

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 03 May 2020 20:20  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**Subject:** Government top-up to local business grants fund scheme

Dear Councillor

I have attached a letter I am sending to William Benson, to outline a proposal in relation to a brand new "Top-up to local business grants fund scheme" on behalf of the 14 Independent hospitality businesses that missed out on the original Business Support Grant Fund.

For reference here is the link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/top-up-to-local-business-grant-funds-scheme>

I have spoken to as many of you today as I could have and I appreciate the time that I was given to explain our situation and how I hope you can assist us.

If you have any questions or want to discuss this please do not hesitate to ring me on  
[REDACTED]

Kind regards  
[REDACTED]

William Benson  
Chief Executive  
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Tunbridge Wells  
Kent, TN1 1RS

3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020

Dear William,

We are writing as owner operators of fourteen independant hospitality sites in the borough, who are ineligible for the local authority business interruption grants owing to our ratable values being over the £51,000 cap.

Having heard Friday's announcement by the Business Secretary Alok Sharma of an additional £617 million for England's local authority grant pot, we are hoping TWBC will use part of this extra funding to help us survive the Covid-19 crisis. Noting in particular that this extra funding "has been set up to accommodate certain small businesses previously outside the scope of the business grants fund scheme", is "discretionary", and that "local authorities may choose to make payments to other businesses based on local economic need."

Please forgive the bluntness of this request, and indeed the haste with which we are making it (we realise the Council's specific budget is not being set until later this week) – but this perhaps underlines the desperate position we find ourselves in.

You will of course be aware of the obvious arguments against the £51,000 cap: Not least the fact the figure is an arbitrary threshold within an inherently unfair system, with the rates themselves being set arbitrarily, particularly in the case of hospitality and leisure businesses.

Moreover, that these grants – despite being designed to help businesses to cover fixed property-related overheads – exclude the very businesses which have the largest such costs, despite finding themselves in the same position as all our competitors who are eligible: unable to trade directly from their properties.

This situation, seems to be universally acknowledged, but thus far has been seen as unavoidable because of the lack of central government funding for such businesses. This announcement therefore seems an opportunity to redress this balance: to help out a handful of businesses which are most in need, owing to the complete lack of grant funding thus far, with the largest fixed costs, and who are almost certainly to be some of the last businesses to open under any plans to ease the lockdown.

We had hoped this disparity would be redressed by central government following considerable lobbying by UK Hospitality. This has not however been the case and one of our members did last week receive word direct from the Treasury that an extension to the cap was something that was not being considered.

Given this, our proposal is that hospitality businesses, which are independent (headquartered in Tunbridge Wells), with a rateable value of over £51,000 be provided a £25,000 grant just as the vast majority of our competitors have.

To clarify, we are making this petition as independent businesses – not on behalf of branches of national and international chains.

It is our argument that our businesses are not only less resourced than national chains to survive this but also that we bring the most economic benefit to the community, by virtue of the economics of our capital circulating almost entirely within the local economy.

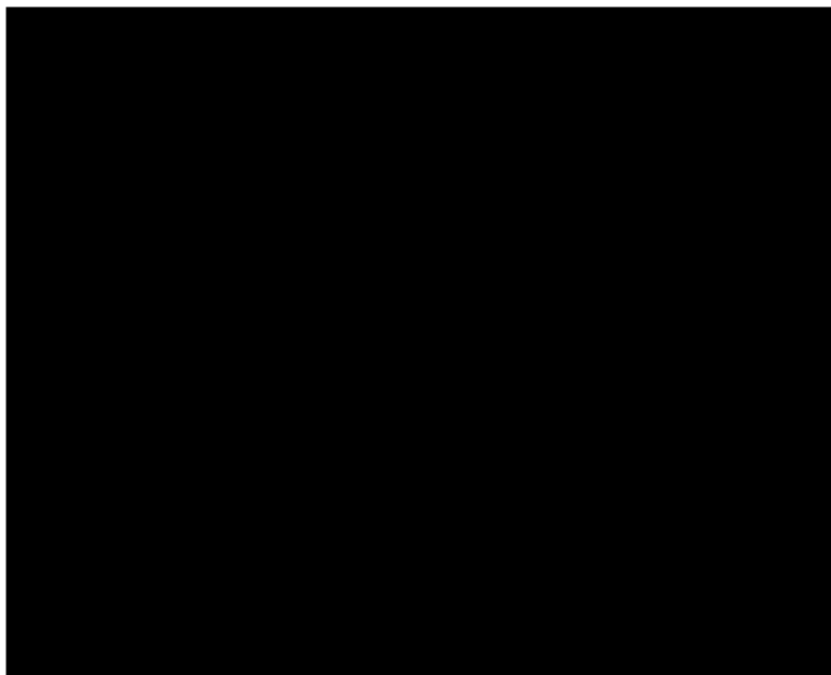
Larger chains may be able to make claims of employing local people and even of using some local suppliers, but cannot claim the extent of the local supply chains we use, the professional services and tradespeople we employ, or indeed that our profit remains in the local economy with us living in the town and spending the large part of our incomes within it.

More so, that local independent businesses tend to be the homegrown success stories the town and those its residents are most proud of. The businesses that give the town its individuality, and are the source for the large part of its cultural offer – both in terms of our investment in our sites themselves but also as organisers and key sponsors of many of the town's events and advising on its various cultural and economic committees.

Again, we are appealing to you to use some of this extra discretionary fund for a single payment of £25,000 per site to get some parity with our competition. To weather the current crisis as well as most of the larger chains will, and so we can continue contributing to the local economy and culture to the extent we have in the past.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 22 May 2020 15:29  
**To:** William Benson; CLARK, Greg  
**Subject:** Dicresionary Grant

Hi Greg & William

Whilst I appreciate you are both very busy and have responded to all of my other issues I have yet to hear much back from you with regard to this Grant.

<http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/coronavirus-updates/advice-and-support-for-businesses/covid-19-grants/covid-19-discretionary-business-grants-scheme> [REDACTED]

I note that TWBC have taken literal guidance from the guidance set out by the Govt. and not applied any "discretion" at all. Page 6 of the guidance says "These grants are primarily & predominantly aimed at", not exclusively...

Item 23 on the same page says:

20. We want local authorities to exercise their local knowledge and discretion and we recognise that economic need will vary across the country, so we are setting some national criteria for the funds but allowing local authorities to determine which cases to support within those criteria

Please don't make me call all the Councillors again....

Greg, Can you please advise on what progress is being made on the front for those of us who missed out on this grant?

William, Can you please advise whether TWBC are earmarking anything out for the 14 independents that still desperately need this assistance?

I have also heard that several companies have been returning their grants either for State Aid rules or simple because they don't need it. Can these funds be reallocated, Might there be a way where companies can "donate" these?

Kind Regards

[REDACTED]