

Relaunch Grant Scheme

Presentation to Scrutiny Panel

13th June 2023

Option two...

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

The Premise

- a “soft approach” in comparison to the alternative RSM assessment which would have involved a more robust and invasive methodology and process, as well as excluding the majority of businesses that have been impacted by the Public Realm Works.
- similar approach to Covid grants, with appropriate due diligence and checks to meet council audit and finance regulations and prevent fraudulent activity

Consultation with Businesses

Minutes from the meeting on 13th March were received from the council but did not accurately reflect the discussions held. The timeline setting out the way forward was not received – it was discussed at the meeting on 13/03/2023 that WSTG Subgroup would be involved in the process moving forward.

The meeting to discuss the application process and eligibility criteria/evidentiary requirements with the traders involved **did not take place**, and there was **no involvement of WSTG Subgroup** with regards to the Relaunch Grant after the meeting on 13th March

This is typical of the council's behaviour regarding lack of consultation with businesses. It was contended at a later date that giving businesses opportunities to discuss the scheme on an individual basis was adequate. Again, this shows a lack of understanding from the council with regards to communication from businesses. Some businesses do not wish to share information with council representatives but will share with subgroup representatives – **as is the purpose of the subgroup.**

Harassment and Bullying Behaviour – rushing businesses to apply without proper consideration

When the scheme went ‘live’ on 3rd April 2023, businesses across the area began receiving calls from the council representatives asking when they were going to apply and offering assistance if they needed help applying.

To date, some businesses have received over 4-5 calls from council representatives, and have commented that they felt like they “had to apply or they’d lose the chance,” that they “needed to get it over and done with” and that they “wanted to stop being hassled”

Businesses have also been told by council representatives that deadlines have not been extended and that they must apply by the end of May to be “sure of receiving funds” or so that they don’t “miss out”

This is not only misleading but is deliberately divisive in terms of what was communicated, not only at scrutiny panel on 2nd May, but also in terms of what WSTG Subgroup members has communicated to those it represents.

The Application Process

The evidence required for the application process was initially simple:

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

Taken from Scrutiny Board Victoria Street Review and consideration Presentation - 140323

Then became more invasive:

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.

Taken from Appendix 1 of Letters Sent to Traders - Pg 57 of Council Supplement Report

What do council need this information for?

The council have asked businesses to provide information

- full financial accounts or tax returns
- **unredacted** bank statements,
- evidence of payments to landlords for rent
- draft accounts for the current financial year

Why is this additional information being asked for? How is such information **relevant** to the approval of a grant?

What is the information being used to ascertain, and where is the council's GDPR statement for disclosed information?

What is the criteria for this information to bring an approved status to a grant application?

Why is a financial credit check of companies/individuals necessary?

If a business was applying for a loan, then this level of evidence would be understandable, but why is it necessary to be this **invasive** for a grant application?

How is this approach similar to that taken by the Government with Covid? How is it 'soft touch'?

Comparison of Evidentiary Requirements

Covid 19 Grant Requirements

Saved Documents:

Date Uploaded	File Name
28/01/2022	bank2.jpg
28/01/2022	booker1221.jpg
28/01/2022	20210730_142821 (1).jpg
28/01/2022	driverslicenceid.JPG
28/01/2022	Statement 17-dec-21 ac 20749230.P

Relaunch Grant Requirements

Saved Documents:

Date Uploaded	File Name
24/05/2023	Statement 19-apr-23 ac 20749230.P
14/05/2023	110423.pdf
14/05/2023	invoice501.jpeg
14/05/2023	regofficechange.pdf
14/05/2023	changeofname.pdf
14/05/2023	certificateofinc.pdf
14/05/2023	accountsfy2122.pdf
14/05/2023	Statement 17-mar-23 ac 20749230.F

Crucial information?

Relaunch Grant Application - Further Information Required Inbox x



Tue, 16 May, 14:13 ★ ↶ ⋮



I hope this email finds you well. I am reaching out to inform you that we have requested additional information regarding your grant application. We kindly ask that you provide us with your bank statement and draft accounts as soon as possible. Please log on the portal and upload the requested documents. These documents are crucial in helping us make an informed decision regarding your application.

Thank you for your cooperation and prompt attention to this matter.

Best regards,

How is this information crucial to making decisions?

If it is crucial, when information was **not** submitted (in this case, draft financial accounts for Financial Year 22/23) why was the application approved and the grant awarded?

Lack of Understanding and Communication

NO MEETINGS/LIAISON

Had criteria, evidentiary requirements and their uses, and the approval processes been discussed with traders, either as a large group, or as was suggested at the meeting on the 13th March with the subgroup involved in the process and able to disseminate information to the wider trader's group (as had always previously been the case) these questions and issues would have been raised and responded to sooner.

WSTG request that the above queries, and the feedback documented in the appendix be responded to and shared with scrutiny panel members.

NO RESPONSES TO FEEDBACK OF CONCERNS/QUESTIONS/ISSUES

- WSTG have not received responses from the council to queries, comments, feedback and issues
- Feedback was sent to council on 23/03/2023 and presented verbally to scrutiny panel on 2nd May 2023 (please see Appendix 1)

WSTG has still not received any responses