

The Retail Support Initiative

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Purpose of the Report

To provide an update on the Retail Support Initiative (RSI) during the first six months of 2014/15.

Public Interest

Supporting and helping to improve the retail offer in the towns and villages across Area East.

Recommendations:

- (1) To note the report

Background

Members will be aware that the Retail Support Initiative (RSI) was set up eight years ago with a focus on town centres; it was subsequently extended to include village & farm shops. Over this time the scheme has been well received making 40+ grant awards across the area during the last five years.

In July members received a comprehensive report and considered the operating criteria for the current financial year. At this time approval was given for a Wincanton 'top-up' scheme, the detail of which was to be worked up by officers for approval by Ward Members and Chairman. Members approved the top-up scheme in October and a member of the Area Support Team visited eligible businesses in Wincanton during October/November. As far as possible a 'face to face' approach was adopted but in some instances a leaflet was left. It remains to be seen if this converts to additional applications, particularly in Wincanton where the 'top-up' is available for the first time.

The new operating criteria is attached at Appendix 1.

2014/15 Operation

Retail Support Initiative awards from April to October 2014:

Quillon Antiques	Antique shop	Bruton	£745.20 awarded July 2014
The Bear Inn	Public House	Wincanton	£1,105 awarded August 2014

No Naked Windows	Upholstery/haberdashery shop	Bruton	£686.40 awarded October 2014
Bruton Vets	Veterinary Practice	Bruton	£1,000 awarded October 2014

Retail Rate Relief – Help for Retail Businesses

Although not part of the Retail Support Initiative, Members may be interested to know Area Support Staff called on eligible businesses, who had not taken advantage of this scheme, to encourage them to apply. We await feedback from the Business Rates team about how effective the additional follow up has been

SSDC have the discretion to discount business rate bills up to £1,000 for 2 years (2014-15 and 2015-16) for retail premises with a rateable value of £50,000 or less. The business owner only needs to complete the form once for both years. A leaflet, with the application form, was sent out with this year's bills. Retail premises must be occupied and wholly or mainly used to sell goods, services or food & drink to visiting members of the public.

Financial Implications

There are currently the following unallocated balances available for the Retail Support Initiative including reserve balances

Revenue element - £6,394.40

Capital - £2,212

Additionally there is £10,000 ringfenced in the Wincanton top-up scheme, to-date none of this has been drawn down.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

A well supported business community

Measured by: An increase in satisfaction by businesses with the specialist support they receive in South Somerset

A vibrant and sustainable Yeovil, Market Towns and Rural Economy

Measured by: Increasing local sustainability measured by the average level of self containment for South Somerset Wards

Other Implications

Included within the Area Development Plan

Background Papers:

Retail Support Initiative

Operating criteria

Percentage contributions cannot exceed 50% of costs and no retrospective applications are eligible (i.e. in respect of works which have already been commissioned/started).

Applications over £750 will be considered by Area East Committee on a monthly basis. Amounts up to £750 may be considered at any time as a delegated grant in consultation with the Chairman and Ward Member(s).

Grant levels:

Maximum 50% of project costs as follows:

Eligible costs:

Shop-front improvements, if they enhance the High Street
Business rates assistance – a contribution to the amount payable for new businesses (which do not compete with another business) in their first two years of trading
Exceptional projects which add to the viability of towns/villages

Process

Applications for Grants are accessed and recommendations made on the basis of a fully completed application form and two 'like for like' quotes. Self-help/DIY schemes may complete the application form and supply a project budget with supporting information.

All grant recipients must accept that the grant may be used for publicity purposes by the District Council. Payment of the grant is done retrospectively, for a completed programme of works on the basis of receipted invoices. Exceptionally officers, in consultation with the Chairman, may release partial payments where there is clear justification for doing so.

The District Council will continue to claw back grants from businesses which cease trading on the following basis: 100% in year one, 75% in year two, 45% in year three.

The existing assessment and current scoring mechanism favours businesses:

- employing more than 2 people
- in prominent places
- key rural stores/Post Offices
- retailers

The award is subject to the following standard conditions:

- The grant award may be used by SSSC for promotional/publicity purposes;
- Grants are paid for approved works/purchases on production of receipted invoices;
- Awards are subject to a summary of the benefit of the scheme being supplied;
- Applicants will normally be expected to draw down the grant within six months of the offer and if not will have to inform us of the reason(s) for the delay. If there is a valid reason, officers can provide a 6 month extension, but beyond this the grant would either be withdrawn or referred Area East Committee to be re-affirmed;
- That appropriate consents are obtained - works requiring listed building/planning consents or building regulation consent will be required to be signed off by the appropriate officer prior to the release of funds

Wincanton only – ‘top-up’ scheme operating criteria

Key elements of flexible top up:

- Maximum contribution from SSDC capped at 50% of scheme costs
- Maximum grant £1,000 for businesses wishing to move into one of 7 units currently empty in the town, these are listed below.
- Grants are only available to proprietors/owners with one business/premise

or

- maximum £300 available to new **and** existing businesses for business improvements and marketing initiatives. For new businesses this could be used towards stock too.

Units eligible for £1,000 top up:

- 3 Market Place
- 13 Market Place
- 1 – 3 High Street
- 6 High Street (2 units)
- 24 High Street
- 36 High Street