

APPENDIX G

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 3 MARCH 2009

Title:

HELP FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

**[Portfolio Holders: Cllrs Mike Band,
Mrs Carole Cockburn and Robert Knowles]
[Wards Affected: All]**

Summary and purpose:

This report considers a number of initiatives to support small local businesses through the economic downturn. These will be funded from the budget provision of £20,000 agreed by Council on 24 February 2009.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

The small business sector is an essential part of the Waverley community, with the average business employing 5 staff. Helping small businesses during the economic downturn will help maintain employment with the associated benefits it brings to all parts of the community.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

Maintaining jobs reduces the reliance on central and local government benefits and reduces the likelihood of social exclusion.

Resource/Value for Money implications:

The 2009/10 revenue budget includes £20,000 to provide additional support to small local businesses.

Legal Implications:

No direct legal implications

Background

1. The economic downturn is affecting all parts of the economy and the previously relatively prosperous South East including Waverley is being badly affected. Whilst the Council cannot single-handedly reverse the affects in the Borough, it can, acting as community leader, assists individuals and small businesses by either providing advice and guidance or limited financial support.

Don't Lose your Home or Business

2. Since October 2008, Waverley established the Don't Lose Your Home or Business initiative to help keep people in their home or offer support to small businesses. Whilst the support to individuals has either been through the Council e.g. providing benefits or homeless advice or working with partners such as Citizens Advice, the advice to businesses has almost entirely been through Business Link Surrey and Enterprise First.
3. Amongst other general advice Business Link Surrey is running special workshops to help businesses improve their cash flow. Topics include Cash is King and Getting Paid. In addition Enterprise First offer free and impartial independent advice sessions.
4. The Council is able to offer limited scope to businesses by temporarily modifying payment arrangements for business rates, although it cannot remit the rates as the Council simply acts as a collection agent on behalf of central government. There are limited powers to support some small businesses financially through hardship relief, but given the scale of the downturn and the number of businesses affected this is not feasible or indeed financially manageable given the pressures on the Council's own finances. Financial support of this nature could only come from central government.

Initiatives for 2009/10

5. The Council will be continuing with the Don't Lose your Home or Business initiative. In addition, Council approved a budget of £20,000 to help small local businesses in the year. To date the following initiatives have been started or proposed

Payment of Invoices to small local businesses within 10 days

6. The Council has an excellent record of paying invoices to businesses and pays around 99% within the agreed deadline. Recognising the importance of cash flow in these difficult times, where credit is both expensive and difficult to arrange, the Council's payment terms have been changed to 10 days from receipt of invoice for small local businesses.
7. This will have a positive effect on local businesses and will cost to the Council about £8,500 in the year. Officers will be monitoring the progress against these new payment arrangements.

Pre-Planning advice to small local businesses

8. The Council is introducing charging for pre-application advice from 1 April 2009. This new service aims to benefit businesses by improving the quality of planning submissions by raising awareness of council policies and creating a dialogue between planners and customers.

9. It is proposed that a discount is offered to small local business during 2009/10 to help the property sector which has suffered greatly in the downturn. It is estimated that this support linked particularly to minor applications will cost around £5,000 in 2009/10.

Car Parking

10. The Council have agreed to hold car parking charges at their existing level for the coming year, recognising the importance of competitive car parking charges for local businesses. This is in contrast to nine of our Surrey neighbours who have increased charges.
11. The Council is able to work with any town or village council or business group that wishes to promote subsidised parking in any part of the borough where charging occurs. Waverley's car parking tickets are two-part and allow for any group to run such a scheme as is used in Haslemere. If this option is taken up by any group, Waverley Borough Council could support the initiative with publicity at the relevant car parks at fairly minimal costs to the Council.
12. Officers will raise this item at the forthcoming Towns and Parishes meeting and at a future Waverley Business Forum meeting to see if there is any interest in such a scheme.

Other Current Initiatives

13. These initiatives are in addition to the work Waverley undertakes on its own and through a range of partners including Waverley Business Forum, Enterprise First, Business Link, the Local Chambers of Commerce, the Town Initiatives, the Visit Surrey partnership and the Learning and Skills Council. These activities include:
 - Waverley is about to launch a new online Business Directory to help with local business to business transactions and raise awareness of the wealth of local businesses for local residents.
 - Waverley is organising a series of retail marketing workshops in association with Enterprise First and the Chambers of Commerce in each community.
 - The latest programme of Waverley Business Forum breakfast briefings which have a focus on business issues in the recession.
14. Waverley will continue to work with its partners over the coming months to ensure actions can be targeted to respond to need

Conclusion

15. Whilst the effects of the economic downturn are enormous there are some sound initiatives that can help local businesses throughout the period. Further ideas will be reported to the Executive as opportunities arise.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Executive endorse the actions taken so far to help small local businesses through the economic downturn.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

CONTACT OFFICER:

Name: Paul Wenham

Telephone: 01483 523238

E-mail: paul.wenham@waverley.gov.uk