



## **Delegated Officer Report**

**Decision Maker:** Cllr Sean Fielding, Council leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Enterprise

**Date of Decision:** Helen Lockwood, Deputy Chief Executive, People & Place.  
22 October 2019

**Subject:** Award of a Business Improvement Grant in Lees district centre

**Report Author:** Liz Kershaw, Principal Regeneration Officer

**Ward (s):** Saddleworth West & Lees

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**Reason for the decision:** The purpose of the report is to seek approval to award a Business Improvement Grant in Lees District Centre.

**Summary:** The Council recognises the important role that independent businesses play in sustaining the vibrancy and vitality of our high streets and has developed a Business Improvement Grant scheme for Lees District Centre. Discretionary grants of 50% of the costs of improvements, up to a maximum of £8,000, are available.

An application has been revived and for which approval is sought.

**Assure Certification Ltd, 96 High Street, Lees.**

This relates to the former Barclays Bank premises at 96 High Street, Lees. It has been vacant since the bank closed and has recently been purchased by Assure Certification Ltd who currently rent the ground floor at 103 High Street Lees.

The building occupies a prominent position on the corner of High Street and Thomas Street and is probably one of the most recognisable buildings in Lees centre. They have registered for business rates at the premises and currently receive Small Business Rate Relief.

The works to bring the building into use will include the installation of new windows and doors, a complete electrical re-wire, installation of boiler, heating and plumbing including toilets upstairs and downstairs and kitchenette facilities.

Planning permission has been granted for the change of use. A further planning application (PA/343773/19) has been applied for the changes to the building, as well as an initial notice for Building Regulations approval and any grant approved would be subject to both these being approved.

The business currently has 2 employees working at their existing offices in Lees. The works being carried out at 96 High street are for two separate areas. The upstairs will mainly be offices for the certification business, who are currently growing rapidly and foresee additional staff will be needed in this part of the business.

The downstairs part of the property will become a boardroom/Meeting room. The plan is to rent this meeting place to local business for meetings and events. This will generate income for the training division of the business and should also create a job for somebody to manage the bookings. They have already spoken to a number of local business to supply catering for the meeting room which should also benefit the local economy.

The applicant has submitted 3 quotes for each aspect of the works and based on the total of all the lowest quotes – the works come to £19,033.41 (exc VAT). The applicant is therefore applying for the maximum grant of £8,000.

The Lees Grant Advisory Panel made up of the 3 ward councillors for Saddleworth West and Lees unanimously agreed to support this application via emails dated 8<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

**What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):**

1. Do nothing. If the Council chooses to adopt this approach then the Council's regeneration aspirations for Lees District Centre would be delayed. There is potential that the appearance of these premises and Lees District Centre could decline further.
2. Approve the award of the Business Improvement Grant. Business Improvement Grant applicants will enter into a contract with the Council, to ensure that works are being

undertaken satisfactorily with claw back arrangements for non-compliance. Funding takes place once the contract is completed and the works completed to the satisfaction of the Council.

**Consultation: including any conflict of interest declared by relevant Cabinet Member consulted.**

A local grant review panel consisting of at least 2 of the 3 ward members for Saddleworth West & Lees has been set up to review grant applications. The panel provides recommendations as to whether to approve, vary or reject the grant applications with the actual decision to award the grant being made by the relevant Cabinet member.

This application has been considered by all of the members of the Lees Grant Review Panel by email on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2019, whereby they recommended approval.

**Recommendation(s):**

Approve a max award of £8,000 Business Improvement Grant to:

- Assure Certification Ltd in respect of 96 High Street, Lees

**Implications:**

**What are the financial implications?**

The Shaw & Lees District Centres Business Support (Neighbourhood Developments) Project was awarded £200,000 for Business Improvement Grants in the districts of Shaw and Lees, with £100,000 earmarked for each district.

The table below details the full budget and allocations to date for Lees District and shows the financial impact of the approval of the £8,000 award contained in this report. Consequently, there would be funds of £48,427 still to allocate.

	£
Total Business Improvement Grant – Lees	100,000
Previous approved grant allocations	(43,333)
Marketing costs	(240)
<b>Total remaining grant</b>	<b>56,427</b>
Approval to allocate above recommendation	(8,000)
<b>Grant Remaining for Allocation</b>	<b>48,427</b>

Approval of this award of £8,000 would increase the value of the grant allocated to £51,573.

It should be noted that of the £43,333 allocated for Lees prior to the consideration of this report, £35,546 has been drawn down by the successful applications, as the conditions of grant state that the recipient has up to 12 months to draw down the grant following the approved offer.

Marketing costs of £480 have been apportioned equally to both districts (£240 each) prior to any grants being awarded. All costs will be charged to capital code M0550, as both districts are funded through this.

It is important that colleagues in the Economic Development team, with the assistance from Finance, maintain an understanding and record of claims so that an accurate forecast can be completed.

It is unlikely that every grant awarded in 2019/20 will be drawn down in the same financial year as the conditions of the grant allow the recipient up to 12 months to draw down the grant following the approved offer.

(Jamie Kelly, Accountant)

**What are the legal implications?**

The grants will be made subject to the Council's standard terms for Business Improvement Grants that provide for the grant to be paid after the works have been completed to the satisfaction of the Council's surveyor. There will be claw back provisions for non-compliance with the grant terms which together with the relatively low amounts of the grants make the grants low risk transactions. As long as the grant applications meet the Council's requirements and have been assessed in accordance with the Council's procedures Legal Services has no further comments to make. (Elizabeth Cunningham-Doyle)

**What are the procurement implications?**

N/A

**What are the Human Resources implications? Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment**

N/A

**What are the property implications**

Improvement of privately owned businesses will contribute towards the achievement of a vibrant Lees District Centre. (Bryn Cooke)

**Risks:**

Each applicant is checked for Business Rates registration and that they are up to date. The applicant is registered for Business Rates at the premises and is currently receiving relief. The grant is only payable on satisfactory completion of the works.

**Co-operative agenda**

Business Improvement Grants are available to any independent business or property owner within the eligible areas. The grants can be the catalyst for local business to carry out improvement which they would not otherwise be able to afford or consider doing. Working with independent businesses is particularly important to our cop-operative agenda and our District Centres as they help to create a strong sense of local identity and customer loyalty and trust. District Centres are often the location for family businesses that have been trading for long periods of time – many of them for a number of decades. Improvements to the exterior of key buildings including fascia's and shop fronts can both uplift an area and the visitor's perception of the District Centre and assist in attracting new independents.

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

**There are no background papers for this report**

<b>Report Author Sign-off:</b>	
Cllr Sean Fielding, Council leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Enterprise	
<b>Date:</b>	

In consultation with Helen Lockwood, Deputy Chief Executive People and Place

Signed : 

Date:23 October 2019

Please list and attach any appendices: -

Appendix number or letter	Description
1	Photo of 96 High street, Lees (existing)



Appendix 1 – photo of existing premises at 96 High Street, Leeds.

