brought forward to be an Urgent Decision. This fast tracked the decision to avoid delays in getting the support in place.
- You mention that WSTG will 'go to the press' if you do not get a satisfactory response. I hope that the information I have provided clarifies things but want to stress that any decision to go to the press is entirely a decision for WSTG. Although this will simply serve to exacerbate the

	<p>situation, it will not resolve anything, and the Council will of course reserve the right to respond in full.</p> <p>Once again, with all of this in mind it is considered that the offer is fair, proportionate and constitutes a justifiable use of public funds. The Relaunch Grant Scheme and wider business support offer remains the council's final position. I would ask that you again encourage all WSTG businesses that are eligible to apply for the funding before the scheme closes. On that point I am conscious that we do have bank holidays between now and the existing closing date of the 12 May. With this in mind we are extending the closing date to the 31 May with the intention that this should give sufficient time for all eligible companies to make their applications. I do have to reiterate that the funding will not be available after this date.</p> <p>My sincere hope is that we can all look forward and establish this area as a thriving part of our City Centre.</p> <p>Regards</p> <p>Tim</p> <p>Tim Johnson Chief Executive City of Wolverhampton Council Email: Tim.Johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk Tel: 01902 554500</p>
27th April	<p>WSTG were made aware that a special scrutiny meeting was to take place on 2nd May 2023.</p> <hr/> <p> John Roseblade <john.roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk> To: des duggal</p> <p style="text-align: right;"> Thu, 27 Apr at 18:23 </p> <p>Hi Des and Billy</p> <p>I am sure you will have heard but I wanted to make sure you were aware of the Scrutiny meeting that has been arranged for next week. The subject of the westside relaunch grant payment will be going to an extraordinary meeting of Scrutiny Board on the evening of the 2 May at 6pm.</p> <p>The focus of the meeting will be the actual amount being offered. There will be an opportunity for up to 2 traders to address the Board and this is on the invitation and discretion of the Chair.</p> <p>If you would like to nominate those that you would like to speak please let me know and I can get our Democratic services to make those arrangements.</p> <p>Happy to talk this through tomorrow if that helps.</p> <p>Regards</p> <p>John Roseblade Director of Resident Services Tel. Office: 01902 555755 Tel. Mobile: 07825 530368</p> <p>E-mail: John.Roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk City of Wolverhampton Council</p>

	<p>WSTG did express for the whole of the subgroup to attend or at least 3-4 members. We heard nothing from the council</p>
<p>2nd May</p>	<p>WSTG attended Scrutiny meeting where they presented concerns. Unfortunately, it was recommended that another date be set by which time newly elected scrutiny board would have all correspondence to be sent to all members so that they could scrutinize and make recommendations. However, 2 members of the WSTG were allowed to present.</p> <p>Find attached a copy of the presentation by WSTG Bivir Chander-Kumar & Esme Stackhouse</p> <p>WSTG responded to the <u>briefing note dated 27th April</u> which has been marked as Enc 9</p> <p>This was presented verbally at the Urgent Scrutiny held 2nd May.</p>
	<p><u>Enc9 : WSTG Response to Briefing Note : 27th April 2023</u></p> <p>1.3 The 5k that has been offered is an insult. Up until Dec 2022 we were under the impression that Westside businesses would be receiving financial hardship relief because of the impact of roadworks during Nov 2021 – to date.</p> <p>2.1 – Point refers to bringing in more homes, jobs, events and shops. What about retaining shops and not losing established businesses and branded shops like Toni & Guy, Le Monde to name but a few.</p> <p>2.2 – No consultation taken place with individual businesses as to the extent of the roadworks. No impact analysis or assessment of the logistics of the roadworks.</p> <p>2.4 – Various Councillors, Deputy Leader, BID Team, MP Stuart Anderson and various other council representatives were invited to attend a meeting organised by Westside businesses at Equinox, Victoria St. to address the issue they had been facing since Nov 2021 in footfall reduction as a consequence of the roadworks. A document was presented to the council listing numerous issues. The meeting was also attended by over 40 local businesses.</p> <p>2.8 – We were unaware of the 50k being applied for as business support. We were told by Isobel that a process of tendering would have to be undergone to identify an independent company to assess the losses that businesses were suffering. It was Isobel who came up with Health Check - which was suppose to be light touch but turned out to be much more detailed.</p>

Business Advisor Financial Health Check

From: Isobel Woods (isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk)

To: bilvirck@yahoo.com; info@crazyco.uk; duggall1@hotmail.co.uk; kimberleysouthall@yahoo.co.uk; nimoburgers@hotmail.com; abradleysolar@gmail.com; thegeorgewallis.wolverhampton@stonegategroup.co.uk

Cc: John.Roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Date: Monday, 16 May 2022 at 22:09 BST

Sensitivity: NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Dear All

Many thanks for taking the time to review and for sharing comments and thoughts.

The focus for this work is to engage with the businesses in this area of the city and gather intelligence related to the improvement works underway on Victoria Street, which will help to inform the next steps. It's been identified that not all businesses in the area have an awareness of business planning. It is important that this is recognised in the spec so that they can receive advice and guidance, whereas others who are more knowledgeable about running a business may choose not to receive this.

Responding to the points which have been highlighted.

- **The title of this work – Health Check**

This work is to undertake a review of businesses position. As mentioned at the meeting the council needs to have an independent impartial review in order to inform further activity that may involve public funds and resources. It's been called a Health Check to ensure this is impartial. To call it a Hardship or Financial Impact at this stage could be seen a pre-determining the outcome of the work which may adversely affect future activity.

- **Wider business support**

From our meetings with businesses in the area, some have said they would find it beneficial to have advice on their current models, particularly as the economy recovers from the impact of Covid and other factors. From initial visits not all businesses have the same knowledge of running a business, or awareness of business support. The advice is optional and any follow up will be for individual businesses to decide and action.

- **Consultant qualification and details**

Details of who will deliver will come once they have been appointed. The qualifications, who the advisor will be and other information are part of the tender process that will commence now comments have been received. 'Competitive process' refers to the tender process to appoint the consultant. Once we have undertaken and complete this part we will be able to share more details.

- **Timeline**

The council has to ensure that all the businesses in the area have the opportunity to have a health check. The pace of delivery and the outcome of this work have been factored in to the brief. The timescale for this work will be subject to the availability and engagement of businesses who wish to receive this review. It will be important that the council can ensure businesses have the opportunity to come forward. It would be really helpful once the advisor(s) have been appointed for yourselves as businesses in the area to raise awareness of the support and to encourages businesses to come forward.

- **Financial Information**

The impact of Covid is a factor that has affected the whole of the economy, it would not be reasonable to use financial information from before March 2020 in this scope. There have been a number of national and local covid business support schemes in place to assist businesses affected by Covid by providing financial grants.

The focus for this work is to understand the impact on businesses as a result of the improvement works on and around Victoria Street and to offer business advice. In order to understand this it will be important to have a reasonable time period prior to the works to then compare during the period of the works. It is proposed that financial information will be looked at for the 6 months period prior to the works, and then from the start of the works to the current time.

- Financial Evaluation of the business – for the period June 2021 - 22 November 2021 , then December 2021 - up to current date
 - Profit and Loss Statement
 - Balance Sheet
 - Liquidity Ratio
 - Working capital

- **New Businesses**

For those businesses who opened after the 22 November when the works commenced, we will ask the advisor to refer to the business plan used when the business was set up, to identify a forecasted trading position for the period we are looking at. The outcome will depend on the quality and detail of the information contained in the business plan.

- **Large Businesses**

Public support is carefully monitored and Local Authorities have to adhere to number of rules and regulations. The UK Subsidiary Regulation (that replaced the EU State Aid rules) means that large companies or those who are part of parent company can only receive a maximum value of support from public funds. This is tracked over a 3 year period and cannot exceed £350,000 of either direct (grant) or indirect (service) support. The support from the advisor and any subsequent assistance will need to be within this threshold. For this reason the support has specifically identified small independent businesses whose main trading and business are registered in Wolverhampton.

I feel it would be helpful to share with you the next steps which are an essential and strictly governed part of local authority procurement.

- I will update the spec to reflect areas of change and send this out to seek a response from the market. This will run for two weeks to enable those who are interested to prepare and submit a response.
- The responses will be assessed and evaluated and a decision made about who will deliver.
- Once contracts / terms of work have been signed the work will commence

Kind regards
Isobel

Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise
Tel. Office: 01902 551848
Tel. Mobile: 07464 981878

[E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk)
City of Wolverhampton Council

2.8 SCA Management were commissioned by the council (as they were the only ones who submitted a tender response). The cashflow statement used to capture data had revealed issues around inconsistencies in not only what should be recorded, the conduct in the way the data was being collected and the process being used. WSTG raised concerns in a number of areas, one being the comparative windows that would be used to determine losses. This was confirmed by council legal and minuted that there was scope for change of window if necessary.

Window defined as Jan21-Sep21 comparative to Oct21-Ju22. Issues with this

- 2.8.1 3-month covid included where we were told it would be excluded. Covid grants were included for some businesses and not for others on the spreadsheet.

	<p>2.8.2 WSTG had proposed Council to use 2018/19 accounts but was refuted. Council stated nothing would be considered pre-covid. Yet RSM Option 1 considered this.</p> <p>2.8.3 WSTG did ensure that the window should be flexible without having to re-tender. This was confirmed by council legal and minuted. To avoid wasting public purse money WSTG suggested window be changed to make the spreadsheet more viable, fair, capture realistic data which would give Council feedback on actual impact of roadworks on businesses which consequently would assist them in better management of their projects going forward i.e. Phase 2, 3 etc. Presentation was made to Isobel Woods & John Roseblade Nov 7th 22 to look at this. It was clearly demonstrated that this was possible and a workable solution to salvage the situation and not waste resources as time was of the essence. Council realised that this would prove more businesses had suffered losses with proposed window Apr21 – Dec21 compared to Jan22-Sept22. (3 month date change)</p> <p>2.8.4 Even though Isobel Woods repeatedly said that Council & Sam’s team SCA Management would come back to us with issues raised for them to clarify. This was ignored repeatedly as it would mean Council would have to address hardship relief for more businesses than the 5 identified.</p> <p>2.8.5 11 businesses out of 51 were clearly identified as evidencing loss by the Council, of which 5 businesses were only paid an initial amount. This admission clearly demonstrates evidenced loss by businesses, for which Council still need to pay the balance of. The window the council decided to stick with was about damage limitation for them not to pay out to more of the businesses.</p> <p>2.8.6 Repeated admission of losses evidenced – are council going to make good on mitigating losses of those businesses that have evidenced, as it appears to have been swept under the carpet and no longer financial hardship is mentioned.</p> <p>2.8.7 WSTG were promised Xmas event to drum up footfall, however due to delays nothing happened, and it was WSTG at the meeting 5th Dec22 raised to Councillor Simkins that the barriers were still up and the fact that there were no lights clearly gave general public the view that Victoria St was closed. Council claimed that they were supporting Westside by removing barriers and it caused delays. A complete misrepresentation of the truth.</p> <p>2.9 WSTG need to identify events to clarify this.</p> <p>2.9.1 Following meeting 7th Nov with Isobel and John where WSTG presented issues and solution of window change.</p> <p>2.9.2 Letters dated 10th Nov sent out by Isobel to businesses requesting additional evidence to support losses suffered by businesses. Businesses had provided updated financial information.</p> <p>2.9.3 24th Nov - WSTG chased up lack of response from Council / Isobel/John. Date change requested by Isobel to move traders meeting from end Nov to 5th Dec. A response detail WSTG disappointment of date change. (NOW 5 WEEKS OF COUNCIL DELIBERATION SINCE PRESENTATION)</p>
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	<p>2.9.4 1st Dec Isobel Woods emailed stating they are still looking at points raised by WSTG Nov 7th, Nov 24th and 27th Nov. WSTG were given no incline as to the engagement of an independent advisor until 5th December meeting. Council mentioned conversations were being held with a company to review their own processes and methodology adopted. This has been cleverly worded alluding that WSTG were aware of independent company engagement prior to the 5th Dec when it was clearly not the case.</p> <p>2.9.5 See WSTG minutes produced from meeting of the 5th with Council representatives. Even though all on list were invited, members abstained from attending. Councillor Simkins was re-introduced to being present and active engagement with WSTG. It was at this meeting that Isobel stated that an independent specialist was being procured to review the processes etc. See point 6 of document. WSTG raised concerns over additional expenditure. Council basically ignored the workable solution given by WSTG. Another delaying tactic in accepting the need to pay financial hardship relief.</p> <p>2.9.6 WSTG attended Wolverhampton Business Forum – raised question to Andy St. See detail for response.</p> <p>2.9.7 23rd Dec WSTG notified via letter that RSM have been appointed to review financial health check approach, requesting permission to share information already provided to SCA Management with RSM. Another delaying tactic and waste of public money.</p> <p>2.9.8 We did not get any indication of findings until 13th March, the day before the scrutiny and the WSTG subgroup were given a directed choice. Totally ignoring all 17months of recognition of financial hardship by introducing a Re-Launch. WSTG were asked to agree with council without being given details. WSTG stated categorically, how are we supposed to make an informed decision without the detail. Isobel/Ian/Cllr Simkins gave WSTG a false sense of security and demonstrated underhandedness in hindsight.</p> <p>2.9.9 Throughout the whole process, since Mar 2022 financial hardship has been the centre point of all engagements and yet now has been totally IGNORED.</p> <p>4.11 In response to this “This excludes the considerable amount of officer time expended upon working to resolve this issue” WSTG Response: The issue is not resolved but WSTG left in dire straits as businesses have lost considerable time personally and has affected their mental health and lost livelihoods. Your officers and yourselves are being paid! You are not being asked to take a reduction in your income as businesses have had to because of council’s lack of professional management of projects by NOT undertaking impact analysis of roadworks and proper business consultation – we are still awaiting physical evidence of this for each business. We find this comment patronising and demeaning. It is the council that have deemed to have wasted WSTG business time yet have the audacity to make it about them. WSTG are the victims here! Not even an apology or credit given to show where WSTG have highlighted repeated flaws, issues in council failings. There is no moral stance here.</p>
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	<p>We urge the council to mitigate losses that have been experienced by WSTG and furthermore, evidenced and proven by businesses remain unpaid. This cannot be brushed away as it would be a gross miscarriage of justice.</p> <p>WSTG still need the financial hardship relief to be considered regardless of the Re-Launch grant.</p>

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● **Tim Johnson** <tim.johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk>

To: des duggal

Cc: Labour Leaders Office, Richard Lawrence, Councillor Stephen Simkins, Ian Fegan (he/him), Councillor Steve Evans, John Roseblade, Isobel Woods, Councillor Paul Sweet, Councillor Ellis Turrell, Councillor Simon Bennett, Councillor Lynne Moran, cherry, jane.stevenson.mp@parliament.uk, mcfaddenp@parliament.uk, Councillor Wendy Thompson, Stuart Anderson, Councillor Sohail Khan, Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman, Martin Stevens Hide

Thu, 13 Apr at 15:30 ☆

Sensitivity: RESTRICTED

Dear WSTG

Thank you for your message that was received at 23.41 on the 6 April.

I want to reiterate the intention behind the relaunch grant scheme is to offer eligible businesses a one-off amount to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces. It is not intended to recompense for loss or hardship.

It has been developed following consideration at Scrutiny Board on the 14 March and unanimous support from the traders to pursue the option of a one off payment. The Urgent Cabinet decision supporting the scheme was approved following due process which included the consultation of the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board.

The scheme involves the substantial investment of £350,000 of taxpayers money into the direct support of the businesses in question, despite there being no legal obligation for the council to do so.

As has been mentioned local businesses can also apply for a form of Business Rate relief and support that could include hardship relief, and a wider package of business support is underway as officers begin to visit businesses to look at other programmes of business support.

With all of this in mind it is considered that the offer is fair and constitutes justifiable use of public funds.

This is the councils final position so I would encourage all businesses that are eligible to apply for the funding before the scheme closes on 12 May.

Regards

Tim Johnson
Chief Executive
City of Wolverhampton Council



● **Tim Johnson** Sensitivity: RESTRICTED Good afternoon Des Thank you for the emai Wed, 22 Mar at 13:31 ☆



● **des duggal** <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

Cc: Ian Fegan (he/him), Richard Lawrence, Stephen Simkins, Tim Johnson, Councillor Steve Evans and 1 more...



Wed, 22 Mar at 16:59 ☆

No problem Tim,

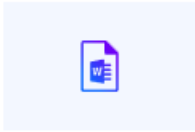
I have resent as word documents as well.

Regards

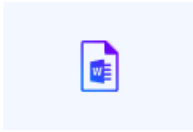
Billy

> [Show original message](#)

[Download all attachments as a zip file](#)



Response t... .docx
25kB



WSTG Mee... .docx
20.2kB

Below are documents attached



Date: 20th March 2023

To Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

CC: Tim Johnson
Ian Brookfield
Richard Lawrence
Stephen Simkins
Ian Fegan
Steve Evans

Following the meeting held 13th March 2023, where findings of RSM and options of way forward were presented to the Westside Traders Subgroup to discuss and review with the Westside Traders Group (WSTG).

We were informed that the presentation above was to be made public at the Scrutiny Meeting to be held 14th March 2023 and we were welcome to attend in person or online.

As mentioned in the email 20th March a number of businesses watched the Scrutiny Meeting and were not in agreement of how the council has misrepresented the information to deflect their own failings in regard to the whole situation. This has been further reinforced by the earlier meeting held on 15th February as part of the Economic Growth, which Westside were unaware of.

Westside Subgroup held a meeting 20th March with WSTG to discuss and review the 2 options presented. Please find attached minutes of the meeting and a list of businesses that were in attendance and those that were unavailable to attend but communicated their preferred choice of option.

Of the 48 businesses listed 23 attended and 17 apologised but gave their vote in a text giving us an overall majority of businesses choosing **Option 2**. 8 businesses did not attend with no reason given and we can only assume that they will communicate, liaise directly with council as the deadline is short.

We have updated the list of businesses as supplied by Isobel. Both options were presented for discussion and concerns, issues raised were documented below and **it is the request of the WSTG that due attention be paid to it**. WSTG have maintained full transparency for all businesses. We cannot be held accountable for how the information shared on WSTG will be used.

CONCERNS ARISING FROM SCRUTINY-

1. We were disappointed with the misrepresentation of facts at the aforementioned meetings above i.e., Scrutiny (March) and Economic growth (February). We state for the record again that **NO CONSULTATION** took place with Westside businesses prior to the commencement of pedestrianisation works November 2021.
2. It was the traders that came together as WSTG and brought to the attention of the Council, the concerns over the impact that the roadworks were and still having on business where it was highlighted about the significant drop in footfall and sales turnover for businesses.



3. WSTG demonstrated to the Council and delegates of both parties, the failings of the council in its duty of care and lack of diligence to the livelihoods of businesses and the **FINANCIAL HARDSHIP** they caused as a result of the lack of consultation. By their own admission Council undertaking 5 years of development in approximately 15 months which is now looking to be 17-18 months and counting.
4. Council instructed what we were told were independent management accountants to undertake a financial review to ascertain losses incurred as a result of impact of roadworks. SCA Management accountants were employed by Council to Conduct financial review. The work undertaken by SCA revealed significant concerns and flaws which WSTG highlighted. All data was provided to financial review by WSTG. Suggestions made to council by WSTG to consider 2018/2019 accounts, which was rejected by Council together with other options not too dissimilar to that of RSM's findings. Isobel admitted that no auditing/validation was carried out of SCA work which revealed issues which were communicated to Council. Therefore, it was not a rejection by WSTG of SCA's work but the conduct and quality of work that was carried out by them which produced anomalies and incorrect representation of data of WSTG. Hence as it was flagged up to Council with possible solution of window change – Council suggested appointing RSM to review process etc at no doubt great expense. Is this not a waste of taxpayers monies? First through employment of SCA and then RSM.
5. Westside businesses were literally cut off with barriers and construction site that was created with poor signage and barriers which a great number of customers could not manoeuvre around.
6. Contractor Eurovia not being held to account on their delays and slowness of the project due to materials delays and other poor management during the course of the works. We have sufficient documentary evidence that has been shared with council.
7. For the record at the scrutiny meeting, it was evident that Council alluded to WSTG were responsible for delays when that was clearly not the case. I.e. When the meeting was held 5th Dec 2022 (moved from 27th Nov) Council had failed Westside in having promised a event to drum up business for Xmas period for westside and furthermore it was WSTG that highlighted the lack of inclusion with the rest of the city. No Xmas lights, the barriers still blocking any Xmas footfall as Victoria St appeared to all as a closed construction site. It was Cllr Simkins who stated that their were approximately less than 2 weeks where businesses could at least get some Xmas lights and possibly gain some Xmas trade. So, Council responding to WSTG and removing barriers was not the real delay as it was the materials and Eurovia's own delays.
8. Council are requested to consider the fact that they have slowed the whole process, during which several businesses have closed. **There is no "at pace"** as the Council keeps alluding. They have insulted the intelligence of WSTG as we have come a further 8 months down the line with no financial hardship payment of the **SIGNIFICANT** losses that businesses have incurred because of the poor management decisions made. The one-off payment should certainly bear this in mind as we were promised by Cllr Simkins in front of over 8 Councillors, Opposition members including MP Stuart Anderson that businesses would not suffer. Council **NEED TO MAKE GOOD ON THIS** as even more negative press demonstrates to the general public the lack of confidence in the current Council in its decision-making process.

confidence in the current Council in its decision-making process.

9. Unlike new businesses that have opened up knowing the risks, those very businesses that have had to suffer on their account and not through their own choices. **No time was given for long standing businesses to plan.** The Council need to mitigate losses of businesses through their(council) failings not viabilities of the business. Council need to be held accountable for this and rectify what general public also sees.
10. **Option 2 needs to bear consideration of fairness to businesses** considering the losses of long standing existing who have been present for the duration of the works and those who have just recently opened. A fair way to approach this would be to consider the number of months of impact as opposed to it being generic across the board, or even a tiered approach.
11. If **Option 1** was taken up by businesses, this would be extremely expensive exercise for council to employ and administer. We have no choice but to agree with the directed choice with the caveat that it is not to be misleading as WSTG have been misled to date. Council should not treat this as a gesture of goodwill but realistic of losses pertaining to the roadworks, hence should be reflective of losses incurred.
12. To avoid further negative press at this crucial time, it is in the interest of the Council to be just in requesting a financial hardship package where possibly a tiered approach be considered as part of the relaunch grant application.
13. We would like to Council to reveal RSM recommendations in the final report.
14. Scrutiny board were not happy with receiving information at the 11th hour. Neither are WSTG. We have been forced to make a directed choice led by the council to accept without any knowledge or insight of what the financial pot might be. In this case a simple pot of money in a relaunch should not downplay the losses incurred by businesses and this would be an insult to injury, particularly as it has been dragged out by the Council and not WSTG.
15. **Clarity of the TIMELINE together with what data will be required from businesses etc.** - this to be done prior to the recommendations being presented on 27th March to the leader of the Council and Cabinet Member Cllr Simkins. WSTG request visibility to preview recommendations to ensure that points raised here have been taken into consideration.
16. Any Businesses who chose to invest in the area mid-way during roadworks of after the initial SCA financial health check should be excluded from any grants. It should also bear consideration to businesses who have not been operational by their own choice i.e. not actively trading as it may be viable for them to just pay minimal overheads whilst remaining closed.
17. Whatever level of taxpayer's money has been wasted by Council on the inadequate assessment of SCA and subsequent evaluations by RSM should not impact or come out of the pot that Westside should receive.

Scrutiny ensures that decision-making processes are clear and accessible to the public and that the people taking decisions are held accountable for those decisions. Good scrutiny also ensures that there are opportunities for the public to influence and improve the services they receive.



● **des duggal** <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>



Mon, 6 Mar at 10:36 ☆

To: John Roseblade

Cc: Isobel Woods, Councillor Stephen Simkins,
Councillor Steve Evans, Marianne Page, Ruth Taylor and 5 more...

Dear John,

Thank you for your prompt response.

We will be attending and look forward to what the findings revealed and how we can move forward in a congruent timely manner.

Kind regards

Billy on behalf of Des & WSTG

> Show original message



● **John Roseblade** <john.roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk>



Fri, 3 Mar at 17:57 ☆

To: des duggal

Cc: Isobel Woods, Councillor Stephen Simkins, Councillor Steve Evans, Marianne Page,
Ruth Taylor, Ian Fegan (he/him), Crissie Rushton, Richard Lawrence, Tim Johnson,
Mark Taylor Hide

Hello Des

I am sorry to hear the traders feel that way. Cllr Evans comments echo what we have said as a council on the public record and I know he is really keen to ensure that we resolve this situation and support businesses, not only where there is clear evidence of loss as a direct result of the public realm work, but also with investment in events and marketing support.

To that end, as you know, we commissioned RSM to review the previous business support review approach and advise on how the council can move forward to ensure that any future use of taxpayers funds is underpinned by clear evidence and data which withholds public scrutiny.

I am pleased to say that we have received their final report, with recommendations, today (Friday 3 March).

I'm sure you will understand as business leaders that we will need to review their findings, clarify and/or challenge the methodology and recommendations and then determine a very clear timeline for the way forward. That will involve sharing the findings and recommendations with yourself, Billy and other colleagues on the WSTG.

With this in mind I will be in touch again next week. In the meantime, I would like to propose a meeting for the evening of the 13 March here at the Civic Centre. Please could you check to see if this is agreeable to WSTG.

I note your comments about Salop Street being closed and dug up again. I do need to point out that this is emergency works by Cadent – not the Council, in order to locate and fix a gas leak. This is obviously beyond our control however our street works team are involved in making sure the reinstatement of their excavations is up to specification.

Regards

John Roseblade
Director of Resident Services
Tel. Office: 01902 555755
Tel. Mobile: 07825 530368

[E-mail: John.Roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:John.Roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk)



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

Fri, 3 Mar at 10:53 ☆

To: John Roseblade

Cc: Isobel Woods, Councillor Stephen Simkins, Councillor Steve Evans, Marianne Page, Ruth Taylor, Ian Fegan (he/him), Crissie Rushton, Richard Lawrence, Tim Johnson, Mark Taylor Hide

Dear John

The recent Express & Star responses made by the Council via Cllr Evans over the last few days has created uproar amongst us traders. It is another blow by the council to deflect their lack of ownership of the problems they have created for businesses. More importantly it is an insult to businesses as it has the condemnation that the majority of businesses around the Westside area are incompetent when we have clearly demonstrated where that actually lies. We apologise for the harsh response but the blame and lack of support is deliberate through the obstacles created by the council and the poor choice of advisors and council not auditing the quality of their own briefs given to management accountants Council employed.

As a bench mark if several businesses have shown losses why would the others not have irrespective of what Councillor Evans is saying as "erroneous information".

It was a misleading statement:

- 1 - Councillor Evans failed to state a review (RSM) has been actioned in dispute to out come of the findings by Sam's team
- 2 - the £5k payment was highlighted as a initial start of what was yet TBA
- 3 - the fact that I asked them personally why can't they accept statements from individual businesses from our accounts to prove the damage done by these works .
- 4 - he also failed to mention the delays , and lack of communication from the contractors appointed etc .

We have been very respectful to this situation and resolving the plight of westside, however the council are clearly taking this as a weakness and any further delays in providing suitable financial hardship for the majority of businesses will have a severe detrimental effect on the Council as a vote of no confidence in them as they currently stand.

We urge a conducive outcome as the businesses have suffered enough. The failure of businesses is as a direct impact of Councils poor management. This is further demonstrated by Salop St being closed and dug up again. Who is auditing the council and its subconscious on their failings. The public see this.

Regards

Des & Billy on behalf of WSTG



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

To: Councillor Stephen Simkins, Isobel Woods, Marianne Page, Ruth Taylor, Ian Fegan (he/him), Crissie Rushton, Keepers, John Roseblade Hide
Cc: Richard Lawrence, Tim Johnson, Councillor Steve Evans

Fri, 17 Feb at 22:33 ☆

To:
Isobel Woods
John Roseblade

CC: Tim Johnson
Ian Brookfield
Richard Lawrence
Stephen Simkins
Ian Fegan
Steve Evans

Further to chaser email sent 12th January requesting an update, the WSTG are extremely disappointed with the poor response from Council. We like to iterate delaying tactics after council stipulated that the company RSM was deliberately chosen for the urgency and quick turnaround. Isobel had stated she was in communication on a "daily" basis as it was at the forefront of ensuring businesses were supported and council understood how imperative the activity was.

So please can you explain why from 5th Dec.2022 we are now 17th February and still businesses have been failed by:-

1. Delay in any form of response from council after setting RSM turnaround was 2-3 weeks. So by 3rd week of January the Council should have delivered its findings. It is now 10weeks from the last time we met.
2. Businesses have still not seen any further financial business support other than the token gesture which was made in December- which was clearly for making statements to press that they are supporting businesses when in fact they are failing on making good on their deliverables.
3. Delay of completion by over a month to March.
4. Why are the Council continuously being negligent towards Westside businesses.
5. Council by their delayed response, are ensuring more businesses close. Where is the fairness?
6. Councillor Simkins on 2nd February asked for our request for an update to be responded to following a chaser email from Westside asking for update 12th January. Still no response!
7. Can Council come clean and deal with Businesses honestly and respectfully. Cllr Evans stated that they have monthly meeting supporting businesses. How are the Council enacting this exactly? Businesses are being failed by the false statements being released to press. Westside see these as deliberate delaying tactics of the Council.
8. Westside businesses need clarity and a response now as to why the urgency of peoples livelihoods is not on top of their agenda and of paramount importance when it was their failings that brought us here.
9. It will be a year in March when the problem was first highlighted and only 7 businesses have had a miniscule amount of what they have lost, whilst others have not even had anything and some businesses have closed
10. Council hold businesses accountable for making good on their timescales yet they continuously fail on theirs.
11. Westside invite senior council delegates Council Leader Ian Brookfield, Tim Johnson, Stephen Lawrence to address these issues with the integrity Westside businesses deserve. It is not right that the Council are seeing to be effective but really are creating false illusions to all and sundry including the press. This is not acceptable. Who scrutinizes Councils decisions and failings?

We look forward to an immediate response to make good on their financial hardship support for Westside businesses. A major factor of businesses closing have been as a direct consequence of roadworks and failed consultation from outset.

On behalf of Westside Traders Group (WSTG)

Despite repeated requests no update provided.



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

To: Isobel Woods, Marianne Page, Ruth Taylor, Ian Fegan (he/him), Crissie Rushton and 3 more...
Cc: Richard Lawrence

Thu, 2 Feb at 19:59

Hi,

Please could you provide an update of when the next meeting will be as you specified that you were expecting RSM were scheduled to present back to council findings of their activity.

Also we have not received updated council presentation slides which John/Isobel was going to send out following 5th December meeting.

We cannot emphasise that businesses are needing responses as patience is wearing thin, especially as there seems to lots of negative press - most recent being Toni & Guy.

Kind regards

Billy

> Show original message



Councillor Stephen Simkins <stephen.simkins@wolverhampton.gov.uk>

To: des duggal, Isobel Woods, Marianne Page, Ruth Taylor, Ian Fegan (he/him) and 3 more...
Cc: Richard Lawrence

Thu, 2 Feb at 20:09

Sensitivity: NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Hi All, can we please get this resolved?

Steve

This meeting referred to below in email 16.Jan.23 never took place with Traders group only sub-group 13th March was suppose to be end of Jan 23

Update on Westside Traders regarding the review with RSM 3

Yahoo/Inbox



Isobel Woods <isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk>

To: des duggal
Cc: Richard Lawrence, Ian Fegan (he/him), Councillor Stephen Simkins

Mon, 16 Jan at 08:36

Sensitivity: NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Dear Sir / Madam

Thank you for coming back to the team during December with permission to share your financial information collated during the summer, with RSM. RSM have been appointed to review the overall approach and the financial information submitted in regards to the improvement works underway in the city. They are planning to present their report at the end of January.

Once the council has received details from RSM when their report is to be received, a meeting will be arranged with representatives of the Westside Traders group.

Kr
Isobel

Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise
Tel. Office: 01902 551848
Tel. Mobile: 07866 564932

E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk
City of Wolverhampton Council

The email below was sent to all businesses on personal email addresses that the council hold.

From a GDPR perspective as the council are a data controller, we would like to know how the data was going to be used by RSM. Also what data was passed to them. Can council confirm all additional information that businesses supplied to them was forwarded. No one in the West Traders Group were approached by RSM as we were led to believe. What did RSM do with WSTG data.

RSM - Permission for information to be shared 2 Yahoo/A-westsi... ★

B Bilvir Chander-Kumar <bilvirck@yahoo.com> Tue, 3 Jan at 15:06 ★
To: BusinessDevelopment@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Further to the letter received 22nd December 2022, firstly I apologise for delay in response as I have been quite poorly over the Xmas period.

This is to confirm permission to share information with RSM who have been recently appointed to review health check.






I have also included a pack of information which I would like to be passed on to RSM to ensure there is no omission of data. Please forward to them the 6 attachments below.

I look forward to hearing from them.







Kind Regards,

B Chander-Kumar

[Download all attachments as a zip file](#)

				
2-WestsideR....pdf 243.2kB	3-CWC-Sup... .pdf 426.2kB	4-CWC-Sup... .pdf 1005.9kB	5-Victoria R... .pdf 168.5kB	6-Complaint....pdf 125.9kB

The documents below would clearly demonstrate to RSM that there was just cause for financial hardship payment. As it demonstrated realistic losses and drop in footfall.

 1-Westside Healthcheck challenges template	Micr
 2-WestsideRetailerMeetingMinutes7Apr22	Micr
 3-CWC-SupportingDocFinal-Equinox	Micr
 4-CWC-SupportingDocFinal-Equinox-18Nov22Submission	Micr
 5-Victoria Road Improvement Letter to Businesses Healthcheck outcomeWestsideResponse1	Micr
 6-Complaint Wolv CC - 16th December 2022-1	Micr

"IMPORTANT/ACTION REQUIRED: RSM appointed to review financial health check approach"

Yahoo/A-westsi... ★



Business Development <business.development@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
To: Business Development

Tue, 3 Jan at 12:55 ★

Sensitivity: RESTRICTED

Dear Colleague

Further to your letter from Isobel Woods on 23rd December headed "IMPORTANT/ACTION REQUIRED: RSM appointed to review financial health check approach"

This requested your permission by today for the Council to share information you have already provided to SCA Management Consulting LTD with RSM.

If you are happy to do so, please Email BusinessDevelopment@wolverhampton.gov.uk or call 07971 837298 confirming that you are happy for your business details, financial information for trading periods and any comments made to SCA, to be passed on to RSM – by today (Tuesday 3rd January).

Thanks and regards

Business Development Team
City of Wolverhampton Council



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

Fri, 16 Dec 2022 at 09:15 ☆

To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade
Cc: Stephen Simkins, Ian Fegan (he/him), Tim Johnson, Richard Lawrence, steve.evans4@wolverhampton.gov.uk, labourleadersoffice@wolverhampton.gov.uk Hide

To Isobel Woods
John Roseblade

Hi

Further to the letter received dated 14th December to the 7 businesses who demonstrated financial losses from the health check. It should be duly noted that this is another prime example of where the council have changed the parameters from stating they would pay the 7 of the 11 businesses the amounts following the financial health check - now pending the review.

It is disappointing that the amount of £5k being paid out is not what was expected. Whilst it is appreciated as a gesture, this does not mitigate losses proven by the 7 businesses and others.

In light of the council delays and that we are at the 16th December, we expect that if the pending review is not concluded by 20th January, then the balance of the health check amount for the 7 businesses should be paid.

This for WSTG is a milestone date and condition that should be honored by the council whilst the finer details of the independent company is being fast tracked.

We look forward to a confirmation of the **next date in January** for the monthly meeting.

Kind regards

Westside Traders Group (WSTG)



● **Bilvir Chander-Kumar** <bilvirck@yahoo.com>

To: Isobel Woods

Cc: Des Duggal



Wed, 14 Dec 2022 at 23:15 ☆

To Isobel,

In response to correspondence received today.

Kind regards

Billy

On Wednesday, 14 December 2022 at 17:01:16 GMT, Isobel Woods <isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk> wrote:

Sensitivity: PROTECT

Dear Billy

Please find attached a letter in regards to a disturbance payment. Please review and do come back if you have any questions. The time set out in the letter is to ensure I meet the payment run in the council.

Kr
Isobel

Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise
Email: isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Mobile 07866 564932

City of Wolverhampton Council

The emailed letter below was sent to those 5 business of the 11 who demonstrated a loss. This letter clearly demonstrates that Council admitted that businesses demonstrated a works-related financial loss, hence the initial payment of £5000 was given. The balance was never paid.

Please note - Now it is referred to as a disturbance payment.

Email contact: BusinessDevelopment@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Address: Civic Centre, St Peters Square, Wolverhampton WV1 1RP

Contact number: 01902 556879

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Ms Kumar

Equinox Gifted

49 Victoria Street

14 December 2022

Dear Ms Kumar

URGENT AND IMPORTANT: Initial Victoria Street Work Disruption Payment

As confirmed in the meeting with Westside Trader's Group representatives on 5 December, the Council is currently prioritising urgent payments to those businesses who, through the financial health check carried out by independent business advisors, that have clearly demonstrated a works-related financial loss.

This offer is not a legal obligation of the Council and is made as a goodwill and entirely discretionary gesture and does not set any precedent for this or any similar situation. This initial payment will be £5,000.

So we can process this payment quickly, please can you:

- Confirm your acceptance of this offer in writing by email or letter by 12 noon, on Friday 16 December so payment can be made on Monday 19 December directly into your business trading [account](#)
- Provide your business trading account bank details including a) business trading account name b) sort code c) account [number](#)

You will also be aware that council is currently looking to swiftly engage, using a fast-track route, a firm of accountants with significant expertise and experience, to audit the current process and make recommendations to the council and the traders group.

Subject to progress on the current contract negotiations, the council aims to start this contract before Christmas with review work starting before the end of the year.

Given this ongoing review, we want to be clear that accepting this money will not affect your position should the council receive recommendations following the audit.

City of Wolverhampton Council

 wolverhampton.gov.uk

 @WolvesCouncil

 WolverhamptonToday

Sensitivity: PROTECT

Kind regards

Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise

E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk



● **des duggal** <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

Cc: Stephen Simkins, Ian Fegan (he/him), Tim Johnson, Richard Lawrence, steve.evans4@wolverhampton.gov.uk and 1 more...



Tue, 13 Dec 2022 at 21:40 ☆

Good evening,

Apologies for the delay in responding to the meeting held 5th December at the Council Offices.

We request the attached document be looked at as a matter of urgency as the situation is becoming quite dire and requires intervention from decision makers. We have shared this with the Westside Traders Group (WSTG).

Kind Regards

Billy

> [Show original message](#)



5Dec-WSTG... .pdf

See attachment below - WSTG Response:

WSTG minutes to meeting 5th Dec 2022

Commercially Sensitive

Date: 5th December 2022

	Council Attendance	Westside Attendees	Company & Representing Westside Traders Group
Isobel Woods	Attended	Des	XBrand Furniture
John Roseblade	Attended	Billy	Equinox
		Esmea	Tunwells
CC: Tim Johnson	Abstained	Kimberley	Richard & Co Hairdressers
Ian Brookfield	Abstained	Wayne	Framers Gallery
Richard Lawrence	Abstained	Owen	George Wallis
Stephen Simkins	Attended	Andrew	Faith Hope & Charity
Ian Fegan	Attended	Vijay	Native Menswear
Steve Evans	Abstained	Nico (late)	Nimo's
		Bruce	Ill

Cllr Simkins, council members have stated that they want to pay 7 of the business that demonstrated a loss from the health check that was submitted, whilst independent company to review process is being procured. **No Date Was Given by Council!**

Cllr Simkins and members agreed that a caveat will be included to ensure and reflect any **subsequent findings/changings** for those of the businesses that will be paid.

WSTG Subgroup expressed **that they are not happy** with this as it means waiting longer for any financial hardship support, when businesses are already on the brink.

The meeting was scheduled to be held at Equinox on 5th Dec, however due to sensitivity of, what we now understand to be a BBC, Isobel suggested it be moved to Council Offices. **Temperaments of traders are running high** as they see nothing but delaying tactics by a council who is not showing care or concern.

Response to council

1. We are disappointed that a number of council senior representatives **chose not** to attend the meeting.
2. We are disappointed that it has taken Isobel 5 weeks to respond to the clear presentation on the 7th November of issues Westside have encountered with the Health Check. This was an action point that arose from Cllr Simkins meeting October, requesting Isobel, John, Billy, Des & Esmea to understand issues around the health check. Miscommunication and failings came to light.
3. Westside also demonstrated clearly an amicable solution that would resolve the failings of the health check. It was made clear by Cllr Simkins that the understanding of the health check required just the **sales turnover of 2 periods would demonstrate losses as a result of the** and not the full income and expenditure cash flow as businesses were required to provide. It had been raised at the time when Isobel was questioned over how the data collected from businesses would be used.

WSTG minutes to meeting 5th Dec 2022

Commercially Sensitive

4. Following email received from Isobel see below, Cllr Simkins had requested Ian Fagan be actioned to set team up to look at the sales turnover again. Ian has subsequently declined and referred it back to Isobel, to whom we have already demonstrated issues.

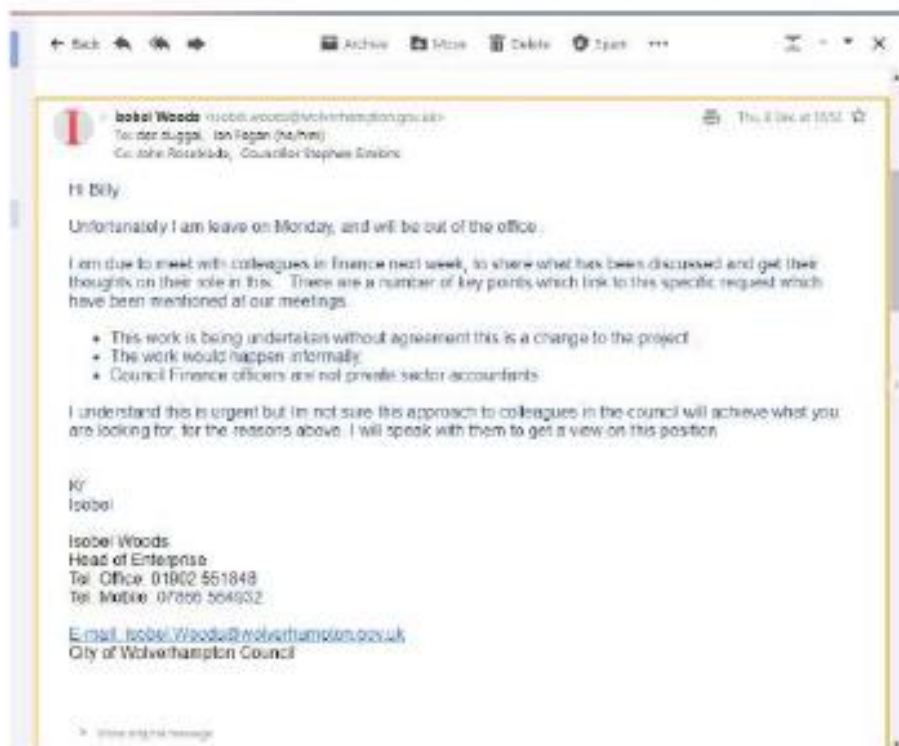
Over 20 businesses have submitted updated information based on new window.

Isobel stated that not all businesses submitted data to her using the same spreadsheet format. Some submitted management accounts showing profit and loss. Hence, she is not wanting to look at this, currently.

Isobel is insisting that the parameters have changed in terms of the window being moved by 3 months and deems it to be a new project, which WSTG disagrees with.

WSTG emphasised the **real data is more relevant** and that factoring still needs to be considered to help businesses and hospitality as covid restrictions were still in place.

Additionally, this easily demonstrates the real losses experienced businesses using the new window, which the council are in denial of.



5. **Cllr Simkins stated that the spreadsheet was never seen by him.** He commented that it should have been based on sales turnover and not income and expenditure cashflow. This clearly demonstrates that the remit of what Sam and his team were to undertake was not clearly specified from the outset, hence a lot of confusion could have been avoided.

Cllr Simkins realised that the turnover should have been kept separate, as merging it with the health check is what's caused the issues. It is the businesses that are bearing the brunt of the mistakes that council are making. They are the ones whose livelihoods are at stake whilst council can write it off as a learning at Westsides expense. This is not acceptable.



Cllr Simkins has asked for a council finance team to address see if there is a possibility to re-use of the spreadsheet template showing the new window as it is clear that there is a lack of understanding of the spreadsheet by senior members.

6. Isobel stated that an independent specialist company has been identified and is looking to be procured by council to review the processes, where failings, mismanagement, miscommunication etc has occurred between council and Westside businesses. Council have stated that they understand the urgency and John Roseblade confirmed it would be fast-tracked. **WSTG are concerned as unnecessary additional expenditure to prove their failings and negligence and further the delays in paying hardship relief.**
7. Isobel stated that Sam still needs to be given an opportunity to respond to issues and concerns raised by WSTG around the health checks.
Isobel needs all comments from Westside traders about the conduct of data collection by Sam and his team. This should be no later than Friday 9th Dec as council need to do an internal contract review. Any issues businesses found must be sent in via email.

WSTG thanks those businesses that have already submitted comments.

8. **Westside have explained sheer disappointment on the failings of Eurovia/Council :**
 1. Not sorting out delivery access for businesses when it should have been done over 2 months ago.
 2. The misuse of space at Bell Square wrt parking vehicles and making the whole space look like a Construction site.
 3. Reduce unnecessary barriers and create accessible walkways with Health and Safety in mind.
 4. Slowness of actually getting work done.
 5. Improved street lighting.
 6. No Xmas lights or lamp posts.
 7. No Christmas activity to generate/drum up trade for Westside.
 8. Westside suggested activities to coincide with an event to consider business trail.

Cllr Simkins stated he would like to meet with senior manager of Eurovia to challenge their lack of care or concern over businesses and urgency of work/ delays/failings and conduct in which works are being carried out.

WSTG requested a date of 19th Dec to get a review. This needs to be confirmed to be Confirmed with council.

9. THE RATIONALE

WSTG strongly suggest data using new window be adopted and payments made accordingly. This is the easiest option to help businesses.

The outcome of the meeting is not acceptable as WSTG see it as further delays. Yes, you have agreed to pay 7 of the businesses. The WSTG suggest council should invest in someone sitting and looking at the data that they already collected and give each business at a minimum, a payment for hardship relief with a freeze of the business rates. Until this inquiry into the failings has been looked at. You cannot expect people to survive on thin air. Why should the councils' failings compromise businesses livelihoods.



WSTG have given the council every opportunity to support businesses and they have not come back with any constructive conducive plan other than an independent company to prove where they went wrong and how to rectify it. Thus, is at the cost of businesses going under. Council accountability is for them to look at. We need someone who understands and can work with the information already supplied. I.e. a finance person.

As businesses we are within our rights to change parameters especially if the process is based on base information that is not totally conducive to the process. Unless you write exactly what has been agreed, you as the council will chose to say what you believe not what we understand and are forced to take on only later to be told we agreed with it.

It is clear right from the outset the remit for health check/data collection has been convoluted and not clearly defined. Council have been selective in how they used or in this cased misused the information.

Over 20 businesses have demonstrated the new window and are appealing. **You as the council have the power to endorse and look at the sales turnover which is what was originally agreed.** It was quite clear that a simple activity has been over complicated for the mere reason that council's opinion showed some flaws in how businesses functioned. E.g. lacking proper accounts, marketing strategies. Independent businesses are not limited companies, that does not mean they should be treated differently. The health check was mis-sold to the business traders another reason why all these problems occurred.

We have traceability of our records; a lot of the council traceability is verbal words.

Businesses have proved losses. The council needs to stop changing the goal post because they don't want to pay businesses.

WSTG stated - Some sort of interim gesture needs to be given this side of Christmas especially where established businesses can show losses through vat returns or other means as they all take into consideration sales turnover. It is the simplest and most efficient way of dealing with the catastrophe occurring in westside and blighting the city as a whole.

WSTG attended the Wolverhampton Business Forum 8th December at the "Meet the Mayor Andy Street" the question asked of Andy Street was...

"When capital programs are instigated by Councils, what consideration and accountability is there to ensure the correct necessary steps are taken to enable existing businesses to operate with minimal disruption. What consideration, contingency plans/ financial support is there for those businesses that are severely affected by the improvements such as roadworks"

Andy Street stated that there is an agreed PUBLIC POLICY where compensation is available in such circumstances. WHY HAS THE COUNCIL NOT MADE THIS AVAILABLE?

Furthermore, WSTG were unaware of the sheer support from other businesses around the city and neighbouring towns such as Wednesfield. Many issues were raised with respect to the Wolverhampton city centre works.



WSTG minutes to meeting 5th Dec 2022

Commercially Sensitive

We are appealing for immediate action on: -

1. Based on sales turnover use new comparative window and make payment to businesses who have demonstrated loss with appropriate caveat for review pending independent company review of whole process. This needs to be done by next week 20th with pay-outs before Christmas. I.e. 19th Dec.
2. Incorporate some level of factoring based on govt guidelines during covid recovery in respect to operation functionality of businesses.
3. The urgency for fast tracking the new window is at no additional expense to the council. Westside are available to clarify this.
4. Provide a hardship package or relief for those that haven't qualified but have suffered.
5. Freeze business rates and backdate from at a minimum Jan 22- Mar 23.
6. For transparency, we need to understand the brief that is going to be given to independent company. Again, learning from SCA management procurement.
7. Full disclosure of communication to business traders needs to come from council issuing statements of what they deem should be communicated to businesses from their perspective as Westside integrity is being questioned because of misconstruing/ misunderstanding information delivery.

Isobel stated that all communication to traders' group is to be copied to council to avoid misunderstandings of information. This is to minimise businesses directly contacting council outside of subgroup and to ensure there is no confusion with both parties being on the same page.



Isobel Woods <isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
To: des duggal, John Roseblade
Cc: Councillor Stephen Simkins, Ian Fegan (he/him), Tim Johnson, Richard Lawrence, Councillor Steve Evans, Labour Leaders Office Hide

Thu, 1 Dec 2022 at 16:55 ☆

Dear Des and Billy

We were looking to come back on the points raised in your email 27 November, at the meeting which has been arranged for the 5 December.

In regards to meeting at Equinox, please leave this with me to speak to colleagues to confirm who will be attending and to share your invitation to host the meeting.

I will come back to you with details of who will be joining myself and John

Kr
Isobel

Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise
Tel. Office: 01902 551848
Tel. Mobile: 07866 564932

[E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk)
City of Wolverhampton Council

Re: Date Change to 5th December 2022 8

Yahoo/Inbox ☆



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>
To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade
Cc: Stephen Simkins, Ian Fegan (he/him), Tim Johnson, Richard Lawrence, steve.evans4@wolverhampton.gov.uk, labourleadersoffice@wolverhampton.gov.uk Hide
Bcc: des duggal

Sun, 27 Nov 2022 at 23:51 ☆

Hi Isobel, John,

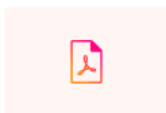
To maintain transparency, we have shared your recent emails with traders together with our responses thus far.

Following the above, Westside Businesses, have responded with anger on what they see as delays amongst other things.

We attach a response on behalf of the Westside Business which has been agreed by the traders of Westside businesses,

We look forward to a response on or before the 5th September

Regards.
Amardeep Kumar



Isobel-Date... .pdf
96 KiB

The attached document below:



Date: 24th November 2022

To Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

Cc: Stephen Simkins, Steve Evans, Tim Johnson, Richard Lawrence, Ian Fegan, Ian Brookfield

Re: Date Change to 5th December

It was extremely disappointing that you asked for monthly meeting to be rescheduled to the end of month. This was to allow you more time to give Westside businesses an answer with respect to the review process based on the issues raised during the presentation Esme, Des and I gave on 7th November. You are now suggesting another week to 5th December, giving you a month, which traders are not happy about. Traders see the lack of the review process not being revealed as delaying tactics.

Some businesses now wish to take it to the opposition for existing/generating public support and press to demonstrate what Mr Evans said publicly on the news regarding support for businesses as not forthcoming.

Westside has been providing evidence since March 2022 when assurances and promises were made in front of 9 councillors, MP and BID team.

With the health check we have proven categorically there have been data errors/failures in the process. By your own admission this data was not audited.

Businesses have all agreed that now we have the real relevant data, with businesses showing additional 3 months-this gives the real picture of the losses incurred and how the growth has been stunted. If the council do not recognise the plight of the businesses now than they are clearly giving false impression to what they deem as "supporting businesses".

Westside are using the health check spreadsheet, with the new window of Apr21-Dec21 in comparison to realistic window of works Jan22-Sep22, which is real data/evidence. Pertaining to your deadline for businesses to appeal the outcome of the health check, business have exercised their right to appeal and evidence accordingly.

Businesses have already scrutinized the validity of the health check and its unfairness for all businesses. Hence suggestion of factoring especially in first 5 months during Apr21-Sep21 where businesses were not fully operational due to Covid restrictions.

Collectively, we are not prepared to waste any more time in discussion. We want clear answers and action.

ALL BUSINESSES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED HOW MUCH MORE TIME AND EVIDENCE IS NEEDED. 8 Months have lapsed, with no support or hardship relief.

ALL NON-ESSENTIAL & HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES HAVE AND ARE STILL BEING AFFECTED. They need to be given hardship relief for this now. Some businesses have already closed down! Others on the brink!

Westside were dangled the carrot that an Xmas event would be held in area as works were going positively, aim was to drum up business for Westside-that never happened. Instead, the last 2 weeks preceding and the Saturday of the light switch on were the worst trading days as Westside was cut off again!



Date: 24th November 2022

There is nothing to show there are businesses down Westside. Xmas lights end at the top of Victoria St. How can businesses survive on earning £3, £25 and less as a day's trading.

This now needs to escalate to Tim Johnson and Ian Brookfield for an audience with businesses for a decision.

Businesses are waiting to go to the press, social media and even address with Andy Street at the next Wolverhampton Business Forum & to Economic Growth team which is fully supported by Sham Sharma and Henry Carver.

As a subgroup we have communicated and have been trying to contain working with council in a positive way. We have been very patient.

IT IS TIME THAT THE COUNCIL LEVELS UP WITH WESTSIDE BUSINESSES.

This is for not only those who have clearly demonstrated losses in the realistic new window but all businesses who have **suffered inconvenience and stunted growth** for time period of Phase 1 i.e. Nov2021 - Feb2023. **THE IMPACT OF ROADWORKS DOES NOT END WITH ROADWORKS COMPLETING!**

Westside presented a possible factoring solution as not all businesses were fully operational and it represented a fairness and reality. The health check revealed 11 businesses demonstrated loss in initial window set, when in fact there were many more and the loss was not based on realistic window.

There is a final opportunity for the Council to make good of their failings for which businesses of Westside have suffered long enough and those that survive will continue to suffer until phase 1 completes Feb 2023.

The impact of subsequent phases will have to be assessed when that arises. Be under no illusion that there will be further evidenced losses.

We look forward to an urgent response/settlement.

At the last monthly meeting held in October, Mr Simkins made it clear that the "council are waiting to pay out." Westside businesses have demonstrated realistic window for continued losses being experienced. It is time for the Council to pay out.

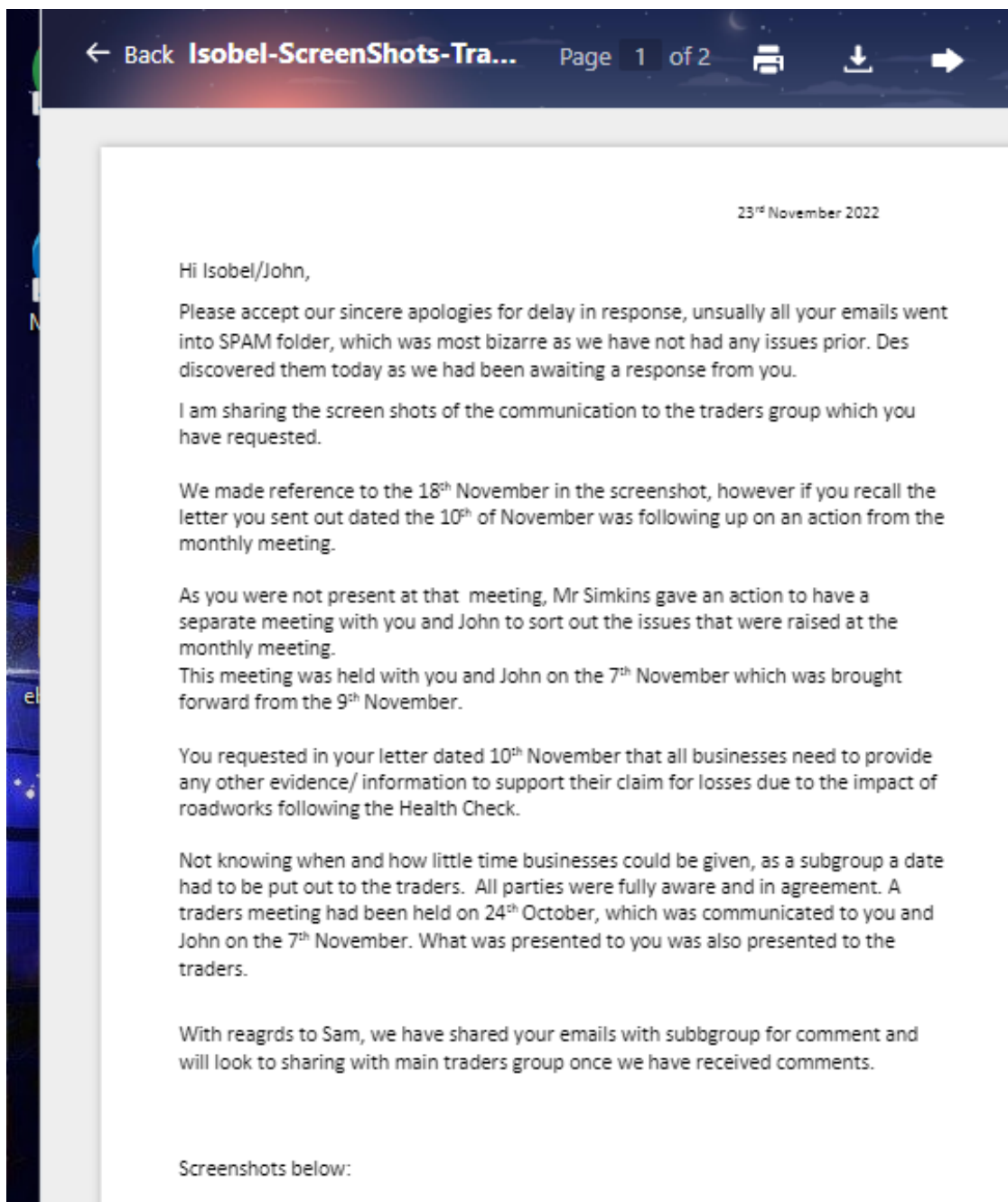
Apologies for the real honesty of the response. Westside have had enough of the area being continuously blighted for over 10 years. This last year could be the nail in the coffin for many businesses and the council. Please rectify the gross injustice to the businesses of Westside.

This response has been collated from the views of Westside businesses which have been shared as a true reflection of the situation that is being faced.

Kind regards

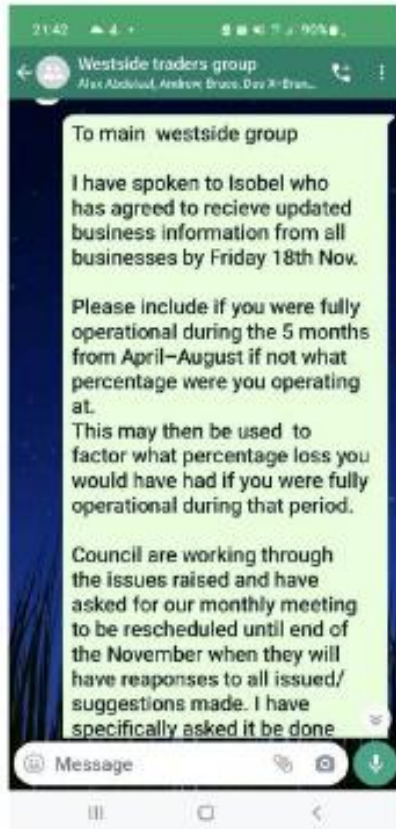
Billy & Des on behalf of Westside businesses

We were requested to copy Isobel into any communication we were sending out to traders to maintain transparency. Pity it wasn't both ways.





23rd November 2022



Kind Regards,

Des & Billy



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>
To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade



Tue, 15 Nov 2022 at 11:35 ☆

Hi Isobel,

Further to our conversation yesterday, information has been relayed to Westside Businesses.

Kind Regards

Billy

Isobel_MobConversation14Nov22.... Page 1 of 2



To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

Date: 14th November 2022

Thank you for your message today and quick update that you and John have been reviewing the information and presentation we shared 7th November. I understand that you require more time to respond to the areas highlighted and concerns raised regarding the processes and quality of data collected by advisors.

This was put to the subgroup, and we concur that the monthly scheduled meeting for tomorrow 15th November can be rescheduled as per your request to end of this month as you have no further update for Westside as yet.

However, as per our conversation I wanted to reiterate that this delay does concern us and will not be received well by Westside businesses as you can appreciate, they are even more worried about further delays in resolving the hardship that businesses face. Especially as what was scheduled to drum up Xmas trade for businesses of Westside will not be happening. In fact, from last monthly meeting nothing really will be scheduled for the new event space until Spring/Summer 2023. Works are not expected to complete until February 2023. The updated financial figures are for losses experienced up and until September 2022 and do not cater for potential losses going forwards until February 2023 and impact of any other subsequent phases.

You have agreed to receive updated financial information with new window from businesses, who have been advised to send it to you directly. This is also to save time and also to give you additional 3 months figures demonstrating a more realistic view of losses. We would like the next meeting to be held before the Cabinet meeting, by which time you would have concluded your review with consideration to the updated information businesses have provided you. We do not want further delays. We entrust that you have understood the scale of the situation businesses face. We look forward to you confirming the date within the next few days.

On a separate note, following Councillor Steve Evans interview on Central News 9th November, this has raised even more concerns to Westside businesses. He stated that **"all businesses will be supported provided they can evidence it"**. We have provided so much evidence, yet still have no conclusion. Even businesses in North Street have been suffering. This clearly iterates the problems only gives more evidence to facts.

He suggested that **"contractor and council have been meeting with businesses and keeping regular contact"**. This is not strictly true as we had to approach council as a collective for them to take notice of the issues that Westside faced. The issues were first raised back in March, and it has been almost 8 months, and nothing has transpired in terms of reimbursement of losses suffered by businesses. He also made reference to **"grants being available to businesses through independent business manager"**. Please can you clarify this?

This is quite condemning as the conclusion and impression given was summed up as *short-term pain is paving the way for a prosperous future!*

Westside has been suffering for almost a year, with the loss of some businesses and others on the brink, Westside needs the council to act immediately and for Tim Johnson to support businesses as it's the consequence of their actions that has affected the livelihoods of businesses. There has been repeated failings from the council's perspective and we are asking for direct decisions to be made by the next meeting for a fair and just outcome.

I can only re-iterate that even though we have been working with the council team including yourselves, it is fair to say that we are under a lot of pressure from the press to comment on our predicament and the situation in relation to the council. Whilst we are trying to contain this, if we cannot reach conclusion on recognition and reimbursement of business losses, we cannot restrain beyond the next meeting businesses freedom to express themselves. This further negative press will not benefit the regeneration program which we are sure that Tim Johnson and the council will not want.

We are trying to work with the council. We need a positive outcome from all of this and time is off the essence literally.

Kind Regards

Billy on behalf Des and Westside Businesses



To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

Date: 7th November 2022

Thank you for bringing forward meeting from 9th November to today.

Following presentation/discussion by myself, Des and Esme on behalf of Westside trader's groups concerns regarding the process and outcome of health check. We have shared the surveys and concerns which we feel have shown the failings/flaws of the lack of a cohesive process. We understand that you and John will come back after reviewing the information given as a matter of urgency.

You have asked me to email what has been communicated to traders to what we feel could be a good compromise to move forward for consideration.

We are requesting the current window be reviewed for comparable percentage losses/gains by businesses as we are now in a position to do this.

We suggest that the comparable time window reflected in the health check spreadsheet be reflective of the time window showing realistic time of roadworks. It was agreed with some preparatory work being done during November/December actual works commenced in earnest Jan 2022.

Following meeting of 18th October at council offices, a traders meeting was held 24th October where a general consensus to have a time period reflective of works was communicated to traders and agreed upon. 2 windows were considered, and you have stated today that the time window of Jan 2019 – Sep 2019 is unacceptable and not a viable option to consider.

We outline below what would pertain to giving businesses confidence in the council and restore trust in moving forward to other phases considering Phase 1 doesn't complete until February 2023.

1. Traders were asked to collect data for period **July, August, September 2022**. As we are now in a position to do this, and **it is a truer reflection of the situation**. We therefore request the windows for turnover comparison be :-

Apr 2021 - Dec 2021 compared to Jan 2022 - Sep 2022

2. Businesses can provide the additional 3 months (July-Sep22) via an updated spreadsheet.
3. As businesses were still not functioning at 100% capacity due to covid restrictions still in place. Restrictions lifted around July (see attached lockdown timeline) As customer confidence was not restored until August/ September which is 5 months of 2021 businesses reopening. **We are suggesting that a factoring exercise be proposed** – i.e. apply a factor to increase sales for period April-December 2021 by either:-



- a. Sector based using statistics for retail/ hospitality
 - b. Using the government timeline take an average - e.g. 30%-40% across the board and apply to all business turnover for April-December 2021 (inclusive of new businesses). Council are asking for "Invest in Wolverhampton", which also means business retention. That's why new businesses cannot be ignored.
 - c. Take an average of sales revenue of last 6 months of 2021 (i.e. July-December 2021) and multiply by 9 to give you what it should have been.
4. From applying the above 3 steps deducting Jan22-Sept22 figures will realise a truer percentage loss of turnover. This is fair and justifiable as: -
- a. This does not take into consideration potential losses expected until roadworks complete for Phase 1 – February 2023. It would be easy to take a statistical view to show continued projected losses that will be experienced by businesses because of the roadworks. The residual losses will linger outside of the period being considered here. How will this be reviewed?
 - b. The campaign to do events and activities to drive footfall to Westside are not expected to happen until possibly April/June 2023. Initially we were told event possibly commencing December 2022.

This would certainly be more representative of the real picture of the impact of roadworks and the council can use this data for potential impact that can be caused by Phase 2 and Phase 3, thus helping with planning.

This is about longevity of businesses of Westside going forward and also return of investment of council in providing and ensuring businesses are there to serve community.

Meeting held 7th Nov 22 with John Roseblade and Isobel Woods and Westside representatives : Des Duggal, Billy Kumar & Esme Stackhouse.

Westside provided yet again the solution to move forward with a window change which because of delays by council would use REALISTIC data and time frames.



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>
To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade



Mon, 7 Nov 2022 at 23:47 ☆

Hi John/Isobel

please find as agreed electronic version of information given out in printed form at this evenings meeting.

With regards to data included in Esme's data collection attached below. As it contains confidential information we won't be circulating this on the main traders. All other information will be.

I will send other points tomorrow.

thanks again for today.

Billy

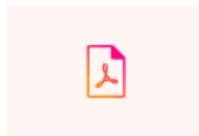
[Download all attachments as a zip file](#)



Followup-B... .pdf
235.3kB



timeline-co... .png
1001.6kB



Presentation....pdf
1.1MB



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>
To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade



Tue, 1 Nov 2022 at 12:55 ☆

Hi Isobel, John

Des has had a short conversation with Mr Simkins who will be contacting you to arrange a meeting with yourself, John Roseblade, Des, myself and Esme. If we can arrange this urgently this week because of the timescales to clarify Westside situation in respect of the findings from the FINANCIAL HEALTH CHECK. Mr Simkins said that it has to be sorted out so payments can be made by end of November.

I have attached a short survey undertaken for you to peruse and also we will send you additional information later today as to the major concerns and findings.

We appreciate that this needs to be addressed and are happy to meet anytime Thursday.

Kind Regards

Billy



Westside Bu... .pdf
1.2MB

Westside: Financial Impact of Roadworks on Businesses Survey 2022

31 October 2022
Prepared by: Nico Chitsa

The above slideshow has been circulated to all Cabinet members and Scrutiny panel as enclosure

1st Nov 22

To Isobel / John Roseblade/ Steve Simkins

Following receipt of your letter dated 26th October.

Following traders meeting, businesses are extremely unhappy and whilst as a subgroup we are trying to reach an amicable compromise, we may not be able to contain this if businesses plight is not being recognised in a fair and just way. We have had opportunity with businesses to look at the how the calculations may have been derived for independent business and we are satisfied that it has raised alarm bells and could break the trust between council and Westside. We are still questioning independent business advisors who carried out a 'Health Checks' as **We are of the impression that Sam and his team were not independent. There has been no transparency on the selection of advisers and formulae used to ascertain health check result as we have been repeatedly requesting over the months. We have discovered major discrepancies!**

In reference to your 4th paragraph - the time window. At the time the council and advisors proposed a 9month window. Businesses were requested to complete a cashflow statement template for the period January – September 2021, and for October 2021 – June 2022. You state "(from when the works started until the business advisor visit)". The roadworks did not start until end of Nov 21 with Jan 2022 when disruptions started. **At the time the two periods were relevant and road works were in progress. Because of the delays, this window should be changed to make it more realistic of what the traders have been facing otherwise the integrity of the data is disputed wholly.**

In reference to your 5th paragraph. Businesses received a letter on 14 October with the outcome of the cashflow comparison between these periods. **Majority of businesses have rejected this as there was no explanation. Discrepancies and flaws in the data handling. Inclusion / exclusion of Covid grants. Inclusion of Web sales even though it is the high St sales only as stated by Mr Simkins at the last meeting – 18th Oct. We have evidence to show this.**

Some traders handed in manual sheets to Sam with no feedback or copy of them being returned.
No follow-ups on findings, therefore no business support given to assist businesses.
Time spent at each business ranged from 30 minutes to 2hrs. Budgeted time was up to 4hrs.
We have recorded the times.

In reference to your 6th paragraph. If a business has been able to demonstrate a reduction in the cashflow between the two periods, they would be able to access a council support payment.

We require the window to be shifted as the data DOES NOT reflect the true reality of the impact. Council have failed to understand or show any compassion to what they only see as black and white. This is a gross injustice for Westside again because of the council negligence of not involving businesses in the consultation process.

Concerns with the validity of the data collected were aired at meeting 18th October. The erroneous calculations have given rise to discrediting the outcome of some of the data. No consistent formula used. The fairness of all businesses being disrupted was discussed. Based on this it was proposed and agreed at the meeting by Mr Simkins that we would come back with what would be a compromise to move forward. The window currently used reflects a total disregard for businesses being affected.

Following traders meeting held 24th October, views were aired at the meeting which primarily agree that the window of comparison should be reviewed. There is very little work to be done for businesses to provide this as the spreadsheet Sam and his team have used can be reused.

Conclusion

The objective of the exercise was to ascertain businesses losses due to impact of roadworks and also the disruption caused by said works which has had major impact on business survivability.

Current window is not a true reflection and is unfair to the businesses.

Jan 2021 - Sep 2021 compared to Oct 2021 – Jun2022

- We strongly feel that roadworks have stunted growth of businesses at a time of Covid recovery
- Most businesses were not operating at 100% due to restrictions still in place. There is a need to have a factor for retail and for hospitality to show what their sales would be when functioning at 100 percent. Determining an agreed percentage amount across the board or by sector eg 25% for retail and 40% for hospitality. If this is going to be a true assessment then it should be added to sales figure for 2021. This would give the businesses the trust in the outcome of the exercise being fair. Yes, it would show more businesses potentially showing a loss particularly where they have shown to make a profit when clearly the majority of businesses haven't. See attached lockdown measure March 2020-December 2021
- Lack of fairness in assessment of loss Hospitality/Retail. Not clear what calculations were used as there are discrepancies shown across different businesses. Who validated Sam's figures?
- Relevant supporting information should be considered for new and existing businesses inclusive of projections etc.
- Business frontages were affected by roadworks since Jan 22 therefore the correct window should be used.
- Disruption will continue and expected until projected completion date of Feb 2023
- Further Phases will add to disruption
- Support via Business Rate Relief Jan 2022 – Mar 2023 for all affected businesses: -
 - Suggested 100% during Jan2022-Mar2023 to backdated and refunded.
 - Reduce by 25% Apr2023- Mar2024 to ensure business stability.

With all the concerns raised in particular to the use of the data collected we have considered a realistic true comparison window council should consider to be either:-

1. Jan 2019 - Sep 2019 compared to Jan 2022 - Sep 2022
2. Apr 2021 - Dec 2021 compared to Jan 2022 - Sep 2022

Currently, we have the data and businesses are able to provide the additional 3 months (July-Sep22) via an updated spreadsheet.

If using the above factoring exercise proposed - we then apply a factor to increase sales by either 25% retail 40% hospitality or we take an average of sales revenue of last 6 months of 2021 and x 9 to give what it should have been. This is because customer confidence was not restored until August September which is 5 months of 2021 businesses reopening.

Then deduct Jan22-Sept22 figures to arrive at a truer percentage loss.

This can be done easily based on figures already supplied with the addition of businesses supplying July, August & September 2022 figures. This would certainly be more representative of the real picture of the impact of roadworks and the council can use this data for potential impact that can be caused by Phase 2 and Phase 3, thus helping with planning.

At the last meeting held 18th October at council offices slide show reference Bilston works:-

Support package announced by the West Midlands Combined Authority for businesses affected by Metro works

The initiative will be specifically targeted towards businesses who have frontages directly affected by construction along the new routes. the scheme is designed to support businesses during periods of unavoidable disruption.

Alongside this sits a commitment for the Midland Metro Alliance to work with individual businesses and local business groups to boost 'business as usual' messages in defined local areas to minimise any disruption impacts and to support initiatives to increase business activity during the works.

WIDER SUPPORT:

There are several forms of rate relief available to businesses affected by the works including National Hardship Relief and other discretionary schemes.

- With reference to the above the council has not promoted business as usual or made reference to any National Hardship Relief or discretionary schemes.

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
C O U N C I L

Email contact: BusinessDevelopment@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Address: Civic Centre, St Peters Square, Wolverhampton WV1 1RP

Contact number: 01902 556879

26 October 2022

PRIVATE and CONFIDENTIAL

Mr Kumar
Equinox Gifted Thoughts Ltd
49 Victoria Street
Wolverhampton
WV1 3PJ

Business Health Check

Dear Mr Kumar,

Following the meeting between the Council and the Traders group for Westside on 18 October, I am writing to make a final request for any additional financial information you would like to include in the 'Business Health Check' that took place earlier this year.

As you are aware, it was agreed at a meeting between the Council and Traders group for Westside on 9 May that an independent business advisor would be appointed to carry out a 'Health Check' for businesses, examining financial details to understand any impact had by the Public Realm works.

At the meeting between the Council and traders on 16 June, it was agreed that the independent business advisor would compare the cashflow of businesses between two periods to determine any financial impact.

It was agreed businesses would complete a cashflow statement template for the period January – September 2021, and for October 2021 – June 2022 (from when the works started until the business advisor visit).

Businesses received a letter on 14 October with the outcome of the cashflow comparison between these periods.

If a business has been able to demonstrate a reduction in the cashflow between the two periods, they would be able to access a council support payment.

Following the outcome of the assessment, we are giving businesses a final opportunity to add any further financial information that may impact the assessment. Please ensure this is verified financial information and includes details of your business and a short statement saying how the additional information relates to the financial records already shared.

City of Wolverhampton Council

 wolverhampton.gov.uk

 @WolvesCouncil

 WolverhamptonToday

Sensitivity: PROTECT

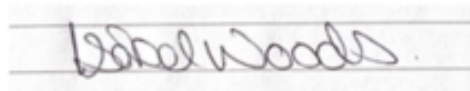
This information must be received by Thursday 10 November by 12:00pm. Any information received after this date cannot be considered.

This is the final opportunity to present to the council, verified financial information to be considered regarding the impact of the improvement works on and near to Victoria Street.

Please send the information to Isobel Woods, Head of Enterprise and **mark the email or envelope - Westside Traders, FOA Isobel Woods.**

The email address is: - Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Kind regards,



Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise

E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk
City of Wolverhampton Council

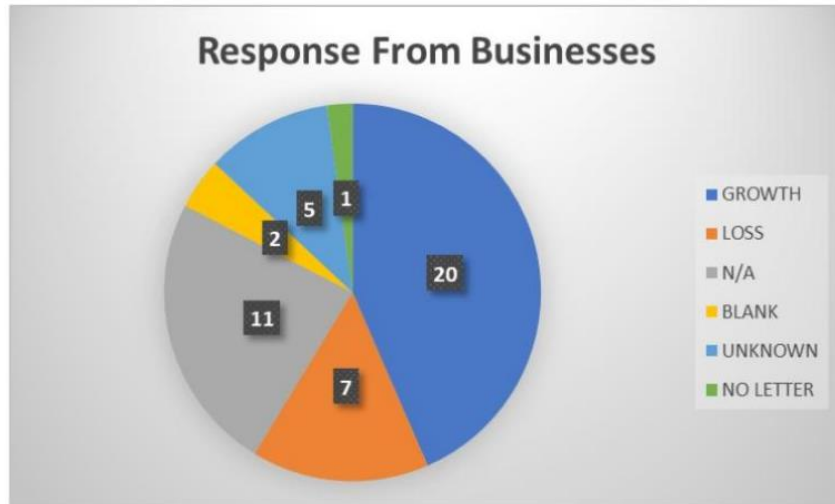
Letters received by businesses dated 14th October 2022 giving outcome of financial health check for the comparative windows.

Above letter sent to John and Isobel together with a powerpoint showing our own interviews.

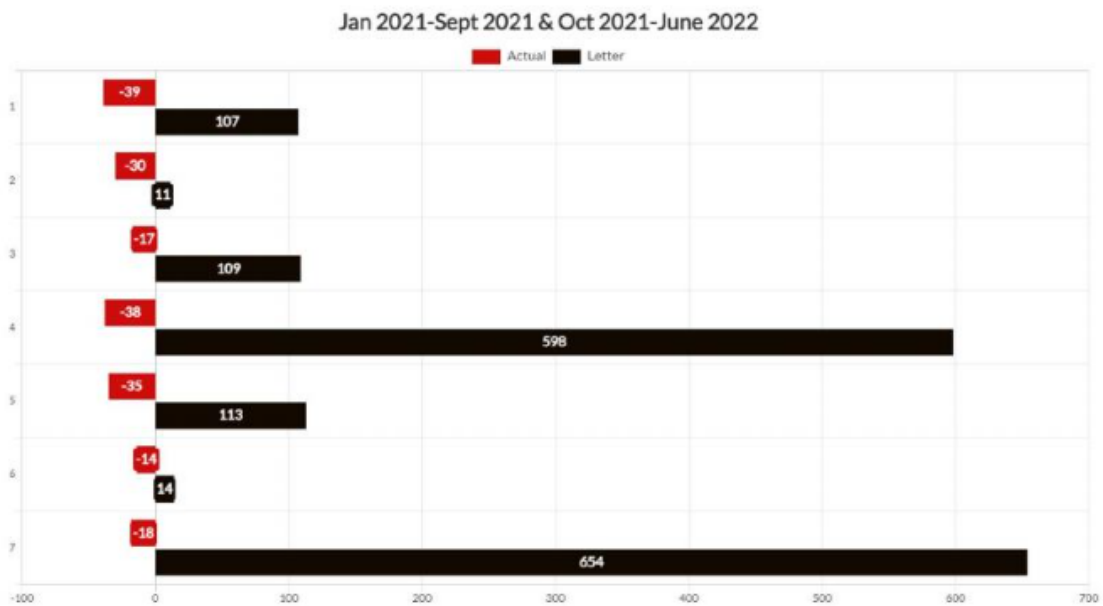
Please Note that we had suggested above similar thing to that what RSM have suggested. In addition we propped a solution which would demonstrate realistic losses of businesses based on actual data. It transpired that isobel admitted that the spreadsheet had not gone through their own auditing process, which is why Westside discovered errors which were corrected in the spreadsheet. It was agreed at the meeting that businesses who have used the new window have done so as a way to save time in further delays. You agreed to receive this whilst you review our findings and suggestions.

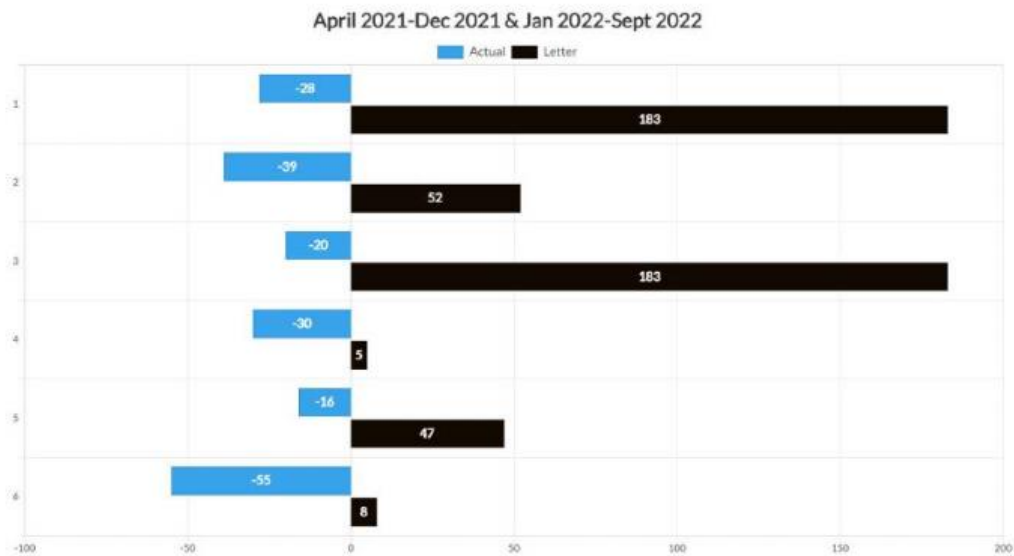
The information below was presented to John Roseblade and Isobel Woods at a council offices following a request by Councillor Simkins to listen and what the issues were regarding the spreadsheet template and the windows. WSTG also stated that because of the delays and the fact that we had REALISTIC data, this should be used and would show realistic view of the impact of works on businesses.

After receiving feedback from the council on 14th October 2022, many business owners were shocked and distressed at the findings. As a result, the subgroup carried out interviews with 46 businesses out of the 52 who took part in assessments.



Of the 20 businesses that showed a growth percentage, 13 calculated losses based on their accounts.
*Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole





Mr Simkins suggested a meeting with some of the subgroup members following 18th Oct meeting.

Meeting Request

Yahoo/Sent ☆



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>
To: Stephen Simkins, John Roseblade, Isobel Woods

🖨️ Fri, 28 Oct 2022 at 19:27 ☆

Dear Councillor Simkins

I am email to request a meeting for Tuesday 2nd November 2022

This is from your suggestion of a meeting with me and Billy from the meeting we held on the 18th October 2022

I would like to include Owen and Esme at this meeting from the subgroup.

Purpose of this request would be to move forward in this process.

From your team we would appreciate if John Roseblade & Isobel Woods can be present.

Thank you

Kind Regards
Des & Billy
WestSide Traders Group.

Slides taken from 18th October 2022 council powerpoint presentation to traders.

Agenda and purpose of meeting...

1. Listen to concerns and develop solutions
2. Progress agreed actions and address the following issues set out by traders including:
 - Financial hardship/loss relief
 - Business rates relief / *ongoing business support possibilities*
 - Plans for all works
 - BID payments relief
 - Two-three-year plan for returning footfall to normal
 - Social media to boost presence
 - Regular monthly meetings for updates
4. Any other business?
- 5. Date and time of next meeting: Weds 15 November at 5.30pm

wolverhampton.gov.uk

Not Distinctly Marked

Financial hardship/loss relief/business rates relief...

- Outcome letters distributed to all businesses involved in the financial review
- 11 out of 52 businesses evidenced financial loss
- Business advisor recommissioned to support those businesses to claim financial hardship/loss payments
- Scheme will be based on precedent
- Bilston Rd: traders demonstrating loss received significant % of lost gross profit up to a capped amount
- Aim will be to work with businesses asap to complete review and secure payment
- Traders demonstrating loss will also be able to apply for Business Rates Relief and financial advisor will be able to support through process

wolverhampton.gov.uk

Even the 11 businesses that evidenced loss were never paid out the full amount. Only 5k was given to only 5 businesses. The balance of the evidenced loss was not paid and is still due.



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>
To: John Roseblade

Sat, 15 Oct 2022 at 11:07 ☆

Hi John

I just wanted to point out that your email response dated 13th October was only received around 2.15 pm on 14th October. Both Des and I had repeatedly checked numerous times separately. It was only around 2.15pm on the 14th October, when your email had arrived, which was very strange, we can only assume a delay on councils own intra-system. This is why Des had tried to contact you wrt to what you had said quoted below

"Apologies – a letter is currently being drafted and a response will be with you tomorrow. If it helps in the interim I can give you a call to talk you through it."

Following this around 3pm is when Isobel walked into Equinox to hand deliver a letter, just one of many she had in her hand - personally delivering them to business traders.

Business traders are extremely distressed, angry and upset and have called a traders meeting for Monday 17th October at 7pm. We request that yourself and the council team attend and talk through the letter so all business traders can understand.

All that can be said is that there are a lot of mixed emotions.

Kind Regards

Billy

> [Show original message](#)

After 7 days the following email was sent.



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>
To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade
Cc: Marianne Page, Stephen Simkins, Richard Lawrence, Tim Johnson, Cherry Shine and 1 more...

Thu, 13 Oct 2022 at 12:12 ☆

Dear All,

Further to our email sent 4th October, we as a subgroup of Westside traders, are extremely disappointed that we **have not had any acknowledgement whatsoever of the email sent from any of the recipients on the list.**

We have been requested by the Westside traders that should a response not be received by Friday 14th October **all business traders request to be present at the next meeting on the 18th Oct to which you all will be expected to attend and address the Westside traders as Council representatives working for the community of Wolverhampton and Businesses.**

Kind Regards

Billy & Des on behalf of Westside subgroup & Westside Traders



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

To: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

Cc: Marianne Page, Stephen Simkins, Richard Lawrence, Tim Johnson, Cherry Shine, Ian Fegan (he/him) Hide

For Attn of

Isobel Woods, John Roseblade

CC: Steven Simkins,
Richard Lawrence
Tim Johnson
Ian Fegan
Cherry Shine

We have attached a response to Isobel's letter and request the points raised in the document be addressed by all relevant parties above as it expresses the disappointment & council failings impacting the Westside Businesses.

We kindly request that it be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Kind Regards

Billy on and behalf of Des & Westside
Find attached Response & Appendix 1

> [Show original message](#)

[Download all attachments as a zip file](#)



Victoria Roa... .pdf
168.5kB



Appendix 1-l....pdf
97.5kB

To Isobel / John Roseblade/ Steve Simkins

~~Victoria Road~~ Improvement works Business Health check: My Thai Plza Café

It is Victoria St.

Dear Mr/s..

I am writing to share with you the outcome of the recent Business Health Check that was carried out by a team of independent advisors during July and August 2022.

Working with the Westside Trader Business Group, the council commissioned a team of independent business advisors to visit your business to offer advice and support, and to seek to understand if there has been any financial impact from the current improvement works, underway on Victoria Street.

For the record, these advisors already work with the council in various capacities and are not totally independent as their bias would be towards the party who is employing them i.e. the council. The different approaches adopted by the accountants gave Westside businesses cause for concern. See earlier response sent to Isobel – attached Appendix 1

During the meeting with the advisor, you provided some financial information documents to show your trading position during a 9-month period from when the works started and the previous 9 months. This has been analysed to understand if there has been a loss to the business arising from the works. Consideration has also been given to the challenges businesses have faced throughout this period as a result of covid restrictions, and the business support grants that were available during this time. This has raised the following concerns :

1. How exactly has the consideration been factored into the financial information provided by the businesses. The context in which the information gleamed has been used needs to be clearly understood by businesses.
2. Businesses were made to believe that support grants given during covid periods would not be considered during the health check, yet this implies that businesses have already received grants which moves away from the issue of the impact of the roadworks.

This approach had been shaped and agreed with the Traders group, and Wolverhampton City Council. The outcome of this work would not be open to appeal.

We as the Westside Traders group, are in agreement that we cannot make decisions for individual businesses. Please see earlier response in Appendix 1

From the information provided, the position for your business for these periods is as follows

Business	Turnover for the period Jan - Sep 21	Turnover for the period Oct 21 - Jun 22	Percentage difference between the two period

Next Steps

For those businesses that have demonstrated 'evidence of loss', the council will fund the team of business advisors to do follow up visits to support them.

What is clear here is that the council are quite prepared to spend excessive amounts on the advisers. Points for consideration: -

1. This statement can be read as being quite demeaning, in that, those that demonstrated loss need help to run their businesses more efficiently, which is not the primary reason for the loss.
2. No clear findings have been identified, in which areas businesses could benefit from advisers help, should they wish to.

The council will also be looking to fund and extend the offer of tailored business support and advice to all those businesses in the area. This could help with current business practises and support business planning to prepare for activity arising from the events programme when the works are completed.

It seems the council are willing to fund and extend tailored business support without identifying areas where they feel businesses are currently lacking! As this is the implication here.

A new events programme, funded by the council, is also being prepared, working with the Traders group that will encourage footfall to this area of the city centre. This will kick off in November with a new Christmas event running along Victoria Street

Following on from monthly meetings Digbeth dining club has been mentioned, however, there has been no indication of exactly what is being suggested.

Thank you for your cooperation and for engaging with this process. Information on these next steps will be coming out soon.

Kind regards

Head of enterprise

URGENT

In addition to the annotated points above, we ask for your attention and response to:

Following a meeting with the Westside Subgroup last week, we are taking this opportunity to raise our disappointment with the letter sent by Isobel. Here are specific concerns that we feel the council need to take into account and address: -

1. Re-drafting the letter to give all 52 Westside businesses identified, the **reassurance** they need and deserve with the council acknowledging the potential disruption payment, following the hardship that has been faced by them on a daily basis since commencement of roadworks.

- a. The council should show some empathy to businesses in sharing the approach they are taking to assist and support businesses with respect to the disruption.
 - b. Clear guidelines on how this process will relate/interface to the business rates
 - c. Failure to readdress this will cause an uproar with the businesses as their patience is wearing thin as we head into the last business quarter of this year.
 - d. More businesses closing. i.e. The New Spice
 - e. Timely response is imperative, all stops should be pulled out.
2. Appeals must be allowed, as concerns raised by traders with SCA with respect to: -
- a. How the data was collected by the individuals – as different formats/interviewing techniques were used.
 - b. How the data was used to ascertain percentage loss.
 - c. Clarification/consideration of factors affecting the figures recorded. i.e., How was any supporting information used.
 - d. Many businesses would have adapted to the difficulties being faced - e.g., working longer hours thus making the data collected not be a true representation of the impact on the business.
3. Response time to conclude this needs to be clearly identified.
4. We have serious concerns regarding the Independent Advisors SCA Management Consulting and their approach and the manner in which they "conduct" their work.
- a. Will they be the Advisors for the 'business support'?
 - b. How many other projects has SCA successfully tendered with the council OR other projects that they have worked on with Wolverhampton City Council.
 - c. We need assurance that their work was independent and not showing bias now and going forwards.
5. Express & Star – the truth "the plan was always the plan" City Centre West.

Council know they have failed Westside again! - a reminder of Summer Row, this is damage limitation. The press article clearly demonstrates that, and we quote "the plan was always the plan". If this is the case, then the council have been covering up the deliberate lack of care for Westside businesses. The article has painted a negative impression to businesses and community.

There is no precedence being set here by Westside, in regard to business losses being redeemed through disruption payments. Council admission to failings differentiates it from other phases. As Mr. Simkins and John Roseblade have said that lessons have been learnt which means contingency plans being put in place together with better project planning and management will ensure subsequent development phases do not encounter what Westside are enduring.

Businesses are getting very restless as we need to resolve this.

Thus to conclude, we have to REITERATE our observations from Westside perspective in relation to the dire situation:

The letter infers that business traders are to accept what the council are proposing without even questioning or knowing what it is that they are accepting.

How can you expect businesses not to appeal if it has not been made clear how the data collected has been used. You are asking us to trust, yet we cannot, based on past history. Who scrutinizes council decisions?

The letter **does not pay any consideration to businesses receiving a disruption payment** on account of the impact that has been caused by the poor decisions made by the council.

This letter is a misrepresentation of where we thought we had arrived since having several monthly meetings to resolve the ongoing issues/impact of the roadworks on Westside businesses.

We had collectively agreed that the words "compensation" was not to be used, however "disruption payment(s)" was to be acceptable.

Over the past few months, we, as the subgroup, have been given verbal assurances that there will be disruption payments due to the roadworks for all businesses, yet there is no mention of this in this letter.

May we remind the council their acknowledgment of their failings by their own admission: -

1. Lack of consultation
2. The acknowledgement of the council undertaking 3 years' worth of work in 1 year
3. Not having a contingency plan – this is quite shocking and very poor management and decision making.
4. Reassurance that lessons have been learnt for future phases of the city development.
5. If it is so easy for the council to employ, at high costs, advisors to do health checks and subsequently business advisors, then why is it so difficult to present business losses and make good what can be perceived to be a failing situation if not rectified asap. Time is of the essence, and we can only repeat that livelihoods at stake.

Events – In the past, events have always been targeted around Queen Square. What are the plans for these events? If there are events planned, please share them? On several occasions this statement has been made and when questioned further we have been advised that either its confidential or we are asked as businesses what we would suggest or recommend?

6. Have external consultants been used/paid to also plan these events? Please provide further information on what we should expect in the 'New Area'. –
7. Please can we also get confirmation if LSD Promotions OR any other operator owns the rights to the street trading along Victoria Street. We are aware that Digbeth dining has been mentioned.
8. What restrictions, if any, may be placed on businesses in the area – especially on hospitality businesses.
9. Will there be daytime and night-time events as Mr Simkins has mentioned wanting to increase the night-time economy. We need to ensure that any potential footfall is maximised across the variety of independent and not just targeting specific businesses.

As it stands, it appears that lessons were not learnt from the failed Summer Row development some 10 years ago, the sentiment being echoed by the Express & Star - where thriving businesses were forced to close through compulsory purchase orders issued by the council to make way for extending the city centre. Only this time, the council's approach has been even more ignorant to the devastating affect their poor/divisive decisions on the area. **This broken TRUST has to be repaired, otherwise the consequential effect will not just be from the lack of support from businesses, but the community as a whole,** who already emphasise and are appalled at the works and their impact on businesses. Their confidence has to be gained, another reason why independent businesses are so key in the uniqueness of what they offer the city and how they serve the local community. You cannot have one without the other. This could be devastating for the plans that's have been laid out on 29th September, Wolverhampton being the City of Investment.

Do not recreate the legacy of the past as the impression portrayed at the meeting on the 29th was, "whatever it costs". We as Westside businesses, will not just go away and we certainly don't want to be ignored. The council should be fighting for us and prove to Westside that we are an intrinsic part of the growth and development of the area making it attractive to new business investors.

We have consistently been patient over the months to work with the council - not to have it turned into a red herring and be told that there will be no disruption payments. Please do not insult our intelligence or the sheer hard work of independents and the time the subgroup are giving to make this work. The Labour council is supposed to consider any support with honesty, fairness, integrity, and justice for exactly those people/business owners who tirelessly labour daily as a consequence of decisions made by the council.

Westside deserves more transparency with council decisions which impact their livelihoods and retribution for their negligence.

We look forward to your response as a matter of urgency within 7 days.

Kind Regards

Westside Subgroup

From: Isobel Woods
Sent: 20 September 2022 14:40
To: des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>; John Roseblade <John.Roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
Cc: Ian Fegan (he/him) <Ian.Fegan@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Marianne Page <Marianne.Page@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Ruth Taylor <Ruth.Taylor@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Crissie Rushton <Crissie.Rushton@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Richard Lawrence <Richard.Lawrence@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; cherry <cherry@wolverhamptonbid.co.uk>; Tracey Richards <Tracey.Richards@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Shelley Smith <Shelley.Smith@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Richard Wyatt <Richard.Wyatt@wolverhampton.gov.uk>; Councillor Stephen Simkins <Stephen.Simkins@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Westside Traders Sub-Group - Action Updates

Hi Des

Hope you are well.

I have drafted a letter which I propose to share with the businesses who received a visit from an advisor. This is to let them know the outcome of the comparison between the two periods in terms of turnover.

I have included in the letter reference to the joint approach taken with the Traders and the council in agreeing the approach and information. Can I confirm the position from the Traders that businesses will not be able to appeal the outcome of the health check. This was talked about in our meeting and I will need to make this clear in the letter.

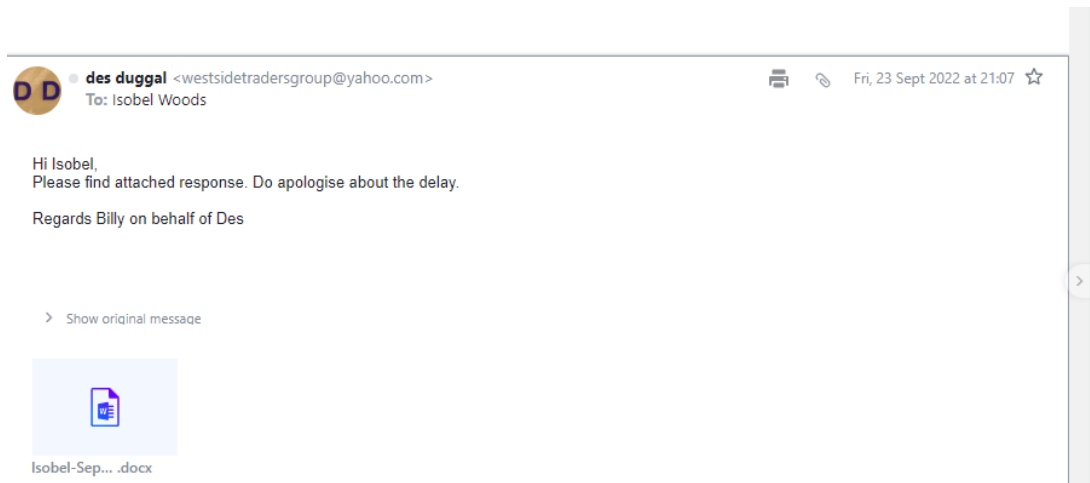
In regards to the financial support, as was mentioned at the last meeting the proposal needs to follow the councils formal process before a decision can be made. This work is currently underway and has not yet concluded. The feedback I have received so far has asked for additional information from the 11 businesses who showed a loss which I need to include in the letters when they go out .

Mt
Isobel

Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise
Tel. Office: 01902 551848
Tel. Mobile: 07866 564932

E-mail: Isobel.Woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk
City of Wolverhampton Council

In response to letter sent out by Isobel below is a subgroup response. 23rd September 2022



The response in the document stating that subgroup cannot make decisions for independents especially where she has requested that we cannot appeal decisions.

This is exactly the same tactic that was employed 13th March 2023 in respect of options being presented to Westside regarding RSM findings. We had stated our concerns and were told that the council will speak to all traders about the options before a decision can be taken by traders.

In response to your email dated 20th September

Hi Isobel,

Sincere apologies for the delay in response. Following a conversation with Des, he has asked me to respond as he is dealing with a few personal issues.

Without seeing the letter, we cannot comment on its content or its format. Whilst in principle we agreed to the Council employing independent accountants for businesses to go through Financial Health Checks to move forward in identifying business losses due to major disruptions caused by the roadworks.

You are asking us, from a Traders position, to confirm that the businesses will be unable to appeal their outcome. This **we cannot do** as they are all independents, and we are not privy to who and what has been submitted by them to Sam and his team and subsequently to the council. If you recall you could not reveal which businesses participated due to confidentiality, so how can we make a decision on their behalf?

In addition, the individual accountants had different approaches, and some independents were disgruntled with the omission of certain information from the exercise. So, we apologise but you are asking us to make a decision without the facts, individual circumstances of businesses and their individual outcome which you will convey in the letter you will be sending. This would be unfair of us as they are responsible for their own business decisions. We also don't know how the information gleaned has been used. **This would be better addressed by the council to all the Traders who have been identified by them as participants.**

Furthermore, the purpose of the health checks was to enable council to make a decision and now you are stating that **further information** will need to be provided by the 11 businesses who showed loss. This will not be well received as businesses agreed to the Health Check and would feel that this is another hurdle and delay in reaching a conclusion.

On a final note, there has been no mention regarding to where we are with the council process and how this exercise will relate/interface to the business rates. Traders have been patient and whilst John had previously alluded to things being resolved in a matter of a few weeks and that all businesses who have participated would receive a disruption payment. It seems this letter will not give Traders the reassurance that they need from the situation caused by the Councils' lack of consideration in regard to the impact the roadworks would have on Westside businesses, which may I remind you was done without consultation. It would be sad for the businesses to lose trust in their council going forwards.

As it stands, it can be seen that the council are not acting quick enough. It is approximately 10months since the works started, yet we still have no formal written commitment to the outcome for the businesses only verbal statements made at the meetings. Please note that the situation businesses find themselves is further exacerbated by the energy crisis. The very reasons why you wish to make a success of this whole development could end up having a negative effect – opposite to what is expected, with investors not looking to invest because of the negative legacy of the area which the council has created.

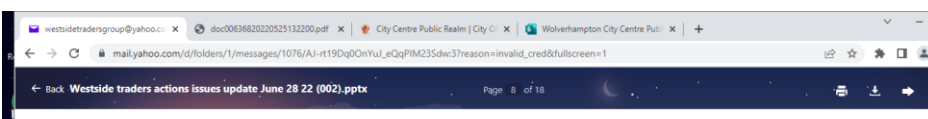
Sorry but this reflects how the traders feel, they need assurances.

Kind Regards

Billy on behalf of Des

Agenda and purpose of meeting...

1. Listen to concerns and develop solutions
2. Progress agreed actions and address the following issues set out by traders including:
 - Financial hardship relief
 - Business rates relief
 - BID payments relief
 - Two-three year plan for returning footfall to normal
 - Social media to boost presence
 - Plans for all works
 - Regular monthly meetings for updates ✓
4. Any other business?
 - 5. Date and time of next meeting: Monday 22 August at 5.30pm



Financial hardship relief update...

- Business Advisor and team have conducted 48 business visits during June and July. 5 business said they did not want to meet or did not respond.
- The analysis of the financial position is underway. The final report was due to be submitted 1 August however the team of Advisors are waiting to receive financial information from 14 businesses.
- The report will enable the council to see the information of businesses trading positions during the works, that will inform next steps.
- What date would Traders suggest is a suitable cut off ?

Above slides taken from July 26th council power point presentation to traders

I Isobel Woods <isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
To: des duggal
Cc: Sam Duru

Thu, 16 Jun 2022 at 16:50 ☆

Sensitivity: NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Hi Des / Billie and Owen

Please find attached a map of the area with the phases we are looking at for the purpose of this work, a list of the business names and below are the names of those working with Sam.

Abraham Achiampong
Stanley Ugwueze
Vincent Ugboh

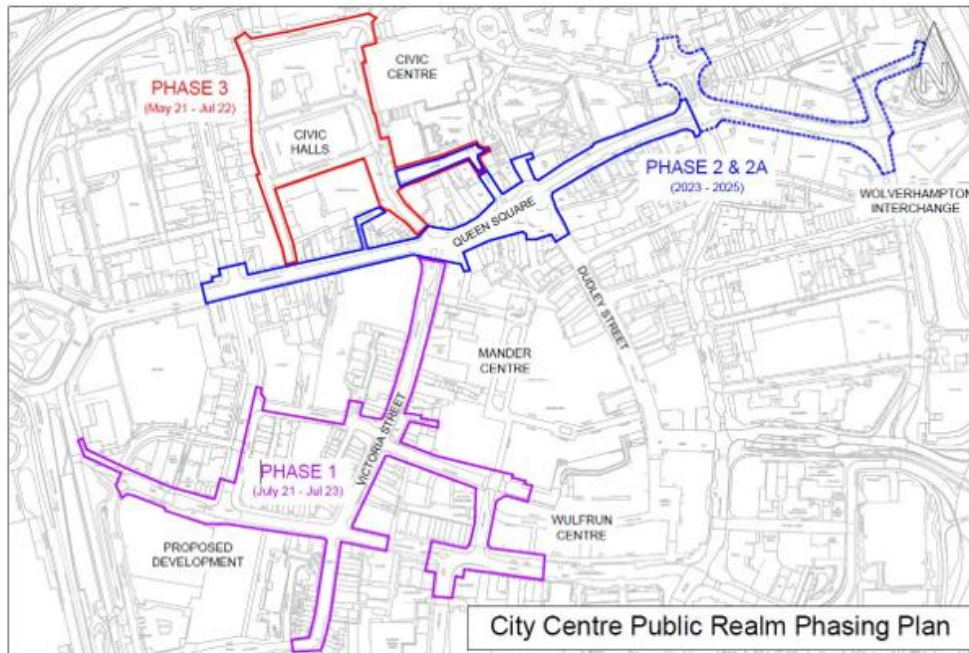
Please can I encourage you to update the other members of the sub group with the outcome of todays meeting and to seek your support to help with communication to those businesses in this area, to help Sam and the team to meet and move forward on this work.

Mt
Isobel

Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise
Tel. Office: 01902 551848
Tel. Mobile: 07464 981878

The list of businesses including in respect of Westside do not included North St. as subsequently mentioned.

Sensitivity: PROTECT



Phase 3 ,2 &2a



● **Isobel Woods** <isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
To: des duggal
Cc: 'Sam Duru', John Roseblade



Mon, 13 Jun 2022 at 21:42 ★

Sensitivity: NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Dear Des, I hope you are well.

I am pleased to introduce Sam Duru who will lead a team of advisors to undertake the financial health check for businesses in the Westside area. Sam and I would like to come and meet with you on Thursday afternoon, around 2pm if this is ok, to talk through the financial information that will help understand the impact of the works, and the communication to businesses in the area so they are ready to receive the approach from Sam and his team.

Hope this is ok

Mt
Isobel

Isobel Woods
Head of Enterprise
Tel. Office: 01902 551848
Tel. Mobile: 07464 981878



● **Ian Fegan (he/him)** <ian.fegan@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
To: John Roseblade, des duggal, Isobel Woods, Ruth Taylor, Shelley Smith, Councillor Stephen Simkins, Ian Fegan (he/him), cherry Hide
Cc: Richard Lawrence



Fri, 10 Jun 2022 at 11:04 ☆

Good morning all,

Please find amended actions with details of those responsible at the bottom of the document. Thank you for your feedback.

Have a lovely weekend.

Kind Regards

Vanessa Mehmet
Executive Assistant – Central Resources
Executive Support Team
Tel. Office: 01902 551804

[E-mail: Vanessa.Mehmet@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:Vanessa.Mehmet@wolverhampton.gov.uk)
City of Wolverhampton Council

Westside Traders Sub-Group

Key	
	Complete
	Action on track/On hold
	On-going
	Major issue/Overdue


ACTION SHEET					
Date of Meeting	Item	Action	Owners of actions	Deadline Date	BRAG Status
06.06.22		Review the proposed comparison period of financial hardship calculations to ensure a fair and equitable approach. Working with the advisor once appointed to agree a reasonable set of financial documents	Isobel Woods	14 June	Action on track
06.06.22		Check the tender to ensure that comparison periods can be changed easily without retendering and check with legal. - checked and this is ok	Isobel Woods	completed	Action on track
		Traders to be informed of appointed Independent Financial Adviser	Isobel Woods	14 June	Action on track
06/06/22		Traders to help businesses in the area to be aware of the Financial Health check being undertaken by the Business Advisor, and the relevant financial paperwork	Traders		
06.06.22		Agree common understanding of what we are trying to achieve in terms of supporting increased footfall in the area.	ALL	28 June	Action on track
06.06.22		Review business rates hardship application process/form for rate relief and whether the current form is minimum requirement under law or can be streamlined.	Tracey Richards	14 June	Action on track

First point on the Council slide above clearly states period of financial hardship calculations....

2nd point - It was quite clear from above that Westside were within their rights to request a time period change as it would have no legal need to retender. THIS WAS IGNORED as it would have resolved the issue about demonstrating true losses.

• Westside Traders Meeting - 6 June - Action Points 5

Yahoo/Inbox ☆

 • **John Roseblade** <john.roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
 To: des duggal, Isobel Woods, Ruth Taylor, Shelley Smith, Councillor Stephen Simkins and 2 more...
 Cc: Vanessa Mehmet, Richard Lawrence

  Thu, 9 Jun 2022 at 11:06 ☆

Sensitivity: NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you once again for attending the meeting at the Civic Centre on Monday. We hope you found it to be a productive and helpful session to further understand issues that you may have and talk about some of things we are doing to address them. Here are the actions from the meeting please can you check to ensure it was a fair and accurate record of discussions. We look forward to meeting with you on 28th June 5:30pm once you are able to confirm this.

Kind regards.

John Roseblade
 Director of City Housing and Environment
 Tel: Office: 01902 555755
 Tel: Mobile: 07825 530368

See Below from the Council slideshow presentation dated 9th June 2022, the page relevant to where council state financial hardship relief (last point) where loss of income is clearly demonstrated. Why is this being retracted now?

Financial hardship relief update...

- Tender closes midnight tomorrow
- Assessment takes place on Wednesday and Thursday
- Appointed by end of the work
- Start date is 16 June (next week)
- Focus for the scheme is to provide SMEs who sign up a financial health check, business advice and guidance and help to connect to relevant support programmes
- Also free business advice for those that want it – build on success of Business Relight programme
- Work will be undertaken at pace and will be independent of the council's current business support programme
- Will be completed within 5 weeks.
- We will provide financial hardship relief where loss of income relative to the works is clearly demonstrated

Westside Traders Group 29

Yahoo/Inbox ☆




des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.co> Wed, 25 May 2022 at 14:30 ☆

To: Stephen Simkins
Cc: Isobel Woods, John Roseblade,
tim.johnson@wolverhampton.gov.uk,
ruth.taylor@wolverhampton.gov.uk,
Stuart Anderson and 6 more...

Dear Mr Simkins

Please find the attached Statement in response to your request of concerns and issues.

Regards
Billy & Des

**Yahoo Mail**
Take a trip into an upgraded, more organized inbox with
Yahoo Mail. Login and start exploring all the free, orga...



doc0063682....pdf

Westside Traders Group – Statement of Fact

Dear Mr Simkins,

Date: 25th May 2022

You requested a summarisation of our grievances with the situation of Westside. Early March, the traders of Westside brought to your attention and other council representatives, in good faith, some serious issues affecting their businesses.

We are now feeling very dejected and disparaged by the absence of resolve to the issues raised. This has been further fuelled by Isobel's recent proposal 'the financial health check', which was **not** asked for and does **not** solve **any** of the current issues, in fact it raises concerns to us that there is no coherency in resolving issues – we are not being heard. We are still awaiting the "working document" that was agreed 8th May that was going to be produced to work closely with the Westside traders.

To be clear on the chain of events. The negligence in not involving Westside during the consultation and planning processes has culminated in putting businesses and livelihoods at risk. By your own admission, not fully understanding and realising the sheer impact it would have on Westside businesses is not only a clear oversight but a gross failure in the project management and the vision going forwards. As direct consequences of this failure to confer, some businesses have lost their livelihoods and others are facing financial hardship. The mistakes made by both the contractors and council has left businesses in dire straits. Thus, the financial health check as it stands will not assist businesses but questions and implies business viability as opposed to addressing and rectifying the problem that has been created by the council and contractors. **Businesses are being asked to justify how and why are they being affected, their sustainable existence and viability. There is a need to provide immediate financial hardship relief to mitigate the losses that this has caused to allow businesses to stabilise and a sustainable plan to support businesses going forward.** Over time, Westside has been stripped of footfall, market relocation, buses and taxis and the last straw being the roadworks now almost completely cutting off accessibility to Westside which has directly impacted businesses and their ability to serve the greater community. **Time is a major factor in saving Westside from irrevocable loss and recovery through negligent and lack of timely responses.**

It seems apparent that there isn't much appetite or urgency from the council to deal with these matters; despite 5 businesses closing and 40 plus asking for help to get through this difficult time outside of our control. Frankly, not much is being resolved as verbal reassurances are not being followed or articulated and are open to misunderstanding.

To be clear how to go forward, we would like to **request a formal written response** to the main points listed below which are underpinned by the minutes of 7th April 2022, a copy of which you received. Please acknowledge receipt of document by 30th May 2022.

WESTSIDE TRADERS GROUP REQUIREMENTS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY.

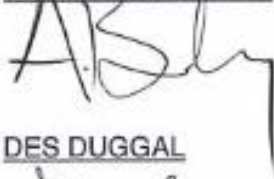
1. Financial hardship relief to counter the losses incurred due to the roadworks to be set in place within 2 weeks and we should have results and pay out within next 6 to 8 weeks for any eligible businesses.

2. All business rates payable should be exempt in the duration of the works and 12 months recovery period thereafter within catchment area on the map attached- this should be actioned within the next two weeks. We make reference to Section 49 of Local Government Finance Act 1988 allowing Council to grant rate relief where ratepayers are suffering hardship or severe difficulties. **In National Non-domestic Rates Explanatory Notes 2022/23 it clearly states "Local Discounts and Hardship Relief Local authorities have a general power to grant discretionary local discounts and to give hardship relief in specific circumstances. Full details can be obtained from the local authority"**.
3. All bid payer payments to be cancelled/exempt in the duration of the works and 12 months recovery period thereafter within catchment area on map- this should be actioned within the next two weeks.
4. A council strategic plan to reflect over the next 24-36 months how you will bring this side of towns footfall back and resume business back to normal. i.e. strategic plans for recovery for the area and the timely figures expected for the return of footfall and share a copy of this plan with us in the next 4 weeks.
5. Social media to boost presence whilst works are going on.
6. Plan of all works, phases in detail in writing over the duration of the works to be shared with us so this can be shared with all our members.
7. Regular monthly meeting with updates on everything on the list and any new concerns. The "working document" needs to be presented within 2 weeks as this was agreed 8th May and would provide a means to have regular meetings, share timescales, give opportunity to raise and address issues proactively in a conducive manner for beneficial of all parties.

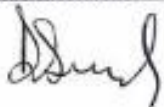
THE GROUP WOULD LIKE TO BRING IT TO YOUR ATTENTION THAT WE CONTACTED WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL AROUND EARLY MARCH 2022 AND NOW WE ARE ALMOST 3 MONTHS ON AND NOTHING OUT OF OUR REQUEST LIST HAS BEEN DONE.

SUB GROUP MEMBERS:

ANDREW BRADLEY



DES DUGGAL



OWEN LOWTHER

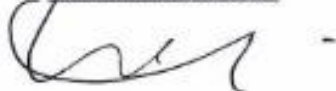
BILVIR CHANDER-KUMAR



KIMBERLEY SOUTHALL



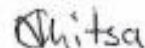
WAYNE HORTON



BRUCE NAGRA




NICO CHITSA



ESME STACKHOUSE



 **Bilvir Chander-Kumar** <bilvirck@yahoo.com>
To: lynne.moran@wolverhampton.gov.uk, Des Duggal

 Fri, 29 Apr 2022 at 13:56 ☆

Dear Lynne,

I have been working closely with Des and am part of the Westside subgroup. Having over the years, supported the BID and contributed time and effort to help and be part of the growth of Wolverhampton. I have a passion for the success of Wolverhampton. I felt the need to share my views below as we as Westside Group fall under your remit.

As the council representative for St Peters ward. Please can you show your support for the plight of the businesses of westside. The financial hardship that is being faced is down to the issues raised at the meeting held in April, where you were also present. The miscommunication and by their own admission, council members/executives not realising the impact of how the works etc are being carried out on the businesses. This gross lack of foresight has been incumbent in businesses facing financial hardship. Delays in providing financial assistance will have a detrimental effect on the westside development and economy. The impact for lack of financial support will have far reaching consequences for all parties concerned and more importantly for the livelihoods of the independents, who are the real victims of negligence in planning, management and communication.

Time is a key factor here which each of the independent businesses may not have without prompt intervention of financial hardship. We need some form of communication to give confidence to us businesses that we do matter and are part of the city centre economic development. At the moment businesses feel extremely isolated and vulnerable. They need assurance of financial hardship support.

Please can you advise and assist in the urgency of this matter.

We need preemptive action to avoid further losses of businesses that have been established for many years and those that are new to the area.


I have been born and bred in Wolverhampton and would like to see it thrive again so I have a vested interest in it as a business owner as well. Very slow progress has been made since the meeting in early April. We need your support urgently to push matters forward. Thank you for taking time to read this.

Kind Regards


Bilvir Chander-Kumar

Equinox



 **Councillor Lynne Moran** <lynne.moran@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
To: Bilvir Chander-Kumar, Des Duggal

 Fri, 29 Apr 2022 at 16:08 ☆

 **Councillor Lynne Moran** <lynne.moran@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
To: Bilvir Chander-Kumar, Des Duggal

 Fri, 29 Apr 2022 at 16:08 ☆

Sensitivity: PROTECT

Hi Bilvir,

Thank you very much indeed for writing to me and of course I understand your concerns and those of all the other traders who attended the meeting at Equinox.

I am sorry you have heard nothing since the meeting and the least I can do at the moment is to refer to the senior officers concerned expressing my support and asking for an update. Once I know more I shall of course share with you and you can pass on to those who would be interested.

Regards

Lynne (Moran)

Lynne Moran
Wolverhampton City Councillor,
St Peter's Ward
07469 410596 (please leave a message)



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

To: John Roseblade

Cc: Marianne Page, Ruth Taylor, Isobel Woods, Richard Lawrence, Vicky Moulding

Wed, 27 Apr 2022 at 14:04 ☆

Hi John,

Verbal promises were made to the traders by Councillor Simpkins that they would respond with what the council can support businesses on the financial Hardship currently facing westside traders group. Additionally, an action team headed by yourself was suppose to arrange what other additional changes, improvements need to happen to resolve issues raised in the minutes where you and other councillors attended at Equinox.

We need a formal address to be held as a matter of urgency as you are aware that livelihoods are critical for some traders. Please can we have the meeting this week at the time you specified around 5.30-6.30pm.

We do not wish for the situation to boil over into anything else.

Regards
Des

[Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone](#)

> Show original message



John Roseblade <john.roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk>

To: des duggal

Cc: Marianne Page, Ruth Taylor, Isobel Woods, Richard Lawrence, Vicky Moulding

Wed, 27 Apr 2022 at 16:06 ☆

Hi Des

Thanks for getting back to me and again assisting with the arrangements. I note the urgency here so will get back to you asap.

John Roseblade
Director City Housing and Environment
07825 500260

Westside Traders Group 2

Yahoo/Inbox ☆



des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>

To: Stephen Simkins

Thu, 14 Apr 2022 at 15:01 ☆

Good afternoon Mr Simkins

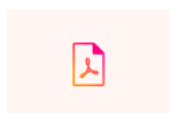
Please find the attached minutes/(updated agenda) from our meeting held on the 7th of April 2022.

Could you please provide us with up to date details of the actions you have taken so far with what you had taken onboard at the meeting.

On our side we have now arranged a sub-group with 8-10, who will be representing the westside traders group to keep all matters professional. We would like to arrange a meeting for around the 25th of April 2022 to go through the agenda in a more constructive manor. Please let me know your thoughts on this.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Regards
Des & Billy.



WestsideRet....pdf
243.2kB



This is the only response we ever got from our ward councillor Lynne Moran.

From: Councillor Lynne Moran <Lynne.Moran@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
Sent: 08 April 2022 17:55
To: des duggal <westsidetradersgroup@yahoo.com>
Cc: Christopher Jellyman <Christopher.Jellyman@wolverhampton.gov.uk>
Subject: Impact of the West Side development upon Traders

Sensitivity: NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Hello Des,

I thank you for your appreciation but I would say that the City Centre is part of St Peter's Ward so your local Councillors are very interested in any or all issues arising.

I have to say I am dismayed at the accounts I heard from traders at the meeting and I sincerely hope that the Council and the contractors can make amends in some ways. I have always worked effectively with the BID team and it is good to see you are all working closely together. Our communication strategy has clearly been sadly lacking.

Please include me in any further discussions you think I should know about/attend and I will do my very best to be there. I did note the worries expressed about anti social behaviours outside some businesses and I am including a Council officer in this message who will be very interested to know more. Chris Jellyman runs the PACT meetings in our area and he has in the past tried out City Centre meetings – if you are able to include traders in our next meeting notice, some of them might be able to attend.

I apologise for the treatment endured by you all as traders. You are a vital part of the City economy and it is clear that many of you are suffering considerable financial pressures as a consequence of the current works.

Regards,

Lynne (Moran)

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Westside Traders Group Meeting Minutes
7.Apr.22 Equinox

Name	Representing	Name	Representing
Alex Abdelaal	Chair Westside Traders Gp (WSTG)	Stephen Simkins (SS)	Councillor Deputy Leader
Des Duggal	Representation Westside Traders Gp	Lynne Moran	Councillor St Peters Ward
Cherry Shine (CS)	Wolverhampton BID	John Roseblade (JR)	Dir. of Housing & Environ.
Shaun Boyce	Wolverhampton BID	Isobel Wood (IW)	Head of Enterprise
Richard Scharenguivel	Mander Centre	Ruth Taylor (RT)	Public Realms
		Stuart Anderson	MP Wton Southwest
		Paul Singh	Councillor Penn Ward
		Sohail Khan	Councillor Tettenhall Regis
		Keith Inston	Councillor East Park
		Philip Page	Councillor Bilston North
Apologies			
			Actions
Welcome and introductions			
	Cherry welcomed everyone to the meeting & asked Top Table to introduce themselves.		
Items for discussion WTG - Concerns			
1	Business Trade Drastic reduction of footfall 65%-70% since commencement of phase 1 public realm work since November 2021. Consequential effects on livelihoods: Cherry Read the 1 st point of the agenda covering 1.1-1.9.		
1.1	Inability to pay overheads inclusive of wages, rents etc.		
1.2	In-operable conditions for businesses to function in normal daily activities. i.e., collections of heavy items, deliveries of goods to name but a few, serving disability customers.		
1.3	Business sustainability severely impacted at a time when businesses were still recovering post covid.		
1.4	The psychological impact of people's shopping habits has changed since covid and any form of recovery or return to normality has been severely impacted by the works underway i.e. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People just started to return to shopping post covid are now finding it extremely difficult to get into the city. • Forcing people to turn to shopping elsewhere & online • Confidence in High St shopping has declined due to inconveniences caused as a result of 'prohibited' access to businesses • Signage to parking very confusing as people finding difficulty in manoeuvring • No guarantee of return of customers 		
1.5	Removal of bus stops.		
1.6	Impact of continued city centre development, noise pollution, dust, smells etc on people's shopping experience.		
1.7	What are the USP's of Wolverhampton which boasted so many independent businesses. So many long-standing businesses have gone and may go as a result.		
1.8	Whilst landlords have filled some empty shops on the promise of Wolverhampton being investable. How will new businesses be sustained if existing businesses have been struggling as a result of disruptive developmental changes since Summer Row and now limited footfall.		

1.9	Survivability of Westside may deteriorate to a level where it will not recover. As businesses are unable to meet rents and overheads as customers are no longer able to access shops.	
	<p><u>Councillor Simkins</u> Made opening statement requesting he wants to understand what the issues were from the Westside Traders. He was open to listening to the concerns and actioned John Rosedale to set up a team to deal with the areas of concern presented here in whole of Section 1 and other sections. A single point of contact/email was also to be set up.</p> <p><u>Discussions & Council Commitments:</u> Whilst we would still need a formal response to the points raised in the agenda, it is hoped that once a team is set up clarity will be given to points raised some of which were touched upon during the discussion of point 1.</p> <p><u>Listed below are the actions that were to be tackled immediately by the council.</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crisis Management, acceptance of the need for compensation/hardship. Council stated like with Covid all businesses will need to provide evidence of losses sustained thus far and moving forwards. Simkins to raise at higher level HARSHIP and how to mitigate the losses that businesses have experiencing since the commencement of the works. There has been no consultation with Westside businesses since 2018 and Councillor Simpkins guaranteed that Westside traders will play an active role in creating a policy and strategy to move forward in a cohesive manner. Need consideration for a 3-4 support package during this transitory time. 2. Council accepted that lesson had to be learnt in not fully realising the direct impact of the road works and road closures on businesses. Direct email/single point of contact to capture Westside issues. 3. Identify how the council can support businesses immediately, short/medium term and long term whilst developments go on. Through :- -Business support -Marketing support – closer look at advertising -Chamber of Commerce 4. Work with Westside businesses to develop a policy and strategy to ensure sustainability and connectivity to other areas of the City e.g. i9 Isabelle explained the reasoning for the development work, which is accepted that it will be eventually beneficial for the linkages to the difference areas, however, <u>how do the council intend to drive footfall back to this side of the town. Need a clear strategy of how this will be done with clear timescales and accountability. This is extremely urgent.</u> 5. Provide “vision” of how the plans will eventually look post development. 6. Clear visibility that communication breakdown has caused utmost confusion for businesses:- - Signage - Barriers - Disability Parking - Deliveries - Failure to ensure information has been disseminated to WSTG businesses. - Timescales for works - clear - Liasion needs to be improved with Meghan/Council/Businesses 	<p>JR</p> <p>SS</p> <p>JR/IW</p> <p>SS/JR/IW</p> <p>IW/JR</p> <p>SS</p> <p>JR/RT</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Posters/Information on developments - that can be given to customers - Focus is on what Roads are closed and not on Businesses are still open - Parking during changes <p>7. Need for a proactive council which works closely with BID & Independent businesses – particularly Westside.</p>	SS/JR/BID
2	Parking	
2.1	<p>Current parking has been an ongoing concern. People getting confused on how to access car parks such as Bell St. causing disruption in Skinner St. i.e., cars turning around after realising road closures.</p> <p>WSTG – Closures of road access to Bell Street/Mander car park and re-routing of traffic has been very confusing. The loss of Beatties Car park has impacted the footfall as it has made it more inconvenient for customers to park.</p> <p>This section is to be addressed as part of the strategy for returning footfall to Westside</p>	JR/IW
2.2	<p>Lack of cash machines, some of our more mature customers prefer to put coins in the machine rather than download an app or go through the pay by phone system.</p> <p>School St. car park has no facility to pay by cash. A visitor would not know this’ until they had parked and gone to the machines to pay.</p> <p>WSTG – Wayne raised this as an issue for elderly and other customers.</p>	
2.3	<p>People call regularly and ask; ‘are we open, where can we park and how can we get there’?</p>	
2.4	<p>Free Parking? Is that on the council plans?</p> <p>Is the Odeon pulling out of the Westside development because the Council would not grant them a free car park</p> <p>Councillor Simkins Stated that Cinema - Odean cannot be discussed due to the sensitivity of the financial implications.</p>	
4	Security	
4.1	<p>CCTV around lower end Victoria St./School St/Salop St.</p> <p>What if any, improvements/additions to CCTV for the area around Westside. Consistent breakages of shop windows etc. causing business disruption, inconvenience and not visibly giving good impressions to the few customers that are still coming to Wolverhampton.</p> <p>Evening economy, classes. Concerns of customers, clients and students’ safety.</p> <p>WSTG (Ravi Duggal & others) mentioned that drugs, graffiti etc were an issue</p>	

	<p>which made customers, particularly elderly feel unsafe. This issue has been ongoing for a while.</p> <p><u>Councillor Simkins</u> Agreed that there was a clear problem with Policing the area.</p> <p><u>Cherry</u> suggested that any issues arising around homelessness should be forwarded to them .</p>	<p>SS</p> <p>WSTG</p>
4.2	<p>Shop Lifting.</p> <p><u>Cherry(BID)</u> As part of the BID stated that BID levy payers have access to an app which allows businesses to share and beware of individuals. Cherry to consider if the app can be distributed to Westside</p>	<p>CS</p>
4.3	<p>Business retention, flagship attractions down Westside and not just Dudley St etc. How do you propose to advertise independent business which Wolverhampton are known for.</p> <p>No business visibility as to what is available this side of the city.</p> <p><u>WSTG (Esme & others)</u> Promotion seems to be key on what roads etc are closed and not enough on businesses still open. Using billboards etc to communicate to general public.</p> <p><u>Ruth Taylor</u> said that documentation was circulated which had QR codes for businesses to access council website for information regarding plans/closures etc.</p> <p><u>WSTG</u> – no such documentation was circulated, it was clear that this was another failing of following up or miscommunication of ensuring Westside</p> <p><u>John</u> said that this is something that can be looked at by his team together setting up a direct email to ensure information is disseminated to all.</p>	<p>JR/RT</p>
	COUNCIL SUPPORT NEEDED IMMEDIATELY	
5	Financial Support	
5.1	<p>Financial support/package for loss of income since commencement of works since November 2021 and going forwards whilst development is underway in the immediate and surrounding areas of Westside.</p> <p>Consideration should be made to an immediate realistic financial package that will allow businesses to survive the major developmental changes over the next 3-4 years which are impacting footfall and livelihoods. If traders cannot meet fundamental overheads such as rent and rates, how will they be expected to survive. Many businesses are already struggling to meet their immediate overheads. Will the projected 30% increase mean anything if there are no businesses?</p> <p>More pre-exemptive action is required going forwards.</p> <p>How will Wolverhampton remain investable if existing landlords cannot get the rents if there are no customers?</p> <p>Formal response in a timely manner would be appreciated.</p>	

	<p><u>MP Stuart Anderson</u> said that whilst the council are in purdah, immediate action should be taken to mitigate the severe consequences of the developments that are on-going around the Westside. Communication, understanding how the council can help. He agreed that there's a direct correlation with the roadworks starting and business sales being affected. What we don't want to see is all of this regeneration, but every shop is going to be empty, so we need to look at how we can support businesses.</p> <p><u>WSTG – Des</u> Suggested that the compensation be changed to HARSHIP and that this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Councillor Simkins will raise this accordingly for a response asap. Potentially could take 4 weeks. Consideration is sought as council elections are coming up. WSTG - Des expressed that more businesses could potentially close.</p> <p><u>Councillor Stephen Simkins</u> agreed he will guarantee liaising closely to resolve these issues to inevitably working together with WSTG input into the strategy to move forwards.</p> <p>He would like the WSTG to come back with date to share the vision of Wolverhampton. Des - Westside Traders Sub-group will set up a follow up and respond in a few days.</p>	<p>SS</p> <p>WSTG</p>
5.2	<p>Improved communication/liaison with Westside giving opportunity to provide input. Regular updates on progress and footfall monitoring. Businesses should be addressed collectively. All businesses must be treated as equal across the city.</p>	
5.3	<p>Structured advertisement of businesses/independents traders to a wider audience Proposal for advertisement of the WHOLE OF THE CITY. Westside Group of Traders are vital components to Wolverhampton City Centre as each business offers something unique to attract different customers.</p> <p>Wolverhampton Council want customers to support local businesses, but they are not giving the public the ways to do so. Whilst businesses appreciate awareness through social media, they are missing out an important generation who were a fundamental support to local businesses but have been denied access to the daily town visits. These people have now been isolated.</p>	
5.4	<p>Free Parking or a low All-Day Charge of £1</p> <p><u>WSTG- Alex & others</u> suggested that some sort of strategy to entice people to Wolverhampton may well encourage customers to return especially when retail parks such as Bently are free parking, hence making them more attractive.</p> <p><u>WSTG</u> feel strongly that all the actions of the council moving market, bustops, taxis etc has taken footfall away from Westside. This has been going on since the plug was pulled on Summer Row. This area has been constantly disregarded. <u>WSTG</u> have asked that the council to act as a matter of urgency to consider a strategy as to how they can return footfall to Westside.</p>	<p>SS/JR/IW</p>

5.5	Area itself is blighted by empty shops and now by development work which we understand needs to happen, but is severely impacting businesses.	
5.5	What other private investor works are being carried out? What if any, are there timescales I.e., Old Beattie's building. Further renovations above existing businesses etc.	
5.7	Clear proposals as to how flow of footfall will be managed and directed towards Westside ensuring connectivity as transport no longer gives visibility to customers.	
6. AOB		
6.1	WSTG – Dave raised that as a charity he is still having to pay full business rates. Contact details of all businesses to be provided to JR, IW & BID	WSTG
6.2	Isobel – said that council issued business rate relief and this shouldn't be the case and will address it directly with him.	IW
6.3	WSTG – Salop St. barrier blockages preventing access to businesses Also the pavement have decreased to a level where scooters cannot park or access safely. It was also clear that Megan was not able to completely support businesses as she was also reliant on the council for information.	
6.4	John said that this can be looked at immediately though there may be Health and Safety considerations to be made.	JR
	WSTG – Nico suggested doing more street event once pedestrianisation is complete to bring more activity to this side as opposed to Queen St, Dudley St. Also suggested digital marketing Eg Pokemon, which has worked well in Walsall. Isobel – responded by saying that is exactly why they are creating more event space.	IS
6.5	WSTG - Andrew Lowton asked that council make it clear as to information they require from WSTG businesses to process Hardship/compensation to ensure minimal delays. Councillor Simkins did say that process would, if any, potentially be similar to that of Covid, where losses would need to be demonstrated. Clarity to be given. WSTG - Nico stated that Cashflow is a significant issues for businesses and the council should look to reallocate some of the pots of money to mitigate losses as monies will be going back to council/government in the form of rates, tax etc. This needs to be done with urgency. WSTG many tradrers are putting their own money into their businesses to meet overhead commitments such rages, rents rates. This cannot be sustained as businesses continue to close. WSTG - Bruce - suggested that the council actually take more of an active role in project management of developments. John said they would consider whether Eurovia need to have more management input from council to ensure effective communication and logistical planning is done with consideration to businesses. This needs to be policed and monitored by council. WSTG require that the onus be placed on the council to return footfall into the westside area. The logistical breakdown in communication needs appropriate chain of command which actively responds to WSTG. Councillor Simkins did reiterate that "drag" economy is being looked at where	SS JR SS/IW

	<p>activities/events occur between 4pm-11pm to encourage customers into the city..</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He also actioned his own team to ensure that issues are effectively resolved and businesses should not have to wait months to hear replies. -Furthermore, he would personally listen to WSTG concerns and wishes to.kove forward. -He will to back to the council regarding the Hardhsip to see what can be done and respond accordingly back to WSTG. <p>CS BID stated that they have been raising some of these issues for a while now and feels that opportunities have been missed. BID are happy to support businesses as it is important to relay standard information to customers so a cohesive picture is given out from all the developments going on.</p> <p>WSTG – to work more closely with support via BID and council to ensure WSTG issues are resolved</p>	<p>CS,WSTG & JR</p>
6. Dates of Next Meetings		

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Westside Traders Subgroup Council Meeting – 9th May 2022

Remit to Council:- The main prerogative of the westside subgroup is to establish what financial hardship support package can be provided by the council following their admission at the mtg 7th April of their lack of consultation and poor communication which has resulted in the situation we find ourselves in.

Deputy leader, Councillor Simkins made a promise to the traders that he would personally ensure that this situation would be addressed as you agreed that as businesses the direct breakdown in communication has jeopardised the survival of businesses in the westside area. Some have already been lost. In order for business survivability, we need this issue addressed formally so we can give reassurances to westside traders that the council have not forsaken westside.

Now that purdah is over, it has been a month since the last meeting, **please tell us what immediate financial measures the council are putting in place to mitigate continued losses.**

From council perspective we are very keen to understand what has been achieved against the issues highlighted in the minutes of 7th April 2022?

Further to the minutes, the council made the following responses at the Meeting Held 9th May 2022 at the Council Offices.

Order of Urgency	Minute Ref	Description	Council Response
1	5.1	<p><u>Financial Hardship Support.</u></p> <p>To ensure business sustainability now & moving forwards. Drastic continued downturn in footfall & trade is jeopardising business survival.</p> <p>Business traders have been improvising, using their own initiatives, however, we need immediate intervention & personal resources have been exhausted. Council cannot expect us to keep afloat businesses through personal funding.</p> <p>We are stakeholders and provide services to the community. This is affecting livelihoods and employees too.</p>	<p>Steve Simkins gave his assurance that the council are here to work with Westside businesses.</p> <p>Clear statement made that the issues with contractors needs to be addressed urgently in particular with regards to the barriers.</p> <p>*Isobel Woods has prepared a tender which will acquire business consultants to work closely with Westside businesses on the losses encountered <u>since commencement of works.</u></p> <p>*Council agreed to financial support whilst the development works continue through to completion as impressed on the council at the meeting.</p> <p>*We have agreed to the commencement of this on behalf of Westside as time is crucial.</p> <p>*A template will be used to gather individual business information. It will be up to businesses to ensure they work with consultants for their benefit. Please have your records/accounts ready to expediate the process. <u>Whole process will take 5-6weeks & is dependant on businesses to be forthcoming with information else it will DELAY assistance for individual businesses.</u></p> <p>* Once data collected the council can review public monies needed to support businesses currently and moving forwards as Council understands that footfall will take time to rebuild.</p> <p>*Council expressed they wish to work with Westside moving forwards to listening to ideas of how footfall can be drawn into area.</p> <p>*Establishment of Westside is important now and also making use of the new “event space” to attract more footfall to the area.</p>

Westside Subgroup – Review & Action plan Outcomes

2.		<p>Project Timescales & Completion of Works</p>	<p>*John Roseblade said that the timescales have not slipped and that everything is on target for completion of Phase 1. *Working document will be produced to ensure the programme of works inclusive of timescales etc so everyone has information. This will also be reviewed and updated to show any delays etc. so that Westside is kept informed. *Any slippages need to be liaised so that businesses can plan.</p>
3.		<p>Communication & Signage.</p> <p>We are still experiencing issues with communication, signage. *Customers are still getting frustrated and confused with accesses. *Deliveries are still being obstructed making business function difficult. *Security of site at the end of the day being left insecure-inviting mischief etc. Bricks being thrown through 1st storey windows.</p>	<p>*Council to revisit Signage as it was still not clear. Barrier positioning preventing people from easy access. This the council have agreed is high priority. * Better signage to show businesses open as usual. *Steve Simkins also agreed for council to showcase businesses regularly. Agreed we are vital local businesses offering unique businesses and unique experiences. *Transport(Council) to ensure suitable locations to allow deliveries and remove current difficulties being experienced by businesses. *Transport to look at ensuring parking tickets are not issued. Consideration *John Roseblade to ensure at the end of the day the working site is left safe & secure by the contractors.</p>
4.	5.4	<p>Parking</p> <p>Temporary parking to allow pick up/drop of points in market st.</p>	<p>Steve Simkins agreed with opening up some temporary parking to ease current issues being faced by disabled people, customers. Market Square was one such place. Transport to look at how customers can access parking for collections without being ticketed. Transport to investigate best solution e.g. ensure traffic wardens allow extra time, permits etc. to be reviewed. Possible idea – ring ride buses to allow customers to jump on and get to Westside.</p>
5.	5.3, 5.7	<p>Advertisement of businesses and footfall direction.</p>	<p>*Establishing westside. * Advertisement in Wolverhampton Today has a very wide audience. More exposure of independent businesses in Westside now and going forwards.</p>
		<p>AOB</p> <p>BUSINESS RATES</p> <p>LANDLORD/RENTS</p>	<p>With respect to business rates, the Council are a collecting agent for the Government. The onus is on individual businesses to speak to Business Rates Dept. either via phone or email to make individual arrangements/payment plans. Please DO NOT IGNORE. In terms of landlords & rent payments again Council cannot get involved in any negotiation & suggests individual businesses address this personally.</p>
<p>NEXT MEETING TO BE ARRANGED IN <u>6 WEEKS</u> WITH SUBGROUP TO REVIEW WITH WESTSIDE, THE FINANCIAL PACKAGE AVAILABLE BASED ON WHAT HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY BUSINESSES. EACH BUSINESS WILL BE INDIVIDUALLY DEALT WITH AS EVERYONES FINANCIAL SITUATION WILL BE DIFFERENT. PLEASE COMPLY ITS IN YOUR BEST INTEREST</p>			

Westside Traders Group – Statement of Fact

Dear Mr Simkins,

Date: 25th May 2022

You requested a summarisation of our grievances with the situation of Westside. Early March, the traders of Westside brought to your attention and other council representatives, in good faith, some serious issues affecting their businesses.

We are now feeling very dejected and disparaged by the absence of resolve to the issues raised. This has been further fuelled by Isobel's recent proposal 'the financial health check', which was **not** asked for and does **not** solve **any** of the current issues, in fact it raises concerns to us that there is no coherency in resolving issues – we are not being heard. We are still awaiting the "working document" that was agreed 8th May that was going to be produced to work closely with the Westside traders.

To be clear on the chain of events. The negligence in not involving Westside during the consultation and planning processes has culminated in putting businesses and livelihoods at risk. By your own admission, not fully understanding and realising the sheer impact it would have on Westside businesses is not only a clear oversight but a gross failure in the project management and the vision going forwards. As direct consequences of this failure to confer, some businesses have lost their livelihoods and others are facing financial hardship. The mistakes made by both the contractors and council has left businesses in dire straits. Thus, the financial health check as it stands will not assist businesses but questions and implies business viability as opposed to addressing and rectifying the problem that has been created by the council and contractors. **Businesses are being asked to justify how and why are they being affected, their sustainable existence and viability. There is a need to provide immediate financial hardship relief to mitigate the losses that this has caused to allow businesses to stabilise and a sustainable plan to support businesses going forward.** Over time, Westside has been stripped of footfall, market relocation, buses and taxis and the last straw being the roadworks now almost completely cutting off accessibility to Westside which has directly impacted businesses and their ability to serve the greater community. **Time is a major factor in saving Westside from irrevocable loss and recovery through negligent and lack of timely responses.**

It seems apparent that there isn't much appetite or urgency from the council to deal with these matters; despite 5 businesses closing and 40 plus asking for help to get through this difficult time outside of our control. Frankly, not much is being resolved as verbal reassurances are not being followed or articulated and are open to misunderstanding.

To be clear how to go forward, we would like to **request a formal written response** to the main points listed below which are underpinned by the minutes of 7th April 2022, a copy of which you received. Please acknowledge receipt of document by 30th May 2022.

WESTSIDE TRADERS GROUP REQUIREMENTS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY.

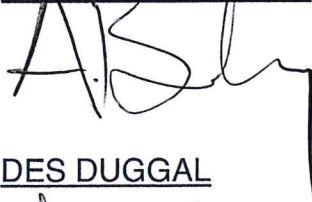
1. Financial hardship relief to counter the losses incurred due to the roadworks to be set in place within 2 weeks and we should have results and pay out within next 6 to 8 weeks for any eligible businesses.

2. All business rates payable should be exempt in the duration of the works and 12 months recovery period thereafter within catchment area on the map attached- this should be actioned within the next two weeks. We make reference to Section 49 of Local Government Finance Act 1988 allowing Council to grant rate relief where ratepayers are suffering hardship or severe difficulties. **In National Non-domestic Rates Explanatory Notes 2022/23 it clearly states "Local Discounts and Hardship Relief Local authorities have a general power to grant discretionary local discounts and to give hardship relief in specific circumstances. Full details can be obtained from the local authority"**.
3. All bid payer payments to be cancelled/exempt in the duration of the works and 12 months recovery period thereafter within catchment area on map- this should be actioned within the next two weeks.
4. A council strategic plan to reflect over the next 24-36 months how you will bring this side of towns footfall back and resume business back to normal. i.e. strategic plans for recovery for the area and the timely figures expected for the return of footfall and share a copy of this plan with us in the next 4 weeks.
5. Social media to boost presence whilst works are going on.
6. Plan of all works, phases in detail in writing over the duration of the works to be shared with us so this can be shared with all our members.
7. Regular monthly meeting with updates on everything on the list and any new concerns. The "working document" needs to be presented within 2 weeks as this was agreed 8th May and would provide a means to have regular meetings, share timescales, give opportunity to raise and address issues proactively in a conducive manner for beneficial of all parties.

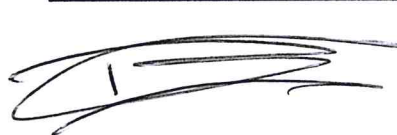
THE GROUP WOULD LIKE TO BRING IT TO YOUR ATTENTION THAT WE CONTACTED WOLVERHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL AROUND EARLY MARCH 2022 AND NOW WE ARE ALMOST 3 MONTHS ON AND NOTHING OUT OF OUR REQUEST LIST HAS BEEN DONE.

SUB GROUP MEMBERS:

ANDREW BRADLEY



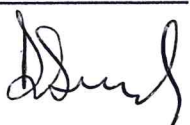
BILVIR CHANDER-KUMAR



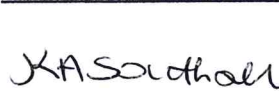
BRUCE NAGRA



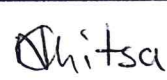
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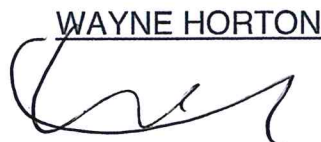
KIMBERLEY SOUTHALL



NICO CHITSA



OWEN LOWTHER



WAYNE HORTON

ESME STACKHOUSE



Briefing Note

Title: Public Realm Support Packages for Businesses **Date:** 15 February 2023

Prepared by: Isobel Woods, Head of Enterprise

Intended Audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

1. Purpose or recommendation

- 1.1 To update City Economy Scrutiny Panel on the business engagement and support undertaken before and during the city centre public realm improvement works along Victoria Street and surrounding roads.
- 1.2 To outline the approach for business support in future phases of the city centre public realm improvements works.

2. Background

- 2.1 The regeneration of the West side of the city centre, aimed at arresting the decline in retail footfall and transforming the environment to bring more homes, jobs, events and shops, has been a significant priority since the publication of the City Centre Area Action Plan in 2016 and has been referenced in subsequent Investment documents as a key opportunity site.
- 2.2 The Council has proactively sought to assemble a strategic regeneration opportunity through land acquisition and subsequent enabling works such as demolition to present a 'development-ready' opportunity. City Centre West will represent a comprehensive mixed-use masterplan approach to bring the site forward in context with wider transformation and plans for the city centre.
- 2.3 City Centre West is identified as a priority project forming part of a continued public sector partnership approach with the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities and Homes England with a view to accelerating delivery, enhancing the quality of the project and maximizing outcomes for Wolverhampton.
- 2.4 The public realm works are an essential part of the overall masterplan and have been planned over a number of years. Following completion of concept plans for the work, and Cabinet endorsement to consult on the project in September 2018, engagement with the public, businesses and stakeholders began in October 2018. During this time extensive consultation was undertaken with a variety of specific interest groups including local businesses, taxis, disabled groups, Wolverhampton BID and cycle forum.

- 2.5 By the end of 2018 all businesses in the phase 1 (Victoria Street) and phase 2 (Queen Square / Lichfield Street) areas that were directly affected by the proposals were contacted on an individual basis.
- 2.6 In March 2020 work on the project paused as the country went into lockdown during the pandemic. Whilst detailed design work and business case development was undertaken during the early months of the year, contact with businesses was limited as most premises were shut down and only a limited amount of contact via email was possible.
- 2.7 As a response to the pandemic and to help facilitate social distancing and increase walking and cycling as a means to travel safely, the Council was mandated to create wider open spaces for safe walking and cycling routes. This led to the early intervention to close Victoria Street to traffic other than time restricted servicing and as part of the Government Reopening the High Street initiative, pavement build outs were created in Victoria Street to assist the hospitality sector to reopen safely with extra areas for outdoor dining. In Lichfield Street, Queen Square and Darlington Street pavements were widened, bus stops were built out, traffic movement restricted to one way westbound and a new segregated cycleway was created as part of these Emergency Active Travel Fund measures.
- 2.8 In July 2021 preliminary enabling works began on site. Occupiers of affected areas were informed by letter drop of the works and traffic management arrangements around the area. Media coverage through the Express and Star and Council social media channels also allowed for a wider audience to be made aware of the works. Ongoing communication with key stakeholders continued through the usual channels including BID meetings and social media.
- 2.9 In November 2021, prior to the start on site of the main contract works, all occupiers in the area were visited and contact / information cards distributed to ensure that occupiers had 7 day per week contact details for the Customer Relationship Manager (or her team). The project website was fully up and running and social media links went live.
- 2.10 On 7 April 2022 officers were invited by the businesses on Victoria Street to attend a business meeting. The meeting had over 50 local traders, ward councillors, Cabinet Member for City Economy and the local MP. At this meeting the business agreed a subgroup with a chair that would represent the businesses in the area and provide a conduit to keep the wider network informed. This subgroup would meet regularly with representatives from the council and agreed to take on the responsibility to feedback information and actions, to and from the meeting.
- 2.11 On 9 May the Cabinet Member for City Economy, Assistant Director for City Transport and Environment, council officers leading the public realm improvements works project, Head of Enterprise and the Director of Wolverhampton City centre BID, met with 10 businesses of the subgroup. At this meeting information on the programme of works and forthcoming events was shared. Businesses fed back the impacts of the work on their premises and access issues that were relayed to the main contractor Eurovia.
- 2.12 The meeting on 9 May also invited businesses to shape the approach for business support. The council outlined that this work needed to be undertaken by an independent party. Traders agreed that it was important the offer included a package of support; advice and guidance on current business needs, support to help the businesses prepare for when the

works completed, and a financial review. Details of the tender specification were shared with the traders, who provided oversight and input.

- 2.13 At the same meeting the council also shared the point that it was not legally required to provide compensation but that it was committed to supporting those businesses where there was clear evidence of impact and financial loss. The council highlighted that it had to ensure it uses taxpayers money legally, appropriately and in their best interests.
- 2.14 The next meeting took place on 6 June. At this meeting with the traders, officers provided an update on the progress with the tender, information on the programme of works and the city centre events programme, including the forthcoming Commonwealth Games and Crazy Races. Officers also stated the council's commitment to invest £20,000 in a future events programme for Victoria Street upon completion of the works. Officers responded to requests from the traders to promote footfall to this area of the city. A social media campaign and signs around the city, saying Victoria Street 'businesses are open' were actioned and have carried on throughout the time of the works. Later in June, the council procured a local business, SCA Consultancy, to undertake the business support.
- 2.15 On 23 June a representative from SCA met with the subgroup, supported by Head of Enterprise, to talk through the approach to engage with businesses and to agree the reporting timeline period for the financial information. The financial information would be captured in a cashflow statement and would identify if a business had evidence of a financial loss arising from the public realm improvement works.
- 2.16 The decision to use a cashflow statement for the financial evidence followed a discussion with the traders. It had been identified that business owners in the area had varying accounts and ways of recording their financial position. To bring a fair and consistent approach, and enable independent businesses to participate, it was agreed with the traders that the cashflow statement was the best approach. Both the Council and traders were keen for SCA to begin their work swiftly and so it was agreed that the financial assessment period would be from January 2021 – September 2021, the 9 months before the works commenced, and October 2022 – June 2022, the 9 months from the start of the works up to that point in time
- 2.17 The meeting on 28 June with the council and traders was cancelled at the trader's request, because a meeting with the business consultant was planned to take place later that week.
- 2.18 On 30 June SCA consultancy attended a business meeting with local traders from Victoria Street and areas where the works were taking place. Around 45 businesses attended, they received information on the engagement with SCA, the service they would offer and the financial evidence for the time periods, set by the traders sub-group.
- 2.19 During July SCA, made contact with local traders in the area. From the 74 independent businesses who had been identified, 52 came forward to meet with SCA.
- 2.20 On 26 July, the council and traders met. The meeting was attended by SCA who fed back the number of responses and shared challenges contacting some traders, having emailed, phoned and walked around the area. The traders were asked when they wanted to bring to a close the business engagement activity. They made it clear this was to be Friday 29 July and confirmed they would inform all the businesses of this deadline.

- 2.21 On 1st August SCA concluded engagement with the businesses in the area where the public realm works were underway.
- 2.22 The meeting on 22 August was cancelled at the trader's request
- 2.23 At the meeting on 26 September SCA presented their findings to the group. From the 74 independent businesses within the identified area, 52 engaged with the consultants, of these 11 showed financial evidence of a drop in turnover.
- 2.24 On 12 October individual letters were hand-delivered to every business who had participated in the business review with details of the financial information for the first and second period, showing the percentage difference.
- 2.25 On the 17 October, after the findings of the initial business review work had been shared, the traders presented concerns to the council regarding the financial review process methodology. Comments were received that businesses had not been able to provide all the financial information which had been requested by SCA
- 2.26 On 28 October the council hand delivered letters to the 52 businesses who had taken part, to invite any missing information for the work which had been undertaken by SCA, to come forward. It was made clear that this information was for the cashflow statement.
- 2.21 On 7 November 2022, the council met with the traders. The traders presented a new approach for the financial review they wanted the council to undertake. They requested that the financial review should be re-done with different financial information and over a revised period, to include the three months since the original financial review with SCA had concluded in July. At no point was December 2022 or the forthcoming Christmas trading period mentioned. Some concerns were raised about the level of support received and this matter is being examined.
- 2.22 Although traders were originally involved in agreeing the terms of the initial review, the council acknowledged the feedback and subsequently commissioned, at pace, a specialist firm of accountants, RSM to review the process and methodology. They were fast-tracked through procurement and started their work before Christmas. They have experience of working on previous similar schemes, both here in the city and West Midlands. This work is being progressed and the council is expecting a report on their findings shortly.
- 2.23 On 16 December the council made disruption payments to 5 of the 11 businesses who had evidenced a loss of turnover. The remaining six businesses did not meet eligibility requirements either because they provided erroneous information when validated or ceased trading.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 The council is currently awaiting the outcome of the review from RSM which is due early February.
- 3.2 With regards to political oversight, updates on the public realm works have been shared at Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel in October 2022, Residents, Housing and

Communities Scrutiny Panel on 17 November, at Scrutiny Board on 27 January 2023, and also at Full Council in January 2023.

- 3.3 A report on the outcome of the consultation on the Phase 2 (Lichfield Street / Queen Square) of the city improvement programmes is due at Cabinet on 22 February 2023. The report recognises the need to have early engagement with businesses and regular channels of communication between all parties – council businesses and the contractor will be established. This will inform businesses about the programme of works and help to identify business support that may be needed.
- 3.4 The RSM review work will also provide a robust methodology that can be applied to future schemes, necessary to the transformation of the city centre, which may impact upon local businesses.

4. Going Forward

- 4.1 Current business support is undergoing significant transformation as EU funded programmes come to a close. The council is working with key partners and stakeholders including the WMCA to establish a new local employer support programme, which will meet the needs of the businesses in the city.
- 4.2 The council will review the report recommendations made by the financial experts currently reviewing the methodology and approach and this will inform future policy.

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ENC 5:

From WSTG: To All in reference to Enc 4 - Briefing Note: Please find a detail response from Westside which reflects discrepancies in what is being reported here.

2.5 - There was no contact. This can be confirmed by businesses.

2.6 - Using Covid as a reason for lack of communication from the supposed contact in 2018 to when works commenced in 2021 is not a valid excuse

2.8 – Businesses had notice of the Bell Street/traffic management from the express and star article <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/local-hubs/wolverhampton/2021/07/07/work-on-wolverhampton-city-centre-transformation-to-start-next-week/> and no letters/leaflets were received by businesses

2.9 – Some businesses were visited by Megan (and a lady Rose) but was only given one letter and no contact numbers or anything like that. Also was given no specific detail as to what was going on, just that they were starting the work.

2.12 - The meeting on 9/5 was only arranged because of the Statement of Fact that was sent to the council in May. It states that work was to be undertaken by an independent party - SCA were not independent of the council. The tender specifications were not shared and still have not been shared. Actions PDF of this meeting was also not received.

2.15 - Reporting timeline period not agreed (we were getting clarification of this at the next council meeting as the meeting was Des/Owen/Sam/ Billy and Isobel - it was also on the 16th June, not 23rd)

2.16 - Dates were not agreed (in fact minutes/actions from meeting on 6/6 show Isobel checking with legal that comparison periods could be changed without having to re-tender)

2.17 -The meeting on 28th June was cancelled as Des had Covid, not because of the business meeting with consultant - the meeting with the consultant and traders had already happened on the 20th June, after the meeting mentioned in point 2.16

2.18 - No. SCA rep (Sam) met with traders on the 20th and gave out paper copies of the spreadsheet. There were insufficient supplied even though Sam new of the number of businesses involved. No electronic versions sent to traders as promised. There was no discussion about the dates - although this was challenged again at the time, and questions about business rates being involved were met by "it's up to the council" More importantly the traders sub-group did NOT at any time, set any dates!!!!

2.20 - Council met with the subgroup not the traders. We were not asked when we wanted to close off the activity - we were told that some businesses had not provided information by 15th July cut-off date and suggested to extend until the 29th - Please note, some meetings with SCA wasn't scheduled until the 13th July!!!! How much of the delay was caused by SCA - another failing on their part.

2.22 - The meeting on 22/8 went ahead as planned. It detailed was it stated in point 2.23. The council proposed a "Discretionary business disruption payment" Please note - regarding the agreement to pay all 52 businesses at that meeting, the Action PDF sent showed that letters were to be sent out by John Roseblade. **The September meeting was cancelled at that meeting because of the fact that the council had proposed the disruption payment, and this allowed them time to approach the relevant parties regarding this,** it was evident that no clear decision /direction could be made by the end of September and letters were set to be send by mid October (as per the action to JR)

2.23 - Not correct as there was no meeting - on 23rd September, Isobel emailed her "council response template" and we had a subgroup meeting. A formal response was sent to her about this on 4/10 and chased on 13/10

2.24 - The letters were hand delivered on 14/10 there were no details just two figures and a percentage

2.25 - Incorrect. Traders had a meeting of their own on 17/10 - council were requested to attend but declined.

2.25 - (again) At the council meeting on 18/10 subgroup advised council that while SCA had assured that all circumstances would be taken into account that this was clearly not the case. Tender information was requested again. No Action PDF was received from this meeting.

2.26 - Letters requested additional verified financial information by 10/11. Westside also sent in updated information showing revised window to save time and allow council to assess asap.

2.21 - (this is the number directly after 2.26) 7th November subgroup reps Billy, Des and Esme met with Isobel Woods and John Roseblade. We did not want the financial review to be re-done with any different information!! We suggested ways that used the information collected by SCA and some additional information to illustrate a fairer and more realistic viewpoint of losses. An email was sent to JR and IW detailing these! Concerns were raised about how SCA conducted the review/health check. (There was NO support received at all!!!) On the 14/11 the meeting set for 15/11 was delayed to the end of November and didn't take place until 5/12. Delay was by the Council.

2.22 - At the meeting between council and subgroup on 5/12 we were told by the council that they were commissioning a company to evaluate the work done by SCA and the process that was used. All of our suggestions were completely disregarded, and we were told that even moving the comparison periods was classed as a "material change" (see earlier regarding IW checking with legal about changing dates earlier, even though it was in the minutes that legal had said dates could be changed without implications) A formal response was sent to the council on 13/12. No Action PDF was received from this meeting.

WSTG raised the fact that westside was totally dark and appeared closed, still looking like a building site. We were informed no work will be done during Xmas period – suggestion for barriers to be rearranged in order to make it more welcoming and perhaps some Xmas lights as there was only 10 days of shopping remaining. It was disappointing as we were informed that event would be held to drum up Xmas trade, but delays in acquiring raw materials by contractor removed this possibility.

2.23 - Businesses were given less than 48 hours to respond to offer letters which stated initial payment. More importantly - businesses did not provide erroneous information! **SCA did not collate/present the information correctly! Errors are the responsibility of SCA and the fact that the council did not audit/check the work that they had done.**

Westside: Financial Impact of Roadworks on Businesses Survey 2022

31 October 2022

Prepared by: Nico Chitsa

Introduction

- We issued a survey to collate the traders views on the impact of the roadworks.
- The survey was open for responses from 26 October 2022 and closed on 28 October 2022.
- The roadworks started around November 2021.
- The survey questions were assessing the impact of the roadworks for the period from 1 Jan 2022 to 30 Sep 2022.
- There were five questions to assess the financial impact of the roadworks.
- Each business that participated in the survey can corroborate its responses.
- Due to short time window, we were able to get participation of 29 businesses.

Survey Results

- The data was collected from 29 Businesses who trade on the streets affected by the roadworks, i.e. Victoria Street, Salop Street, School Street etc.
- All businesses surveyed have experienced **a slowdown in sales** since the roadworks began.
- The results indicate that majority of the participating businesses have been **severely affected by the roadworks**.
They are facing several issues such as **decrease in cashflow, decrease in demand due to low footfall, reduction in sales and profit, defaulting on payments, negative impacts on the mental health of staff and business owners** among others.
- The findings from the survey are consistent with the sentiments already socialised with the Council by the Business SubGroup.
- In some instances, the impact of the roadworks on business finances is **similar to when we were in Covid lockdown**.

Survey Introduction

Westside Financial Impact of Roadworks on Businesses Survey 2022

Wolverhampton Westside Financial Impact of Roadworks on Businesses Survey

Survey to understand the impact of the roadworks on your business in the period from 1 Jan 2022 to 30 Sep 2022. The roadworks commenced in November 2021. Please answer the questions truthfully and ensure you have the supporting evidence to your responses.

Page 226 The survey had descriptions of its purpose.

1. Cashflow - the first sign things are going wrong is a constant lack of cash. If cash flow is continually a problem, the business is in trouble.

Each question had a description of what the key terms mean, see example above.

Question 1: Survey Results

Q1

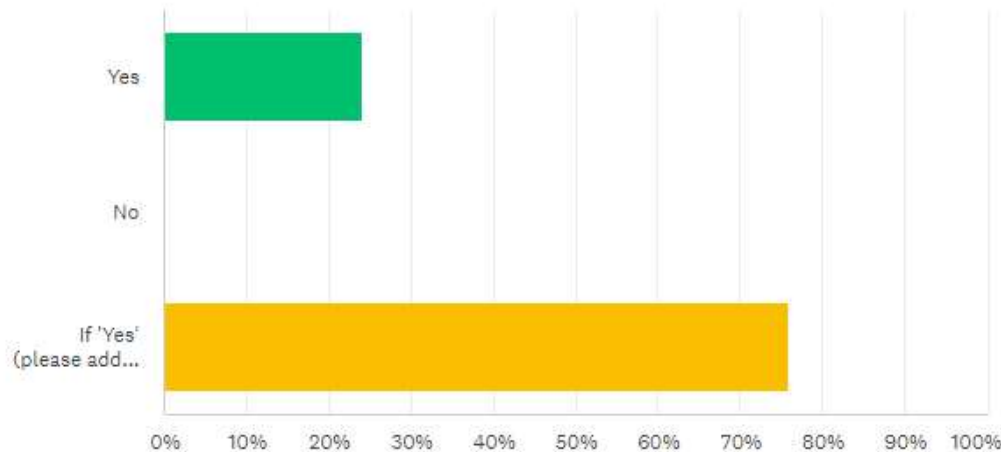


Customize

Save as ▾

In the period stated above, did your business experience a decrease in cash flow?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0



Page 227

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	24.14% 7
No	0.00% 0
If 'Yes' (please add more details)	Responses 75.86% 22
TOTAL	29

100% of the respondents had a significant decrease in cash flow.

Question 1: Some Sentiments from Businesses

Showing 22 responses

Significant money was spent on equipment such as outdoor seating, window displays, etc, all on the promise of the council completing these works in a timely and minimal disruption to walk-in trade and allowing for outdoor seating, which has categorically not been possible!!! In fact we are constantly told by our customers that coming into town has been made far too undesirable and that they are now going to bars/restaurants on the outskirts of Wolverhampton or towards places like Birmingham, who actually like to attract customers instead of developing ghost towns in the hope of attracting large housing developers!! Our only income now is trade t

27/10/2022 22:51

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Suffered appointment cancellations. Patient's saying no clear road signs and don't want to come until road works completed. This impacted downturn in sales.

27/10/2022 14:29

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Due to not been able to get access to the shop. Also unlevel pavement has stop disabled clients coming in.

27/10/2022 13:57

Page 228

Showing 22 responses

We loss around 10k each month till the work started

27/10/2022 13:38

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Have repeatedly used own cash to buy items for the business

27/10/2022 13:31

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

a dramatic drop in cashflow

27/10/2022 12:35

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

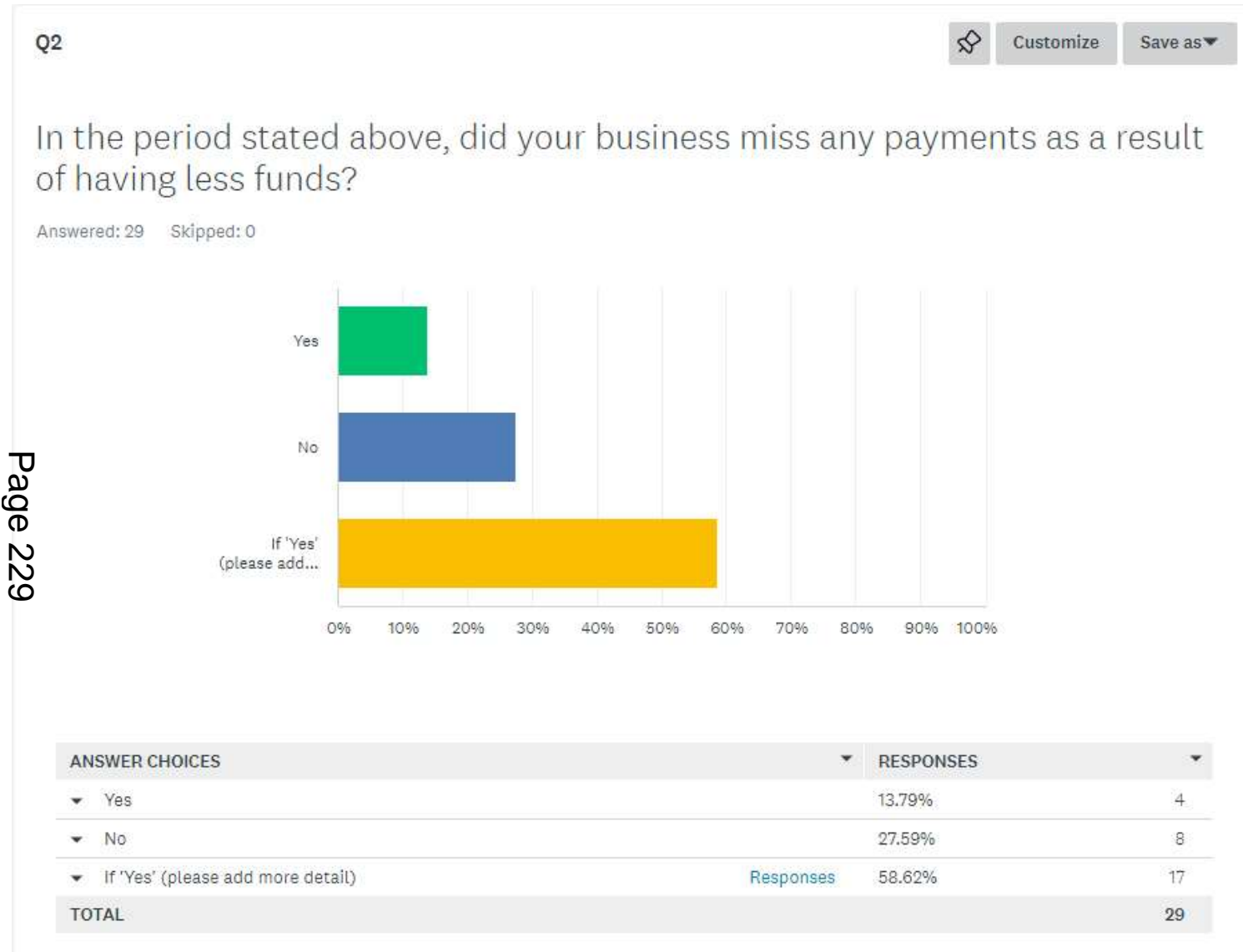
Reduced income, therefore reduced cashflow

27/10/2022 12:34

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Have been using personal money to meet bills and operating costs

Question 2: Survey Results



Page 229

73% of the respondents missed payments as a result of having less funds.

Question 2: Some Sentiments from Businesses

Showing 17 responses

Rent / vat / suppliers

28/10/2022 16:26

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Paying half rent , paying tax bill in instalments , paying suppliers late

28/10/2022 12:50

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Borrow money from friends for paying bills

28/10/2022 09:46

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Borrowed and loaned money

28/10/2022 09:14

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

We missed our electricity bill and rent before this period I never late for any payment and I'm still in arrears

Page 230

Showing 17 responses

TOTAL

I couldn't pay rent Im behind 10 months bonus back loan 5 months credit card 4 months

27/10/2022 23:08

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

we have had to ask suppliers and landlord for more time to cover payments for bills/rents

27/10/2022 22:51

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Rent and vat payment

27/10/2022 21:36

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

We put personal money into the business so not impact our suppliers. But this is not now sustainable.

27/10/2022 14:29

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼


I have missed each month hmrc bills, my food and beverage suppliers

TOTAL

29

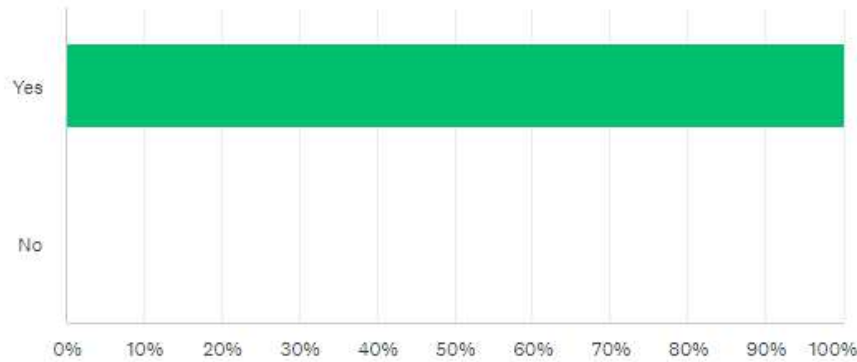
Question 3: Survey Results

Q3

 Customize Save as ▾

In the period stated above, did your business experience a fall in margins?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 1



Page 231

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▾ Yes	100.00%	28
▾ No	0.00%	0
TOTAL		28

[Comments \(25\)](#)

100% of the respondents had a fall in margins.

Question 3: Some Sentiments from Businesses

Showing 25 responses

with the increase in transport/delivery costs, in addition to couriers refusing to delivery or collect packages (as they fear parking tickets) due to the pedestrianisation works margins have decreased an average 5%

27/10/2022 22:51

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

45%

27/10/2022 21:36

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

4.6%

27/10/2022 14:29

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

At least 15%

27/10/2022 13:57

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

Page 232

Showing 25 responses

27/10/2022 10:30

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

To get public through doors putting offers on more frequently

26/10/2022 11:37

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

Supplier prices increasing but for us to increase our prices would deter customers coming back

25/10/2022 20:16

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

Higher staff costs, higher transport costs, increase of wholesale prices.

25/10/2022 19:52

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

20 to 25,./.

25/10/2022 16:12

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▼

Question 4: Survey Results

Q4

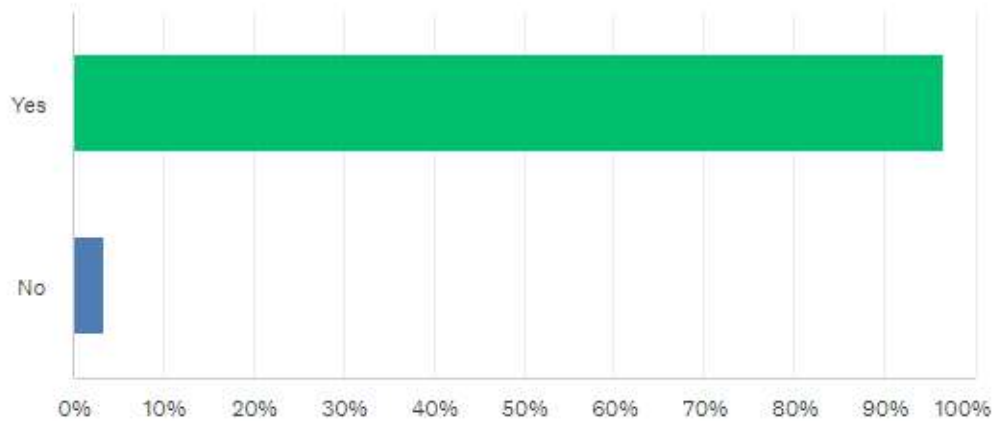


Customize

Save as ▾

In the period stated above, did your business experience a decrease in footfall?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0



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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	96.55% 28
No	3.45% 1
TOTAL	29

[Comments \(25\)](#)

97% of the respondents had a decrease in footfall

Question 4: Some Sentiments from Businesses

Showing 25 responses

Approx 50% down on 2019 figures

28/10/2022 12:50

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

40% loss

28/10/2022 12:36

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

60-70%

28/10/2022 09:46

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

At least 70percent or more

28/10/2022 09:14

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Around 15%

Showing 25 responses

Appointment cancellations and walk in appointments dried up which we also rely on. Unable to put signage for walk in appointments since paving ripped up in front of shop. Still the same now.

27/10/2022 14:29

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

15%

27/10/2022 13:57

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

55%

27/10/2022 13:38

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼



Again as above difficult to compare as new business but over 200% down on projections

27/10/2022 13:31

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

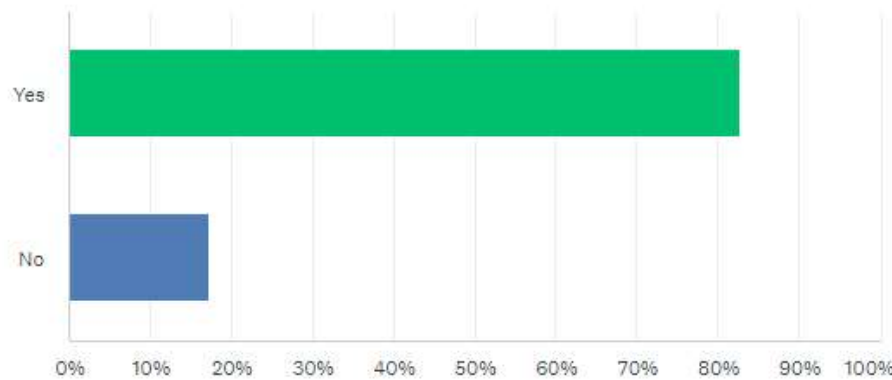
Question 5: Survey Results

Q5

 [Customize](#) [Save as](#) 

In the period stated above, did the roadworks have a negative impact on you or your employees mental health?

Answered: 29 Skipped: 0



Page 235

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	82.76% 24
No	17.24% 5
TOTAL	29

[Comments \(21\)](#)

83% of the respondents said roadworks had a negative impact on their and their employees mental health.

Question 5: Some Sentiments from Businesses

Showing 21 responses

Stress

28/10/2022 16:26

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Stress , difficulties sleeping , reducing hours, losing staff, staff morale

28/10/2022 12:50

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Had to reduce staff and make things harder for me and getting very stress most of the time due to rides work taking a very long time

28/10/2022 09:14

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Stressful as not sure if able to pay rent & wage

28/10/2022 08:55

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

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Showing 21 responses

27/10/2022 23:54

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Battling with contractor to stop concrete dust + noise. Also depressing having an empty shop - makes our efforts seem pointless.

27/10/2022 23:48

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

severe stress on myself and wife regarding the loss of income/potential business from the lack of passing trade, trying to understand how we cover our business running costs in addition to our costs to live and look after our 4 year old child, groceries, utilities, heating, etc, not sure how many things I can keep listing without the anxiety getting to a stage of questioning my life!!!

27/10/2022 22:51

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Mental and physical stress. Longer hours

27/10/2022 21:36

[View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags](#)▼

Conclusion

- Based on the findings from this study, we have concluded the **roadworks have had a significant impact on the finances of the Businesses Surveyed.**
- Businesses **need help to ease the suffering.**
- Majority of these businesses **cannot survive from the crisis without financial aid.**
- The work is not expected to complete until Feb 2023 and other phases are commencing, i.e. Phase 2 and 3. Therefore, there will be ongoing business disruption and Council should learn lessons from Phase 1.

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Victoria Street Traders update meeting, 28 June 2022

Agenda and purpose of meeting...

1. Listen to concerns and develop solutions
2. Progress agreed actions and address the following issues set out by traders including:
 - Financial hardship relief
 - Business rates relief
 - BID payments relief
 - Two-three year plan for returning footfall to normal
 - Social media to boost presence
 - Plans for all works
 - Regular monthly meetings for updates ✓
4. Any other business?
- 5. Date and time of next meeting: Tuesday 26 July at 5.30pm

Actions from previous meeting...

Westside Traders SubGroup Meeting

Key	
	Complete
	Action on track/On hold
	On-going
	Major issue/Overdue

ACTION SHEET

Date of Meeting	Item	Issue	Update	Owners of actions	Deadline Date	BRAG Status
06.06.22		Review the proposed comparison period of financial hardship calculations to ensure a fair and equitable approach. Working with the advisor once appointed to agree a reasonable set of financial documents	16.06.22 Appointed business Advisor met with Billy, Owen and Des to talk through the financial information and agree approach. Isobel and Sam can update in meeting	Isobel Woods	14 June	Suggested complete
06.06.22		Check the tender to ensure that comparison periods can be changed easily without retendering and check with legal. Traders to be informed of appointed Independent Financial Adviser	Reviewed, can be done and being actioned through the item above	Isobel Woods Isobel Woods	14 June	Suggested complete
06/06/22		Traders to help businesses in the area to be aware of the Financial Health check being undertaken by the Business Advisor, and the relevant financial paperwork	A well-attended meeting was held 20.06.22 supported by traders	Traders	20 June	Suggested complete

06.06.22		Agree common understanding of what we are trying to achieve in terms of supporting increased footfall in the area.	For discussion at next meeting	ALL	28 June	Action on track
06.06.22		Review business rates hardship application process/form for rate relief and whether the current form is minimum requirement under law or can be streamlined.	Can be streamlined and fast-tracked directly by council – avoiding Valuation Office process Team are working with the new business advisor to look at using the information collected from the Health Check as a way of demonstrating loss during this time and simplify the process	Tracey Richards	14 June	Suggested complete
06.06.22		Traders to send formal requests to the Bid for the Bid Board to consider bid levy relief (Cllr Simkins declared an interest at this point as member of the bid board).	Traders and BID to update at the next meeting	Traders	8 July	Action on track
06.06.22		Share presentation and link to investment prospectus.	This has been done and the link to the Prospectus was contained within the presentation	Ian Fegan	10 June	Suggested complete
06.06.22		Communications to piggyback on forthcoming events to promote the message that Victoria Street will still open for business, including temporary signage to direct visitors.	Update is a substantive agenda item	Richard Wyatt	28 June	Action on track
06.06.22		Liaise with Commonwealth Games OC to see if there is any merchandise or materials <u>e.g.</u> posters/t-shirts that can be ordered for local businesses.	Commonwealth Games Organising Committee team contacted. No free merchandise and only officially sanctioned CWG branded materials can be used which can be purchased online	Shelley Smith	28 June	Suggested complete

06.06.22		Look at opportunities to dress empty units in the vicinity with City or Commonwealth Games branding. Consider artists to use space.?	Spoken to Hannah Taylor at Asylum Art Gallery who is going to come up with some ideas about possible art installations or backlit video	BID/Council	28 June	Action on track
06.06.22		Traders to come to next meeting with their ideas on how £20k budget can be spent on events/type of events they think will generate footfall.	Update at next meeting	Traders	28 June	Action on track
06.06.22		Develop artwork for a shop local Victoria Street branded digital campaign to support footfall for local businesses.	Update is a substantive agenda item	Richard Wyatt	28 June	Action on track
06.06.22		<u>Eurovia</u> and Project Manager to visit premises affected by uneven threshold paving and damaged shutters and address.	Latest update is included within the presentation slide deck from <u>Eurovia</u>	Ruth Taylor/ Mark Nicholls	10 June	Suggested complete
06.06.22		Conduct further discussions with traders regarding parking issues to identify parking solutions. Permits to be issued to businesses for loading / deliveries.	Proposed approach: Dispensation for Loading & Unloading - 20 minutes maximum loading period to apply, no return within 1 hour. Vehicle must not obstruct the flow of traffic or pedestrians / pavements / crossing or access to any other business premises.	John Roseblade/City Transport	28 June/ 18 June	Action on track
06.06.22		Establish date of Bell Street taxi rank/bay opening.	The lines are in - just waiting for update on delivery and installation of the compliant signage	Mark Nicholls	28 June	Action on track
06.06.22		Examine opportunities for paid advertising, social media including development of hashtag as part of a wider campaign.	Update is a substantive agenda item	Richard Wyatt		Action on track
06.06.22		Pavement licence applications forms for tables and chairs on the highway to be sent out to interested businesses	Applications sent to businesses who expressed interest.	Ruth Taylor	13 June	Suggested complete

Progress updates on issues...

Financial hardship relief update...

- Business Advisor and team have been appointed
- Met with members of the sub-group and agreed financial information and comparison timeline for the health check would be nine months before the works with the nine months of the works.
- Wider discussions about trading positions pre-covid to be progressed
- Met with businesses from the area to introduce the Advisor and his team, and share the financial information which the team will be looking for
- Work is underway engaging with the businesses in the Westside area.

Business Rates relief update...

- Streamlined application process
- Will be fast-tracked by council

Team are working with the advisor to use the information collected from the Health Check as a way of demonstrating a loss during period



Plan for returning footfall to normal - events

- LSD Promotions, the approved markets operator in the city, have the site plans and are considering them. We are awaiting feedback before opening up further discussions with other operators.
- Digbeth Dining Club are interested in running events in this space. They are looking for a city centre site to run with their 'markets model' similar to events they are running at The Waterfront in Brierley Hill and are keen to get 2 or 3 dates in the diary.

Commonwealth Games Festival Site

Festival Site in Old Market Square from 9.30am to 6pm on 4th August is a prime viewing position for non-ticketed spectators to watch the race

Festival site includes:

- Large screen
- Seating
- Live entertainment
- Commentary from sporting legends
- 'Have a go' cycling activities
- Information stands
- Food and beverage
- Face painting
- Children's rides

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KEY:
2 KEY POINTS
 --- PARACHUTE JUMP
 --- RELAY ROUTE



QUEEN'S BATON RELAY

Sunday 24 July 2022, Wolverhampton

8AM
START
LOOK TO THE SKIES



Queens Baton Relay route on 24th July has now been announced and will travel down:

- **School Street**
- **Skinner Street**
- **Victoria Street**
- **Bell Street**
- **Cleveland Street**

Merchandising Update

- Unfortunately, local businesses are unable to purchase dressing items unless they were a commercial sponsor.
- Merchandise is available to purchase online: <https://shop.birmingham2022.com/>
- Local businesses can use the 'business as usual' colours to decorate their shop fronts or get plain bunting made but this cannot use the Birmingham Logo or have Commonwealth Games or Birmingham 2022 wording or branding on due to strict brand guidelines.

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BUSINESS AS USUAL

There are two key areas where Business as Usual will apply: planting and lighting. Both options could help you establish your Look at minimal cost.

Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games colours present an intense energy and a hopeful, optimistic and youthful outlook on the world that embraces the new.

These are the colours that make up our primary identity and can be used as the backbone of the choices you make to dress your area. The range provides a great deal of flexibility in how colour can be applied to help create impact and grab attention.



	URBAN GREY	SABBATH BLACK	CANAL BLUE	CHASE GREEN	JQ GOLD	BALTI ORANGE	BOURNVILLE RED	LICKEY LILAC	MOSELEY MAUVE	SALMON PINK
PANTONE	COOL GRAY 1 U	BLACK 6U	2985 U	382 U	7404 U	166 U	2347 U	213 U	2597 U	486 U
CMYK	C0 M0 Y0 K15	C0 M0 Y0 K100	C70 M0 Y5 K0	C45 M0 Y100 K0	C0 M15 Y100 K0	C0 M65 Y100 K0	C0 M89 Y100 K0	C0 M90 Y0 K0	C60 M77 Y0 K0	C0 M60 Y60 K0
RGB	R227 G227 B227	R0 G0 B0	R0 G182 B248	R206 G223 B0	R255 G230 B0	R255 G157 B026	R255 G027 B018	R234 G039 B194	R114 G077 B214	R255 G125 B123

Social media to boost presence – shop local Victoria St campaign

Page 252

- Revised 'Still Open for Business' branding campaign covering Victoria Street, School Street and Salop Street
- Social media campaign to be launched on Independents' Day UK – weekend of Saturday July 2 and Sunday July 3 using #ukindie day #shoplocal
- Mailout to 18,000 residents about Independents' Day and the affected businesses in residents newsletter on Friday July 1.
- Working with BID to revisit 'Spotlight on Businesses' features
- All city events comms to include 'Still Open for Business' messages

[Wolves Council](#)  @WolvesCouncil · Jun 4

  OPEN FOR BUSINESS: Out shopping in the city centre this long Platinum Jubilee weekend? Remember shops in Victoria St, Salop St School St are still trading while transformation works take place. [#shoplocal](#)

Scheme info  orlo.uk/q5qdk
[#investwolves](#)



New signage



Four big scheme information boards about the public realm works in the west side of the city centre in position at either end of Victoria Street.

Construction update sent out by Eurovia, 24th June

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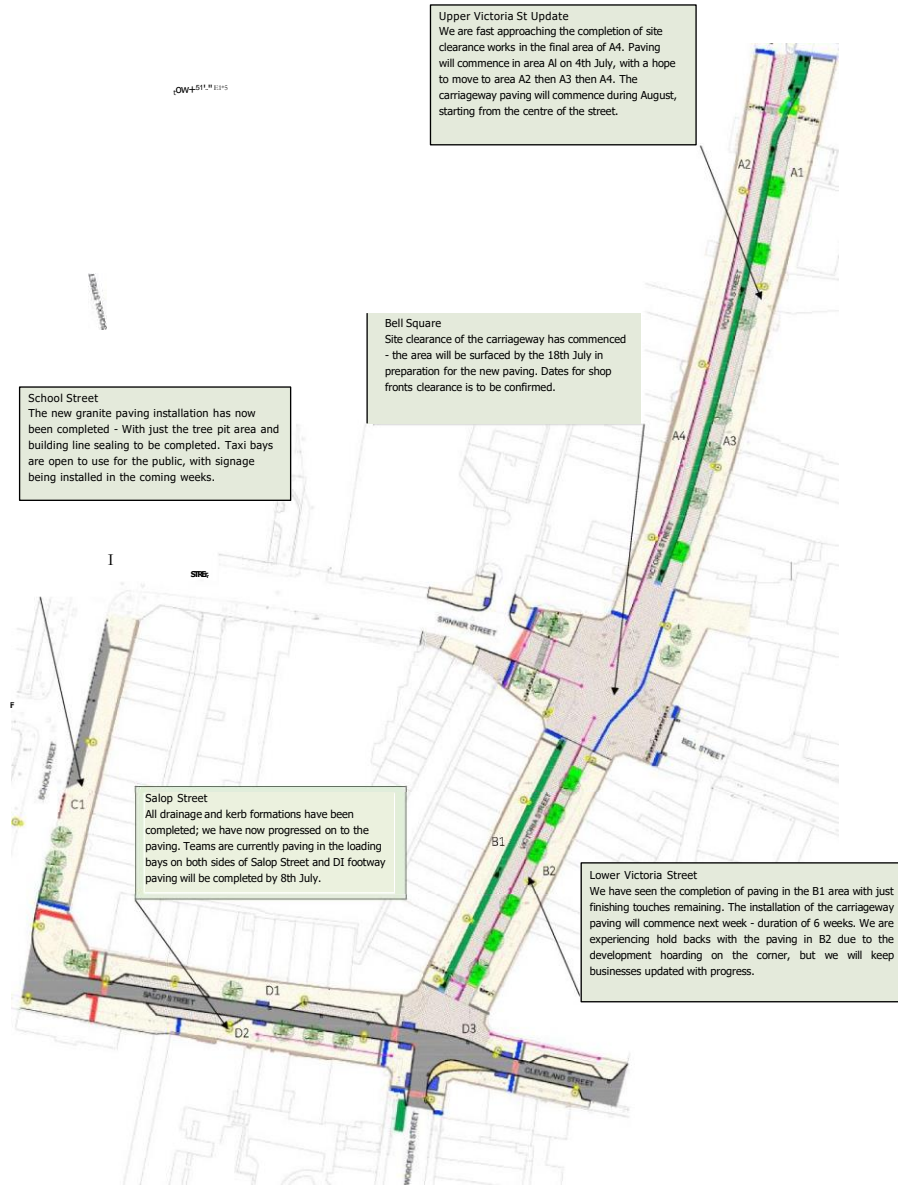
Phase 1 Construction update

School Street

The new granite paving installation has now been completed, with just the tree pit and building line sealing to be completed. Taxi bays are open for use by the public, with signage being installed in the coming weeks.

Salop Street

All drainage and kerb formations have been completed. We have now progressed onto paving. Teams are currently paving in the bays on both sides of Salop Street, and paving in area D1 will be complete by 8th July.



Upper Victoria St Update

We are fast approaching the completion of site clearance works in the final area of A4. Paving will commence in area A1 from 4th July, with a view to move to areas A2, A3 then A4. The carriageway paving will commence during August, starting from the centre of the street.

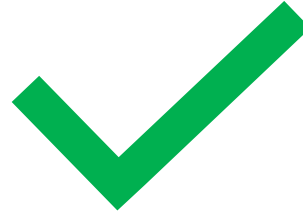
'Bell Square'

Site clearance of the carriageway has commenced – the area will be surfaced by 18th July in preparation for the new paving. Dates for shop fronts to be confirmed.

Lower Victoria Street

We have seen the completion of the paving in area B1 with just the finishing touches remaining. The installation of carriageway paving will commence next week – duration 6 weeks. We are experiencing hold backs in area B2 due to the development hoarding on the corner, but we will keep businesses updated with progress.

Regular monthly meetings for updates...



Meeting dates confirmed, starting 5.30pm:

- Tuesday 26 July
- Monday 22 August
- Wednesday 21 September
- Tuesday 19 October
- Tuesday 15 November
- Thursday 15 December

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Date: 5th December 2022

	Council Attendance	Westside Attendees	Company & Representing Westside Traders Group
Isobel Woods	Attended	Des	XBrand Furniture
John Roseblade	Attended	Billy	Equinox
		Esmea	Tunwells
CC: Tim Johnson	Abstained	Kimberley	Richard & Co Hairdressers
Ian Brookfield	Abstained	Wayne	Framers Gallery
Richard Lawrence	Abstained	Owen	George Wallis
Stephen Simkins	Attended	Andrew	Faith Hope & Charity
Ian Fegan	Attended	Vijay	Native Menswear
Steve Evans	Abstained	Nico (late)	Nimo's
		Bruce	Ill

Cllr Simkins, council members have stated that they want to pay 7 of the business that demonstrated a loss from the health check that was submitted, whilst independent company to review process is being procured. No Date Was Given by Council!

Cllr Simkins and members agreed that a caveat will be included to ensure and reflect any subsequent findings/changings for those of the businesses that will be paid.

WSTG Subgroup expressed **that they are not happy** with this as it means waiting longer for any financial hardship support, when businesses are already on the brink.

The meeting was scheduled to be held at Equinox on 5th Dec, however due to sensitivity of, what we now understand to be a BBC, Isobel suggested it be moved to Council Offices. Temperaments of traders are running high as they see nothing but delaying tactics by a council who is not showing care or concern.

Response to council

1. We are disappointed that a number of council senior representatives **chose not** to attend the meeting.
2. We are disappointed that it has taken Isobel 5 weeks to respond to the clear presentation on the 7th November of issues Westside have encountered with the Health Check. This was an action point that arose from Cllr Simkins meeting October, requesting Isobel, John, Billy, Des & Esmea to understand issues around the health check. Miscommunication and failings came to light.
3. Westside also demonstrated clearly an amicable solution that would resolve the failings of the health check. It was made clear by Cllr Simkins that the understanding of the health check required just the **sales turnover of 2 periods would demonstrate losses as a result of the** and not the full income and expenditure cash flow as businesses were required to provide. It had been raised at the time when Isobel was questioned over how the data collected from businesses would be used.

4. Following email received from Isobel see below, Cllr Simkins had requested Ian Fagan be actioned to set team up to look at the sales turnover again. Ian has subsequently declined and referred it back to Isobel, to whom we have already demonstrated issues.

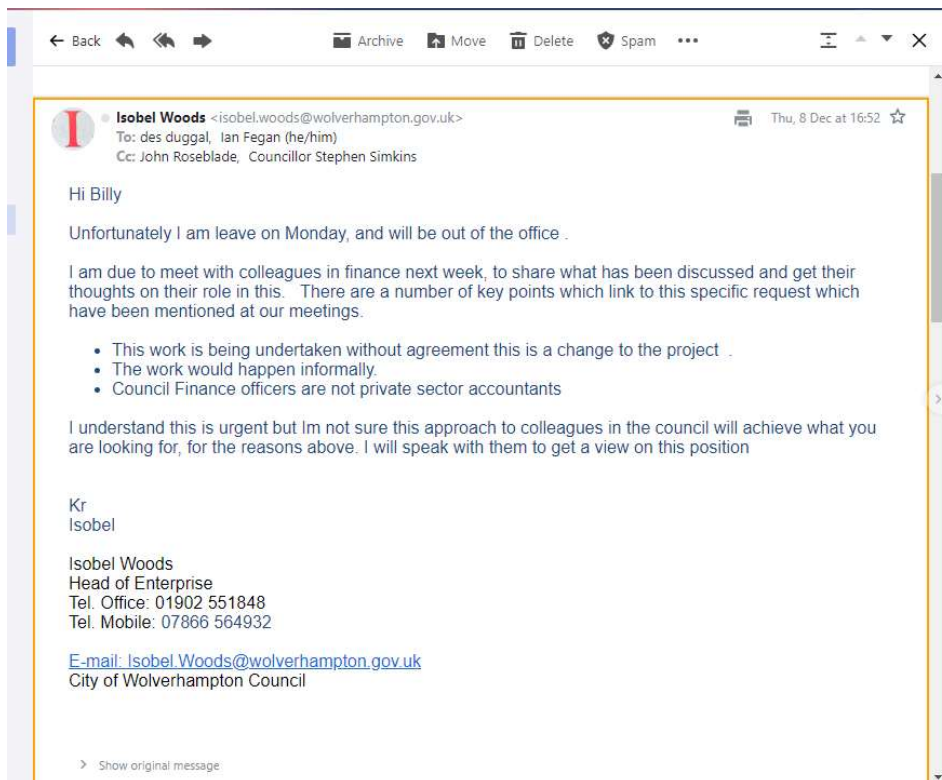
Over 20 businesses have submitted updated information based on new window.

Isobel stated that not all businesses submitted data to her using the same spreadsheet format. Some submitted management accounts showing profit and loss. Hence, she is not wanting to look at this, currently.

Isobel is insisting that the parameters have changed in terms of the window being moved by 3 months and deems it to be a new project, which WSTG disagrees with.

WSTG emphasised the **real data is more relevant** and that factoring still needs to be considered to help businesses and hospitality as covid restrictions were still in place.

Additionally, this easily demonstrates the real losses experienced businesses using the new window, which the council are in denial of.



5. **Cllr Simkins stated that the spreadsheet was never seen by him.** He commented that it should have been based on sales turnover and not income and expenditure cashflow. This clearly demonstrates that the remit of what Sam and his team were to undertake was not clearly specified from the outset, hence a lot of confusion could have been avoided.

Cllr Simkins realised that the turnover should have been kept separate, as merging it with the health check is what's caused the issues. It is the businesses that are bearing the brunt of the mistakes that council are making. They are the ones whose livelihoods are at stake whilst council can write it off as a learning at Westsides expense. This is not acceptable.

Cllr Simkins has asked for a council finance team to address see if there is a possibility to re-use of the spreadsheet template showing the new window as it is clear that there is a lack of understanding of the spreadsheet by senior members.

6. Isobel stated that an independent specialist company has been identified and is looking to be procured by council to review the processes, where failings, mismanagement, miscommunication etc has occurred between council and Westside businesses. Council have stated that they understand the urgency and John Roseblade confirmed it would be fast-tracked. **WSTG are concerned as unnecessary additional expenditure to prove their failings and negligence and further the delays in paying hardship relief.**
7. Isobel stated that Sam still needs to be given an opportunity to respond to issues and concerns raised by WSTG around the health checks.
Isobel needs all comments from Westside traders about the conduct of data collection by Sam and his team. This should be no later than Friday 9th Dec as council need to do an internal contract review. Any issues businesses found must be sent in via email.

WSTG thanks those businesses that have already submitted comments.

8. **Westside have explained sheer disappointment on the failings of Eurovia/Council :**
 1. Not sorting out delivery access for businesses when it should have been done over 2 months ago.
 2. The misuse of space at Bell Square wrt parking vehicles and making the whole space look like a Construction site.
 3. Reduce unnecessary barriers and create accessible walkways with Health and Safety in mind.
 4. Slowness of actually getting work done.
 5. Improved street lighting.
 6. No Xmas lights or lamp posts.
 7. No Christmas activity to generate/drum up trade for Westside.
 8. Westside suggested activities to coincide with an event to consider business trail.

Cllr Simkins stated he would like to meet with senior manager of Eurovia to challenge their lack of care or concern over businesses and urgency of work/ delays/failings and conduct in which works are being carried out.

WSTG requested a date of 19th Dec to get a review. This needs to be confirmed to be confirmed with council.

9. THE RATIONALE

WSTG strongly suggest data using new window be adopted and payments made accordingly. This is the easiest option to help businesses.

The outcome of the meeting is not acceptable as WSTG see it as further delays. Yes, you have agreed to pay 7 of the businesses. The WSTG suggest council should invest in someone sitting and looking at the data that they already collected and give each business at a minimum, a payment for hardship relief with a freeze of the business rates. Until this inquiry into the failings has been looked at. You cannot expect people to survive on thin air. Why should the councils' failings compromise businesses livelihoods.

WSTG have given the council every opportunity to support businesses and they have not come back with any constructive conducive plan other than an independent company to prove where they went wrong and how to rectify it. Thus, is at the cost of businesses going under. Council accountability is for them to look at. We need someone who understands and can work with the information already supplied. I.e. a finance person.

As businesses we are within our rights to change parameters especially if the process is based on base information that is not totally conducive to the process. Unless you write exactly what has been agreed, you as the council will chose to say what you believe not what we understand and are forced to take on only later to be told we agreed with it.

It is clear right from the outset the remit for health check/data collection has been convoluted and not clearly defined. Council have been selective in how they used or in this cased misused the information.

Over 20 businesses have demonstrated the new window and are appealing. **You as the council have the power to endorse and look at the sales turnover which is what was originally agreed.** It was quite clear that a simple activity has been over complicated for the mere reason that council's opinion showed some flaws in how businesses functioned. E.g. lacking proper accounts, marketing strategies. Independent businesses are not limited companies, that does not mean they should be treated differently. The health check was mis-sold to the business traders another reason why all these problems occurred.

We have traceability of our records; a lot of the council traceability is verbal words.

Businesses have proved losses. The council needs to stop changing the goal post because they don't want to pay businesses.

WSTG stated - Some sort of interim gesture needs to be given this side of Christmas especially where established businesses can show losses through vat returns or other means as they all take into consideration sales turnover. It is the simplest and most efficient way of dealing with the catastrophe occurring in westside and blighting the city as a whole.

WSTG attended the Wolverhampton Business Forum 8th December at the "Meet the Mayor Andy Street" the question asked of Andy Street was...

"When capital programs are instigated by Councils, what consideration and accountability is there to ensure the correct necessary steps are taken to enable existing businesses to operate with minimal disruption. What consideration, contingency plans/ financial support is there for those businesses that are severely affected by the improvements such as roadworks"

Andy Street stated that there is an agreed PUBLIC POLICY where compensation is available in such circumstances. WHY HAS THE COUNCIL NOT MADE THIS AVAILABLE?

Furthermore, WSTG were unaware of the sheer support from other businesses around the city and neighbouring towns such as Wednesfield. Many issues were raised with respect to the Wolverhampton city centre works.

We are appealing for immediate action on: -

1. Based on sales turnover use new comparative window and make payment to businesses who have demonstrated loss with appropriate caveat for review pending independent company review of whole process. This needs to be done by next week 20th with pay-outs before Christmas. I.e.19th Dec.
2. Incorporate some level of factoring based on govt guidelines during covid recovery in respect to operation functionality of businesses.
- 3.The urgency for fast tracking the new window is at no additional expense to the council. Westside are available to clarify this.
4. Provide a hardship package or relief for those that haven't qualified but have suffered.
5. Freeze business rates and backdate from at a minimum Jan 22- Mar 23.
6. For transparency, we need to understand the brief that is going to be given to independent company. Again, learning from SCA management procurement.
7. Full disclosure of communication to business traders needs to come from council issuing statements of what they deem should be communicated to businesses from their perspective as Westside integrity is being questioned because of misconstruing/ misunderstanding information delivery.

Isobel stated that all communication to traders' group is to be copied to council to avoid misunderstandings of information. This is to minimise businesses directly contacting council outside of subgroup and to ensure there is no confusion with both parties being are on the same page.

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Scrutiny Board Meeting

Tuesday, 2 May 2023

Dear Councillor

SCRUTINY BOARD - TUESDAY, 2ND MAY, 2023

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Tuesday, 2nd May, 2023 meeting of the Scrutiny Board, the following report that was unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No	Item
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3	<u>City West Grant Relaunch Scheme - Payments</u> (Pages 3 - 20)
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[To consider a report on the City West Grant Relaunch Scheme – Payments].

[The urgent decision made on 31 March 2023 by Cabinet, relating to the City West Grant Relaunch Scheme can be found at the following link - [Decision - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme :: Wolverhampton City Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)].

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Scrutiny Team:

Contact Martin Stevens DL

Tel 01902 550947

Email martin.stevens@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Address Scrutiny Office, Civic Centre, 1st floor, St Peter's Square,
Wolverhampton WV1 1RL

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Briefing Note

Title: City Centre West Business Support Scheme Grant Funding Allocation

Date: 27 April 2023

Prepared by: Richard Lawrence **Job Title:** Director of Regeneration

Intended Audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this briefing is to clearly set out the rationale for determining the funding level for business support grant payments to traders operating in the west of the city centre who may have been adversely affected by the impact of the £15 million Future High Street Fund investment to improve public realm spaces and increase footfall.

1.2 The report concisely sets out the background to the current position, sets out the legal and financial considerations to the funding decision and balances this against the Council's commitment to support affected businesses whilst using taxpayers money in an appropriate, responsible and proportionate way.

1.3 This report to Scrutiny Board follows a challenge from Victoria Street traders to the level of payment proposed through the urgent decision made on 31 March 2023 relating to the City Centre West Grant Relight Scheme – [Decision - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme :: Wolverhampton City Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

2.0 Background

2.1 The regeneration of the West side of the city centre, aimed at arresting the decline in retail footfall and transforming the environment to bring more homes, jobs, events and shops, has been a significant priority since the publication of the City Centre Area Action Plan in 2016 and has been referenced in subsequent Investment documents as a key opportunity site.

2.2 City Centre West is also a priority project forming part of a continued public sector partnership approach with the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, Homes England and the WMCA with a view to accelerating delivery, enhancing the quality of the project and maximizing outcomes for Wolverhampton.

2.3 The public realm works are an essential part of the overall masterplan and have been planned over a number of years. Preliminary works began in October 2021 with physical work beginning in January 2022.

2.4 In April 2022, local businesses and the Council met to discuss the impact of the works, it was agreed regular meetings would be held to update on the programme of works, business support and events/communication plan.

2.5 On 9 May 2022, the Cabinet Member for City Economy, the Director for City Housing and Environment, council officers leading the public realm improvements works project, Head of Enterprise and the Director of Wolverhampton City centre BID, met with 10 businesses representing the Westside Traders (WSTG).

2.6 At this meeting the Council shared that it was not legally required to provide compensation but that it was committed to supporting those businesses where there was clear evidence of impact and financial loss. The Council highlighted that it had to ensure it uses taxpayers' money legally, appropriately and in their best interest.

2.7 In May 2022 an Individual Executive Decision Notice gave approval for £50,000 to provide business support to traders in the area. It was from this budget that an external consultancy was appointed supported by the local traders, to offer business support to assist businesses in the Victoria Street area. Businesses were invited to receive business advice and guidance and a review of their financial position which was captured in a cashflow statement.

2.8 The cashflow statement was an approach, agreed with the local traders, to identify if there had been a reduction in turnover in their business during the works, compared to a period prior to the start of the works. The outcome showed that five businesses, out of fifty-one who came forward, who remained in the area, had evidence of an impact. The Council had committed to support those businesses where evidence could be shown.

2.9 In November 2022, following a meeting with local traders where a new approach for the financial review was presented for the Council to consider, the Council commissioned a specialist firm of accountants to review the process and present recommendations to the Council on a methodology. The company, RSM having previously worked on similar schemes, presented their findings in early March 2023.

2.10 The Council was presented with a very detailed, robust, but lengthy, process and methodology to consider. The details of this and an alternative option for a 'relaunch' payment grant scheme were shared with the local traders at a meeting on 13 March 2023 and presented to Scrutiny Board on 14 March 2023. Letters with details of both options were delivered to all the businesses who took part in the previous exercise earlier in the year, to seek their views, for the Council to consider in its recommendations going forward.

2.11 On 22 March 2023, having considered the options, representatives of the traders fed-back that their preferred option was to establish a City Centre West Relaunch Grant. This reported of the 41 businesses who voted, 41 were in favour of the option of a one-off grant. The grant offers small businesses who were open during the works and remain in the area, a one-off payment to invest in their business. At this time traders asked for a wide scale meeting to include all relevant traders to discuss the recommended package. It is also important to note that the amount of grant had not been determined at this stage.

2.12 To facilitate the urgent implementation of the scheme and to allocate the agreed level of funding, an urgent decision was made on 31 March 2023 - [Decision - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme : Wolverhampton City Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#). [Business support officers were also allocated to the scheme to personally visit each business to advise on the scheme and offer individual assistance in making applications, rather than in a large-scale public meeting.](#)

2.13 The urgent decision identified up to 59 businesses who, if they were eligible and met certain simple due diligence criteria, could receive a swift, one-off grant payment of £5,000 to invest in their business. The aim of this was to support them to seize upon the opportunities presented by the £15 million Future High Street Fund investment to improve public realm spaces outside their premises and to increase footfall to the area.

2.14 The scheme went live on 3 April 2023 and business advisors from the Council's Enterprise Team hand-delivered (wherever possible) details of the scheme to potentially eligible businesses and engaged with them to offer support.

2.15 Although the opportunity to apply to the scheme was originally due to come to an end on 12 May 2023, the closing date was extended to 31 May 2023 to allow businesses more time to make an application.

2.16 As at 8am on 25 April 2023, 21 businesses out of a potential total of 59 that may be eligible, have applied to receive the grant. This represents around a 37% current take-up of the Relaunch Grant Scheme offer.

3.0 Evaluation of alternative options

3.1 The evaluation of alternative options are set out in the urgent decision made on 31 March 2023 relating to the City Centre West Grant Relight Scheme – [Decision - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme :: Wolverhampton City Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

4.0 Reason for decision

4.1 Although **there is no legal requirement for the Council to make any form of grant payment**, the Council has made it clear on numerous occasions – and through its actions in engaging with businesses – that it is committed to supporting traders who may have been adversely affected by the £15 million investment in public realm improvements.

4.2 In doing so, the Council is also very clear about its financial duties to manage tax-payers money well. This is set out in *Roberts v Hopwood [1925] AC 578*, which established the principle that:

"[A] local authority owes a fiduciary duty to the ratepayers from whom it obtains moneys needed to carry out its statutory functions, and ...this includes a duty not to expend those moneys thriftlessly but to deploy the full financial resources available to it to the best advantage" (at paragraph 37).

4.3 Officers are not aware of any other local authority areas where similar works have taken place, that have made similar grant payments or who have compensated for the inevitable disruption that this has caused.

4.4 An example of similar plans is given in the recent express and star article which describes the recent similar investment in Leicester City Centre and the benefits this has delivered. [A tale of two cities – Wolverhampton should learn from Leicester's reinvention | Express & Star \(expressandstar.com\)](#). Sir Peter Soubry, the Mayor of Leicester, is quoted as saying that their plans received significant criticism at first but very similar public realm

investment in high quality materials, and pedestrianising connections to key destinations has been key to the cities rejuvenation.

4.5 City of Wolverhampton Council, however, has agreed to provide business support, backed by significant funding to City Centre West traders. This has been based on regular engagement with businesses throughout the process as evidenced in 2.4 to 2.14 above. Moreover, following the conclusion of review work by RSM, businesses were offered two support options to consider as set out above at 2.10 and 2.11. Following feedback from businesses, the Council agreed to move forward with the traders preferred option and pressed ahead with the process of agreeing and establishing a proportionate funding pot.

4.6 Again, it is important to note that the Council has **no legal responsibility to provide funding support** in these circumstances and that the support we intended to provide and are now providing, is categorically **not** compensation and was never intended to be compensation.

4.7 In determining the funding pot, council officers considered the following factors.

4.8 Firstly, proportionality. The cost to implement a more detailed review (as recommended by the expert independent financial advisors) would have involved businesses in a complex process where they would have had to provide extensive financial records and information, going back over a number of years, to evidence profit loss. The cost of this was estimated to be approximately £4,000 to £6,000 per business to complete, therefore totalling a maximum sum of £354,000 if all eligible businesses at the time were involved. This expenditure would have not included any payments to cover lost profits, it would have been an accounting exercise to establish clear evidence of loss in the first place and would have considered the additional affects on businesses such as the national and regional reduction in retail activity, the cost of living crisis and inflation etc. It was therefore considered more proportionate to allocate this considerable sum of taxpayers money to a grant scheme, than to pay consultants for a very thorough, time-consuming and robust accounting exercise.

4.9 Secondly, comparability. The most recent, similar scheme in the city where a process was implemented to provide support payments to traders affected by road/ metro works was the Bilston Road Scheme in 2017. A very robust and thorough process was implemented by expert independent accountants which took a number of years to complete and for payments to be made based on lost profits. Sixteen businesses in total received an average of £6,500 each, although based on the criteria applied some business received a lot more than this average amount, whilst others received a lot less. In the case of the City Centre West scheme, the level of payment is less than the average but comparable, whilst the size and scale of the overall funding pot allocated for the City Centre West scheme is significantly larger.

4.10 Based on the legal, financial, proportionality and comparability considerations, the total amount of funding was recommended to, and then determined by the Council's Cabinet. It represents a significant sum of tax-payers money - £350,000 in total for the grants alone.

4.11 In terms of the total package of support provided to businesses in the area, if you include the grants awarded to struggling businesses in December 2022 and the proposed expenditure in a series of 'reopening events' in Victoria Street, the total package of support is closer to £400,000.

This excludes the considerable amount of officer time expended upon working to resolve this issue.

Appendix 1 - Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme

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Special Urgent Decision

Report title	Urgent decision relating to City West Relaunch Grant Scheme	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Steve Simkins Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	St Peters	
Accountable Director	Richard Lawrence Director of Regeneration	
Originating service	Enterprise	
Accountable employee	Isobel Woods Tel Email	Head of Enterprise 01902 551848 Isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Directorate Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board Scrutiny Board	27 March 2023 22 March 2023 14 March 2023

Recommendations for decision:

In accordance with the provision of article 12.9 in Part 2 of the Council's constitution, the Leader (or in his absence Deputy Leader) in consultation with the Chair of Scrutiny Board, Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board and Chief Executive authorises the steps listed below

These matters are of immediate urgency making the prompt exercise of the powers of the Cabinet desirable and cannot await the next meeting of the Cabinet (26 April 2023).

These decisions will be reported to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

1. Approve the use of the urgent action powers outlined in Part 12.9 of the Council's constitution detailed in paragraphs 2,1 regarding the use of Urgent Decision.
2. Approve the City West Relaunch grant scheme, to support businesses in the Victoria Street area to relaunch their business and payments to eligible businesses as per the criteria set out in appendix 1.
3. Approve the use of the Our City, Our Plan reserve up to £350,000 to support the City West Relaunch grant and the establishment of supplementary budgets.

4. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy and Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital City in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Finance to allocate any balances from the £350,000 to provide additional further necessary business support once all payments have been made to eligible businesses.
5. Note that given the 'go-live' date for this scheme is within the designated pre-election period of heightened political sensitivity where public communications activity is restricted, ahead of the all-out elections in the city on May 4 2023, it is proposed that information regarding the scheme is limited specifically to the businesses affected and that any such communication is marked as private and confidential with further communication provided after the end of the pre-election period.
6. Note that businesses may be able to receive Business Rate relief through established processes such as hardship relief and have been encouraged to contact the Business Rates team if they find themselves in financial difficulty.

1.1 Purpose

- 1.2 To agree the City West Relaunch grant scheme and provide business support aimed at eligible businesses who may have been adversely impacted by the city west public realm work in Victoria Street, Salop Street School Street and North Street.
- 1.3 The payment offers small businesses who have been open during the works and intend to remain in the city, a one-off amount to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces.

1.4 Urgent Decision Making

- 1.5 The approach to decisions to be made under the Urgent Action powers is that the Council will use its urgent action powers for any urgent decisions that must be taken that cannot wait for the next formal meeting of the relevant Council body, in this case Cabinet. These powers are to be used sparingly and the guiding principles for any decisions are:
- A. Only those decisions that have to be made urgently (eg as a result of COVID-19 or related matters, including support of businesses or as a result of an immovable deadline) will be made
 - B. The decisions will be made or endorsed (where the decisions have to be made very urgently) using the Urgent Action powers
 - C. The decisions will be made available in a transparent way, as all decisions of Council bodies, such as Cabinet, are required to be, including through the relevant pages on the Council's website
- 1.6 Following receipt of the RSM report and their recommendations in relation to what would be involved in a detailed and complex profit and loss analysis, two options were offered to the Traders. Option 1 was to follow the consideration the council had received and option 2 was to pursue a one-off Relaunch grant as set out in this report.
- 1.7 By the deadline of the 22 March 2023, unanimous support for option 2 was subsequently forthcoming with specific reference that timely support was desperately needed in the area, indicating that this was to ensure businesses survived.
- 1.8 Prior to this deadline, council representatives met with the traders group on Monday 13 March to discuss the proposed options. It was clear, from the trader's feedback, that a swift scheme to support them would be favoured as they highlighted the challenging financial and ongoing trading position they faced and feared that some businesses in the area were at risk of ceasing to trade – without immediate support.
- 1.9 The Council acknowledges that the works may have had an impact on traders and while the Council has no legal obligation to provide support – it is committed to doing so and delivering a programme which meets the immediate requirement of traders to receive support. This immediate support will be augmented by a more medium-term plan of help

to bring footfall to the area to support the substantial investment made by the Government and Council to create new public spaces and transform this previously declining area to the west of the city centre. .

- 1.10 The need to process this decision and commence the scheme has led to the need to seek this urgent decision ahead of the next Cabinet meeting on the 26 April 2023.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The regeneration of the West side of the city centre, aimed at arresting the decline in retail footfall and transforming the environment to bring more homes, jobs, events and shops, has been a significant priority since the publication of the City Centre Area Action Plan in 2016 and has been referenced in subsequent Investment documents as a key opportunity site.
- 2.2 City Centre West is identified as a priority project forming part of a continued public sector partnership approach with the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities, Homes England and the WMCA with a view to accelerating delivery, enhancing the quality of the project and maximizing outcomes for Wolverhampton. 3.2 The public realm works are an essential part of the overall masterplan and have been planned over a number of years. Preliminary works began in October 2021 with physical work beginning in January 2022.
- 2.3 In April 2022 local businesses and the Council met to discuss the impact of the works, it was agreed regular meetings would be held to update on; programme of works, business support and communication plan.
- 2.4 On 9 May 2022 the Cabinet Member for City Economy, the Director for City Housing and Environment, council officers leading the public realm improvements works project, Head of Enterprise and the Director of Wolverhampton City centre BID, met with 10 businesses representing the Westside Traders (WSTG).
- 2.5 At this meeting the Council shared that it was not legally required to provide compensation but that it was committed to supporting those businesses where there was clear evidence of impact and financial loss. The Council highlighted that it had to ensure it uses taxpayers' money legally, appropriately and in their best interest.
- 2.6 In May 2022 an Individual Executive Decision Notice gave approval for for £50,000 to provide business support to traders in the area. It was from this budget that an external consultancy was appointed supported by the local traders, to offer business support to assist businesses in the Victoria Street area. Businesses were invited to receive business advice and guidance and a review of their financial position which was captured in a cashflow statement.
- 2.7 The cashflow statement was an approach, agreed with the local traders, to identify if there had been a reduction in turnover in their business during the works, compared to a period prior to the start of the works work. The outcome showed that five businesses,

out of fifty one who came forward, who remained in the area, had evidence of an impact. The Council had committed to support those businesses where evidence could be shown. With the need to act at pace and with the information available at that time the approach was agreed with the traders ahead of the assessments.

- 2.8 In November 2022 following a meeting with local traders, where a new approach for the financial review was presented for the Council to undertake, the Council commissioned a specialist firm of accountants to review the process and present a consideration to the Council on a methodology. The company, RSM having previously worked on similar schemes presented their findings early March 2023
- 2.9 The Council was presented with a very detailed and robust methodology, to consider. The details of this and an alternative option for a 'relaunch' payment scheme were shared with the local traders at a meeting on 12 March 2023 and presented to Scrutiny Board on 13 March 2023. Letters with details of both options were delivered to all the businesses who took part in the previous exercise earlier in the year, to seek their views, for the Council to consider in its recommendations going forward.
- 2.10 Since October 2022, updates on the public realm improvement works and business support have been taken to:

A. Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel	28 September 2022
B. Resident, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel	17 November 2022
C. Scrutiny Board	27 January 2023
D. Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel	15 February 2023
E. Scrutiny Board	14 March 2023

3.0 Progress.

- 3.1 Having considered both options and the feedback from businesses in the area, a decision is being sought to establish a City Centre Relaunch Grant. This will offer small businesses who have been open during the works and remain in the area, a one-off grant to invest in their business

4.0 Evaluation of alternative options

- 4.1 The Council was asked to consider:

Option 1, an alternative approach to assess the impact of the works presented to the Council through the work undertaken by RSM. RSM's comments and recommendations for Council consideration/decision are professionally and methodologically rigorous and robust and have been applied to other schemes in the West Midlands.

- They asked the Council to consider a detailed set of criteria including financial records and evidence and required to be provided by businesses to assess and evaluate the impact of the works.
- Adopting the approach is likely to take a considerable amount of time and the eligibility criteria and information required is likely to be challenging for many small businesses to comply with and could exclude them
- The Council/taxpayer will have to incur further expense in implementing the recommendations
- The traders were not in favour of this option.

4.2 Option 2 a 'Relaunch' grant. The aim to minimise administration for businesses to promote accessibility, and therefore the impact of the process on businesses and the Council and deliver financial support to businesses in the next few weeks/months. The scheme would be open to small businesses, with less than 50 employees, who have traded in the area for a minimum of 6 months, whose business was open during the works and who intend to remain open. Their premises must be in the area and frontages directly open onto the area of works, with their prime business being driven on site, in person and direct customer transactions. To offer £5,000 subject to assurance of being a valid business who are up to date with business rates or have a payment plan in place for any outstanding business rates.

- This would maximise benefit and provides support for businesses to take the opportunity to relaunch. It would be a quicker option, could be resolved in a matter of weeks/months and more businesses would benefit, recognising that the amount payable needs to be affordable within council funds. Whilst the grant scheme focuses on businesses that have been trading in the area for a minimum of six months, the wider support programme will benefit all business in the area. Those businesses that have been trading for less than six months will have opened in full knowledge of the works and will have been able to take mitigating actions.
- The Council would ensure due diligence and checks, to meet council audit and finance regulations and prevent fraudulent activity. This option was shared with the local traders for their views, and they have overwhelmingly feedback that Option 2 was their preferred approach.

4.3 Option 3, to not offer any support.

- The council has no legal obligation to provide support and would therefore not require the use of taxpayers money.
- However through the engagement with local traders it is clear that the improvement works, which are acknowledged will bring vitality to an area that has been in decline, have added to other issues businesses in the area are facing.

- Representatives of the council have been working closely with local traders for a number of months and made a commitment to support businesses affected by the impact of the works.
- There is a concern that some businesses are at risk of ceasing to trade, if support is not available

5.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 5.1 Council representatives met with the trader's group on Monday 13 March to discuss the proposed options. It was clear, from the trader's feedback, that a swift scheme to support them would be favoured as they highlighted the challenging financial and ongoing trading position they faced and feared that some businesses in the area were at risk of ceasing to trade – without immediate support.
- 5.2 The Council acknowledges that the works may have had an impact on traders and while the Council has no legal obligation to provide support – it is committed to doing so and delivering a programme which meets the immediate requirement of traders to receive support. This immediate support will be augmented by a more medium-term plan of help to bring footfall to the area to support the substantial investment made by the Government and Council to create new public spaces and transform this previously declining area to the west of the city centre.
- 5.3 The works carried out in the area are both unprecedented and intensive in their scale and have seen the comprehensive excavation and reconstruction of the streets. This has involved the use of high quality, high specification materials that needed to be laid by hand. This has meant that the scheme, covering approximately 20,000 square metres has been undertaken intensively.
- 5.4 The first option would require the council to invest between £200,000 - £250,000 to commission a firm of specialist accountants to carry out the forensic accounting assessment. A further budget would be required by the council to award a sum to those, who through this process could demonstrate a loss to their business. This approach does not offer the council value for money
- 5.5 The second option would significantly reduce the requirement for public funds to oversee the process. The council would use the system in place used to make payments during Covid, which means the process would be quicker and still retain key governance and audit assurance check.
- 5.6 The Council has taken into consideration the impact on public funds and its resources, and the views from local Traders, the council is seeking approval to take forward Option 2

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 As detailed in section 6, the recommended option for the City West Relaunch Grant Scheme is to award eligible businesses a grant of £5,000. It is estimated that there are

around 64 businesses who are open in the area, who are classified as small businesses and whose main custom is conducted by their premises fronting the Victoria Street and North Street area, and may be eligible for support. Payments will be made subject to the meeting the eligibility criteria and that supportive evidence is present and correct.

- 6.2 This report therefore seeks approval to allocate a total of £350,000 from the Our City, Our Plan Reserve and the establishment of supplementary budgets to fund the City West Relaunch Grant scheme and make payments to eligible businesses and provide additional business support.
- 6.3 In addition, approval is also sought to delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Inclusive City Economy and Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital City in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and the Director of Finance to allocate any balances from the £350,000 to provide additional business support once all payments have been made to eligible businesses.

[AS/30032023/J]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council is under no statutory or legal duty to award payments to businesses affected by road works, in comparison, for example, to certain utility companies under relevant statutory regimes.
- 7.2 The Council, at its discretion and to support the businesses has decided to offer the 'relaunch payment' providing the business meets the eligibility criteria required. In addition, financial checks will be carried to ensure that the business is not facing bankruptcy or liquidation.
- 7.3 It will be a condition of receiving the payment that the business intends to remain at its current location and continue trading. The nature of the payments is such that it does not contravene the Subsidy Control Act 2023. Those businesses who are in arrears with their business rates will be required to work with the Council to agree a payment plan and directed to other support available for businesses.
- 7.4 Businesses will need to agree to the terms and conditions in order to receive payment.
- 7.5 The provision of the proposed grant is lawful and has a legal basis under the general power of competence at S.1 of the Localism Act 2011.

SZ/29032023/P

8.0 Equalities implications

- 9.1 The focus of the grant is to support businesses in the location to help them prepare for the new events and other activities scheduled for the forthcoming year. The grants will support small and micro businesses in the locations, subject to meeting the terms of the grant. These businesses represent the diverse culture and sectors for our city centre.

9.0 All other implications

- 9.1 The focus for the Future High Street Funds is to be a catalyst to support the regeneration of this area of the city, to bring economic prosperity and improve the environmental conditions. The scheme has a detailed events plan running for the next 12 months, aimed at attracting footfall from visitors and communities to the city.
- 9.2 Given that the 'go-live' date for this scheme will be within 24 hours of this urgent decision being approved, it is within the designated pre-election period of heightened political sensitivity. Public communications activity is restricted, ahead of the all-out elections in the city on May 4 2023 and it is proposed that communications regarding the scheme are targeted specifically to the businesses affected and that any such communication is marked as private and confidential. There will be no general communications issued, however, it may be necessary to respond to any press enquiries should we be approached.

10.0 Schedule of background paper

- 10.1 <https://wolverhamptonintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=7216>

12.0 Appendices

Appendix 1

City Centre Public Realm Relaunch Support Grant scheme

Scope of the support scheme

The City Centre Public Realm Relaunch Support Grant is aimed at eligible businesses who may have been most adversely impacted by the city west public realm work in Victoria Street, Salop Street and North Street. The grant offers businesses a one-off grant payment of £5,000 to relaunch their trading activities and seize upon the opportunities presented by the multi-million-pound investment in improved public realm and public spaces.

Scheme Details

1. The grants are only available for businesses that have been invited to apply
2. Only fully completed applications will be processed.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to receive the City Centre Public Realm Relaunch Support Grant, businesses must be able to demonstrate that they:

- 1 Are physically located within the identified area of the works and business frontages directly open *onto* the area of the works.
- 2 Were legally trading during the works for at *least* six months and are currently trading
- 3 Are a business primarily driven by on-site, in-person, face-to-face, direct customer transactions and services rather than on-line or postal sales or professional services predominantly delivered by planned appointments or by off-site visits to customers
- 4 Are a locally-based business and not part of a wider regional or national corporation which employs more than 50 people in total
- 5 Comply with national and local regulations, for example valid trading licences and registrations
- 6 Do not have outstanding invoices or payments due to the Council, for example business rates arrears unless a payment plan has been agreed with the City Council
- 7 Are not in liquidation, administration, are insolvent or are subject to a striking off notice
- 8 Are not planning to cease/close trading within the location or move their premises out of the city centre

Information required to validate eligibility/compliance

1. Evidence of trading, for example recent monthly rental invoice, business insurance or monthly utility, telephone, internet invoice
2. Evidence of certificate of incorporation or unique tax reference number
3. Evidence of last accounts filed at Companies House or last tax return filed with HMRC

4. Evidence of business bank accounts which contains your business transactions
5. Evidence of one month's recent bank statements (redacted statements will not be accepted)
6. Details of business bank account name, bank account number and bank sort code

Timelines

Once we have received a completed application we will:

- Process eligibility of claims and approve/reject/seek clarification within five working days of receipt of application
- Conduct financial checks on approved applications within three working days
- Make payments within five working days of a successful finance check.

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Enc10: WSTG Response to Briefing Note : 27th April 2023

1.3 The 5k that has been offered is an insult. Up until Dec 2022 we were under the impression that Westside businesses would be receiving financial hardship relief because of the impact of roadworks during Nov 2021 – to date.

2.1 – Point refers to bringing in more homes, jobs, events and shops. What about retaining shops and not losing established businesses and branded shops like Toni & Guy, Le Monde to name but a few.

2.2 – No consultation taken place with individual businesses as to the extent of the roadworks. No impact analysis or assessment of the logistics of the roadworks.

2.4 – Various Councillors, Deputy Leader, BID Team, MP Stuart Anderson and various other council representatives were invited to attend a meeting organised by Westside businesses at Equinox, Victoria St. to address the issue they had been facing since Nov 2021 in footfall reduction as a consequence of the roadworks. A document was presented to the council listing numerous issues. The meeting was also attended by over 40 local businesses.

2.8 – We were unaware of the 50k being applied for as business support. We were told by Isobel that a process of tendering would have to be undergone to identify an independent company to assess the losses that businesses were suffering. It was Isobel who came up with Health Check - which was suppose to be light touch but turned out to be much more detailed.

Business Advisor Financial Health Check

From: Isobel Woods (isobel.woods@wolverhampton.gov.uk)

To: bilvirck@yahoo.com; info@crazyco.uk; duggal1@hotmail.co.uk; kimberleysouthall@yahoo.co.uk; nimoburgers@hotmail.com; abradleysolar@gmail.com; thegeorgewallis.wolverhampton@stonegategroup.co.uk

Cc: John.Roseblade@wolverhampton.gov.uk

Date: Monday, 16 May 2022 at 22:09 BST

Sensitivity: NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Dear All

Many thanks for taking the time to review and for sharing comments and thoughts.

The focus for this work is to engage with the businesses in this area of the city and gather intelligence related to the improvement works underway on Victoria Street, which will help to inform the next steps. It's been identified that not all businesses in the area have an awareness of business planning. It is important that this is recognised in the spec so that they can receive advice and guidance, whereas others who are more knowledgeable about running a business may choose not to receive this.

Responding to the points which have been highlighted.

- **The title of this work – Health Check**
This work is to undertake a review of businesses position. As mentioned at the meeting the council needs to have an independent impartial review in order to inform further activity that may involve public funds and resources. It's been called a Health Check to ensure this is impartial. To call it a Hardship or Financial Impact at this stage could be seen a pre-determining the outcome of the work which may adversely affect future activity.
- **Wider business support**
From our meetings with businesses in the area, some have said they would find it beneficial to have advice on their current models, particularly as the economy recovers from the impact of Covid and other factors. From initial visits not all businesses have the same knowledge of running a business, or awareness of business support. The advice is optional and any follow up will be for individual businesses to decide and action.
- **Consultant qualification and details**
Details of who will deliver will come once they have been appointed. The qualifications, who the advisor will be and other information are part of the tender process that will commence now comments have been received. Competitive process' refers to the tender process to appoint the consultant. Once we have undertaken and complete this part we will be able to share more details.
- **Timeline**
The council has to ensure that all the businesses in the area have the opportunity to have a health check. The pace of delivery and the outcome of this work have been factored in to the brief. The timescale for this work will be subject to the availability and engagement of businesses who wish to receive this review. It will be important that the council can ensure businesses have the opportunity to come forward. It would be really helpful once the advisor(s) have been appointed for yourselves as businesses in the area to raise awareness of the support and to encourages businesses to come forward.
- **Financial Information**
The impact of Covid is a factor that has affected the whole of the economy, it would not be reasonable to use financial information from before March 2020 in this scope. There have been a number of national and local covid business support schemes in place to assist businesses affected by Covid by providing financial grants.

The focus for this work is to understand the impact on businesses as a result of the improvement works on and around Victoria Street and to offer business advice. In order to understand this it will be important to have a reasonable time period prior to the works to then compare during the period of the works. It is proposed that financial information will be looked at for the 6 months period prior to the works, and then from the start of the works to the current time.

- Financial Evaluation of the business – for the period June 2021 - 22 November 2021 , then December 2021 - up to current date
 - Profit and Loss Statement
 - Balance Sheet
 - Liquidity Ratio
 - Working capital

- **New Businesses**

For those businesses who opened after the 22 November when the works commenced, we will ask the advisor to refer to the business plan used when the business was set up, to identify a forecasted trading position for the period we are looking at. The outcome will depend on the quality and detail of the information contained in the business plan.

- **Large Businesses**

Public support is carefully monitored and Local Authorities have to adhere to number of rules and regulations. The UK Subsidiary Regulation (that replaced the EU State Aid rules) means that large companies or those who are part of parent company can only receive a maximum value of support from public funds. This is tracked over a 3 year period and cannot exceed £350,000 of either direct (grant) or indirect (service) support. The support from the advisor and any subsequent assistance will need to be within this threshold. For this reason the support has specifically identified small independent businesses whose main trading and business are registered in Wolverhampton.

I feel it would be helpful to share with you the next steps which are an essential and strictly governed part of local authority procurement.

- I will update the spec to reflect areas of change and send this out to seek a response from the market. This will run for two weeks to enable those who are interested to prepare and submit a response.
- The responses will be assessed and evaluated and a decision made about who will deliver.
- Once contracts / terms of work have been signed the work will commence

Kind regards
Isobel

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City of Wolverhampton Council

2.8 SCA Management were commissioned by the council (as they were the only ones who submitted a tender response). The cashflow statement used to capture data had revealed issues around inconsistencies in not only what should be recorded, the conduct in the way the data was being collected and the process being used. WSTG raised concerns in a number of areas, one being the comparative windows that would be used to determine losses. This was confirmed by council legal and minuted that there was scope for change of window if necessary.

Window defined as Jan21-Sep21 comparative to Oct21-Ju22. Issues with this

- 2.8.1 3-month covid included where we were told it would be excluded. Covid grants were included for some businesses and not for others on the spreadsheet.

- 2.8.2 WSTG had proposed Council to use 2018/19 accounts but was refuted. Council stated nothing would be considered pre-covid. **Yet RSM Option 1 considered this.**
 - 2.8.3 WSTG did ensure that the window should be flexible **without having to re-tender.** This was confirmed by **council legal and minuted.** To avoid wasting **public purse** money WSTG suggested window be changed to make the spreadsheet more viable, fair, capture realistic data which would give Council feedback on actual impact of roadworks on businesses which consequently would assist them in better management of their projects going forward i.e. Phase 2, 3 etc. Presentation was made to Isobel Woods & John Roseblade Nov 7th 22 to look at this. It was clearly demonstrated that this was possible and a workable solution to salvage the situation and not waste resources as time was of the essence. Council realised that this would prove more businesses had suffered losses with proposed window Apr21 – Dec21 compared to Jan22-Sept22. (3 month date change)
 - 2.8.4 Even though Isobel Woods repeatedly said that Council & Sam's team SCA Management would come back to us with issues raised for them to clarify. This was ignored repeatedly as it would mean Council would have to address hardship relief for more businesses than the 5 identified.
 - 2.8.5 11 businesses out of 51 were clearly identified as evidencing loss by the Council, of which 5 businesses were only paid an **initial amount.** This admission clearly demonstrates evidenced loss by businesses, for which Council still need to pay the balance of. The window the council decided to stick with was about damage limitation for them not to pay out to more of the businesses.
 - 2.8.6 Repeated admission of losses evidenced – are council going to make good on mitigating losses of those businesses that have evidenced, as it appears to have been swept under the carpet and no longer financial hardship is mentioned.
 - 2.8.7 WSTG were promised Xmas event to drum up footfall, however due to delays nothing happened, and it was WSTG at the meeting 5th Dec22 raised to Councillor Simkins that the barriers were still up and the fact that there were no lights clearly gave general public the view that Victoria St was closed. Council claimed that they were supporting Westside by removing barriers and it caused delays. A complete misrepresentation of the truth.
- 2.9 WSTG need to identify events to clarify this.
- 2.9.1 Following meeting 7th Nov with Isobel and John where WSTG presented issues and solution of window change.
 - 2.9.2 Letters dated 10th Nov sent out by Isobel to businesses requesting additional evidence to support losses suffered by businesses. Businesses had provided updated financial information.
 - 2.9.3 24th Nov - WSTG chased up lack of response from Council / Isobel/John. Date change requested by Isobel to move traders meeting from end Nov to 5th Dec. A response detail WSTG disappointment of date change. (NOW 5 WEEKS OF COUNCIL DELIBERATION SINCE PRESENTATION)
 - 2.9.4 1st Dec Isobel Woods emailed stating they are still looking at points raised by WSTG Nov 7th, Nov 24th and 27th Nov. WSTG were given no incline as to the engagement of an independent advisor until 5th December meeting. Council mentioned conversations were being held with a company to review their own processes and methodology adopted. This has been cleverly worded alluding that WSTG were aware of

independent company engagement prior to the 5th Dec when it was clearly not the case.

- 2.9.5 See WSTG minutes produced from meeting of the 5th with Council representatives. Even though all on list were invited, members abstained from attending. Councillor Simkins was re-introduced to being present and active engagement with WSTG. It was at this meeting that Isobel stated that an independent specialist was being procured to review the processes etc. See point 6 of document. **WSTG raised concerns over additional expenditure. Council basically ignored the workable solution given by WSTG. Another delaying tactic in accepting the need to pay financial hardship relief.**
- 2.9.6 WSTG attended Wolverhampton Business Forum – raised question to Andy St. See detail for response.
- 2.9.7 23rd Dec WSTG notified via letter that RSM have been appointed to review financial health check approach, requesting permission to share information already provided to SCA Management with RSM. Another delaying tactic and waste of public money.
- 2.9.8 We did not get any indication of findings until 13th March, the day before the scrutiny and the WSTG subgroup were given a directed choice. Totally ignoring all 17 months of recognition of financial hardship by introducing a Re-Launch. WSTG were asked to agree with council without being given details. WSTG stated categorically, how are we supposed to make an informed decision without the detail. Isobel/Ian/Cllr Simkins gave WSTG a false sense of security and demonstrated underhandedness in hindsight.
- 2.9.9 Throughout the whole process, since Mar 2022 financial hardship has been the centre point of all engagements and yet now has been totally IGNORED.

4.11 In response to this “This excludes the considerable amount of officer time expended upon working to resolve this issue”

WSTG Response: The issue is not resolved but WSTG left in dire straits as businesses have lost considerable time personally and has affected their mental health and lost livelihoods. Your officers and yourselves are being paid! You are not being asked to take a reduction in your income as businesses have had to because of council’s lack of professional management of projects by NOT undertaking impact analysis of roadworks and proper business consultation – we are still awaiting physical evidence of this for each business.

We find this comment patronising and demeaning. It is the council that have deemed to have wasted WSTG business time yet have the audacity to make it about them. WSTG are the victims here!

Not even an apology or credit given to show where WSTG have highlighted repeated flaws, issues in council failings. There is no moral stance here.

We urge the council to mitigate losses that have been experienced by WSTG and furthermore, evidenced and proven by businesses remain unpaid. This cannot be brushed away as it would be a gross miscarriage of justice.

WSTG still need the financial hardship relief to be considered regardless of the Re-Launch grant.

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