

Appendix 'A'

ARG Task Group

ARG Potential Initiatives to help businesses to become stronger and more competitive.

Background:

Spelthorne Council have been allocated funding from the government called an Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) to help support businesses during the pandemic. At the beginning of August there was £2.2m funding available under this scheme which could be used until 31.3.22. Any monies unspent after that date will be returned to government. The government has said that there will be no more support via ARG for businesses once this money has been spent.

It is anticipated that the latest round of grants is likely to cost about £500k. Spelthorne has 4 windows of opportunity for businesses to apply for a grant; the main purpose of this phase was to help businesses 'survive' the economic impact of the pandemic.

The next phase of support is centred around helping make our businesses stronger. It is likely that there will be at least £1.5m left to support businesses and it is important we utilise all this golden opportunity to do just this.

Conversations with BEIS (Department of Business Energy & Industrial Strategy) confirmed that this funding could be used for other purposes other than just grants. But the key caveat was that it must provide 'DIRECT' support for businesses. With this guidance in mind the below proposals are suggested as a way of helping our businesses

New / Replacement Equipment

- Any new equipment which can be shown to help the business become more competitive / productive can apply for a grant of 90% of the cost of the item(s) up to a maximum of £20k. This could include new and greener equipment, which is more cost effective and efficient reducing the amount it costs to run, maintain, and repair. It is also likely to be less damaging to the environment adding to the company's green credentials.

For instance, the dry cleaning and printing industries use equipment that is reliant on solvents and chemicals that are quite polluting, some may be old and costly to run / maintain. There are new more efficient and eco-friendly alternatives available which could improve production and reduce their carbon footprint.

Old machinery / equipment which breaks down frequently reduces productivity and in turn the turnover of the business including computers.

The new equipment could mean more production, cost savings, and make them more competitive which are ingredients to create employment opportunities.

Improve the frontage of independent shops to improve the appearance of a location, boost customers and increase trade

All businesses awarded the grant will be asked to buy within the Borough, but we cannot enforce that.

For the above, it is proposed that the amount of funding awarded is based initially upon the number of employees, but with a degree of flexibility in exceptional circumstances.

- Sole trader up to £5k
- Less than 5 employees up to £10k
- More than 5 employees £20k

Factors that can influence the amount:

- The length of time the business has been incorporated / operating.
- Volume of turnover / profits
- Quality of submission – has a case been made that it will boost production / create jobs / increase competitiveness / ability to grow the business

Business support

Digital

- A programme of digital training could be made available to help the 'bricks and mortar' businesses to expand their offer by the provision of training through a variety of social media and digital workshops giving them the life-long skills to promote their business and combine bricks with the digital world. This can be through a presence on Facebook, Tic Tok, Snapchat, Pinterest and Twitter etcetera.
- Provision of the building of bespoke websites for those businesses that do not have an on-line presence. This will enable them to reach out locally and further afield through their website which can be reached 24/7 when the shop is closed to take orders or attract customers. This would include Google my Business
<https://blog.hootsuite.com/google-my-business/>

Face -to-Face Support

- Business support via one-to-one help / training to address concerns or ambitions about running a business, including HR, finance, business planning, marketing, growth, starting a business and much more. This could be for 1 year or 2 years support.

- Provision of annual membership of the FSB or Chambers of Commerce for businesses that may need regular support. Could set aside £2k which may buy around 10 memberships, but the cost depends upon the size of business.

Training/Grants

- Free grants for training relevant to that business, this may include new skills and qualifications to support activities such as exporting, accessing new markets or skills required to improve efficiency for the business owner / employee to be more productive. This relates to training that is not available via apprenticeship scheme.

The above opportunities are designed to help: -

- Improve equipment: Help improve the competitiveness of businesses by upgrading the 'tools' that they use to compete for business.
- People Skills: Improve the skills and abilities of our business owners by the provision of professional business support and training.
- Make best use of Technology: To make the best use of digital technology so that they can compete on-line / utilising social media as well as through bricks and mortar.