

WIRRAL COUNCIL

Cabinet - 9th April

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE/ DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

Business Support - Response to the Current Economic Conditions

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report asks for Cabinet's support for provision within the Council's constitution to increase the delegated authority of the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Regeneration and Planning Strategy, to approve business support grants from £5,000 to an amount of up to £20,000.

2. BIG Support Grant/ Consultancy Support

- 2.1 On the 19th March, Cabinet approved a programme that has been designed to specifically support SME's (250 employees and less) with a specific focus on micro businesses. This programme will utilise the £50,000 identified at Cabinet on 23rd February 2009 to support local companies during the current economic downturn and £800,000 per year of Working Wirral funds. The fund will be available for a wide range of support, including access to consultancy and grants. It is also hoped that the availability of such financial support will encourage banks and other lending institutions to also invest in these businesses
- 2.2 Cabinet expressed the desire that the process should be as responsive as possible in terms of speed and efficiency and Officers have devised a process a process to enable this to be the case. One of the key features in the design of this grant programme should be the ability to respond quickly to a company to support them in the current financial climate. In order to do this, a quick turnaround for a decision is essential.
- 2.3 The timeframe for the assessment of applications for grant and consultancy support is six weeks from start to finish. Having reviewed relevant Cabinet dates and in order to ensure that no decisions are delayed by having to fit in with committee cycles, it is requested that the delegated authority for the Director of Corporate Services is increased from £5,000 to £20,000 for authorisation of support grants for businesses,

in consultation with Cabinet member for Regeneration and Planning Strategy. Authorisation will only be given following a robust assessment of activity. Grants awarded under delegated authority will be reported to Regeneration and Planning Strategy Committee, with updates also provided to Cabinet.

- 2.4 An assessment panel is being established which will include the Head of Strategic Development, a representative from the Federation of Small Business (FSB) as well as the Wirral Chamber of Commerce. It will also include Wirral Council Finance department. The panel will also include a representative from the financial institutions (although this will work on a rotation basis).

3. Proposed Amendment

- 3.1 The proposed amendment to the Council Constitution is to delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with Cabinet member for Regeneration and Planning Strategy, for grants for businesses up to the value of £20,000. This is an increase of current authority which is £5,000 and will only apply to the new BIG grant programme approved at Cabinet on the 19th March and will not apply to the Think Big Investment Grant.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 Cabinet approved the use of £800,000 from Working Wirral for a business support programme on the 19th March 2009. This follows the Cabinet budget proposal of £50,000 identified within the budget resolution to support local companies during the current economic downturn.

5. Staffing implications

- 5.1 No implications arising directly from this report.

6. Equal Opportunities implications

- 6.1 No implications arising directly from this report.

8. Community Safety implications

- 8.1 There are no direct Community Safety implications arising from this report.

9. Local Agenda 21 implications

- 9.1 None as a direct result of this report.

10. Planning implications

10.1 No implications arising directly from this report.

11. Anti-poverty implications

11.1 No implications arising directly from this report.

12. Human Rights implications

12.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

13. Social Inclusion implications

13.1 No implications arising directly from this report.

14. Local Member Support implications

14.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

15. Background Papers

15.1 Can be obtained by contacting Alan Evans on 0151 691 8426.

Recommendation

That Cabinet support the request for provision within the Council's constitution to allow the delegated authority for the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with Cabinet member for Regeneration and Planning Strategy, to approve business support grants of up to £20,000.

Jim Wilkie

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

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