

APPENDIX B

Proposal for processing applications for business support and Area North Small Business Development Grants (prepared by Mike Bartlett, SSDC Business Support Officer)

Central database of all enquiries

It is proposed that in the future all enquiries for small business grants are directed to the Economic Development Services within Brympton Way. A central database will be held within the service recording relevant details including location and size of business.

Eligibility to apply for grants

Once recorded on the central database, the first eligibility check will be carried out based on the following:

- Location
- Size
- Trading or not trading
- Previous grants obtained

At present, if the business is located in any area other than North, they will not be eligible because no funds are allocated in other areas. If other areas were to contribute, then all locations would be eligible.

Businesses with over 50 employees will not be eligible.

Individuals that are not presently trading will not be eligible. (They will be signposted to the Business Link Start Up Programme and may become eligible after completion)¹

If the business has successfully been awarded a small business grant within the last three years from SSDC, they will not be eligible.

The above checks will quickly and efficiently identify businesses that are eligible and can proceed to completing an application form.

Ineligible businesses will be contacted, and possibly visited, to determine if there is other help they can benefit from.

Completion of grant application forms

Eligible businesses will be asked to complete an application form, requesting further details. (This will be based on the form used on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) grant).

As well as details concerning the business, questions will be asked about the effect the grant will have on the business, including:

- Increase in staff numbers (in particular apprentices)
- Increase in sales and clients
- Increase in business efficiencies
- Retention of business and staff within the District
- Added local value (possibly using local suppliers)

¹ * Further help and advice will be offered via Business Support Officer to get the business trading a.s.a.p.

The completed application form will be assessed by the BSO. If a majority of the above are met (at least 3), a site visit will take place. If not, further clarification will be sought, but if the above are still not met, the business will be notified of refusal together with reasons.

Site visit by Business Support Officer

A site visit will be undertaken by the Business Support Officer to:

- Check details on application are correct
- Advice of further help that is available from SSDC
- Sign posting to other areas of help
- Advise of next stage in process

Offer

Grants will be for up to 50% of the total cost (ex VAT) and it is envisaged that grants will be offered between £500 and £1,000 ex VAT.

The actual amount of grant will be scored against criteria, prioritising key business sectors.

Members will be notified of all applications in their Ward and can request further details.

If successful, an offer letter will be sent to the business, confirming the financial details and requesting confirmation that the business agrees to the terms and conditions attached.

Financial checks

Once the business has confirmed acceptance, they can go ahead and purchase the service and/or product providing the grant is £500 or under. If the grant is greater than £500, at least one other quotation must be obtained.

The business must submit a signed invoice from the supplier, confirming that payment has been made, together with quotations, if applicable. An invoice for the grant amount must be submitted to SSDC, on the letterhead of the business and excluding VAT.

All invoices will be checked by the Business Support Officer, a short report written, and financial authority will be delegated to the Economic Development Team Leader. Details will then be passed to Financial Services for payment.

Evaluation of benefits of the grant

Three to six months after payment of the grant, a further visit by the Business Support Officer will be made to fully evaluate the tangible benefits of the grant. For instance, an increase in staff numbers, increase in sales or increase in business efficiencies leading to increased profitability.

Monitoring

Monitoring of the progress of the scheme will be included in reports to the Area Committee including a final evaluation.