

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

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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

Re: City Centre West Relaunch Grant Scheme