

Discretionary Grants Consultation

Spelthorne Borough Council undertook a consultation with businesses in receipt of the Additional Restrictions Grant ahead of the 17 May unlocking. The consultation ran from the 30 April 2021 – 15 May 2021.

Background

There are 7673 businesses in Spelthorne, the split by ward is below

Area	Number of Businesses	% of Businesses
Ashford Common	497	6.5
Ashford East	402	5.2
Ashford North & Stanwell South	422	5.5
Ashford Town	1329	17.3
Halliford & Sunbury West	363	4.7
Laleham & Shepperton Green	522	6.8
Riverside & Laleham	278	3.6
Shepperton Town	736	9.6
Staines	1101	14.3
Staines South	396	5.1
Stanwell North	494	6.4
Sunbury Common	499	6.5
Sunbury East	634	8.2

The top 10 categories by number of businesses are shown in the table below.

Number of Businesses by Category	
Specialised construction activities	776
Computer programming, consultancy and related services	562
Retail trade	543
Real estate activities	510
Wholesale trade	483
Other personal service activities	458
Activities of head offices; management consultancy activities	445
Transport	368
Office administrative, office support and other business support	319
Food and beverage service activities	312

From midnight on the 23 March 2020 the government required as many people as possible to stay at home wherever possible and to only make essential journeys. All non-essential businesses and workplaces were required to close, in addition to the earlier closure of schools and the leisure and hospitality sectors. Social distancing was introduced for everyone, and for the most vulnerable to the infection, a shielding programme was activated. These 'lockdown' measures were put in place until it was determined that the reproduction rate of the virus had fallen to a level to suppress the virus, save lives and protect the NHS.

As the UK moved to a position allowing pubs and restaurants to open and the 2-metre social-distancing rule relaxed, the economy slowly and nervously returned in slow steps towards 'normality'. However, the subsequent lockdown (December to March 2021) has deepened the financial impact on many retailers with both winners and losers emerging.

We held a consultation with businesses in order to hear what is needed most to help with the recovery of the local economy.

There has been the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) which is targeted at predominantly non-business rates payers, including the self-employed, sole traders and small businesses; this is more commonly known as the discretionary grant.

Results

We found that the construction services sector has continued to perform very strongly during the pandemic. In fact, several of the businesses we spoke to have seen growth due to large demand in the home improvement sector during lockdown.

We asked: On the basis that all Covid-19 restrictions will have been lifted, what is your level of confidence for your business succeeding over the next 12 months?

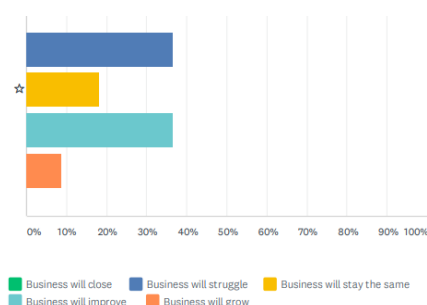
None said their business will close

37% said their business would struggle

18% said business would stay the same

37% said business would improve

9% thought their business would grow



BUSINESS WILL CLOSE	BUSINESS WILL STRUGGLE	BUSINESS WILL STAY THE SAME	BUSINESS WILL IMPROVE	BUSINESS WILL GROW	TOTAL
0.00%	36.59%	18.29%	36.59%	8.54%	
0	30	15	30	7	82

We also asked: Please comment on the suggested potential interventions and let us know what else could the funding be used for to support businesses and what impact is it likely to have?

From this question the majority of businesses asked for the following;

75% - Web and social media support

72% - Subsidised purchase of equipment

60% - Free business advice & support

54% - Grant to improve shop fronts

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Subsidized purchase of equipment	72.09%	62
Free business support	60.47%	52
Grant to support web / social media presence	75.58%	65
Grant to improve shop fronts	54.65%	47
Other suggestions to support your business and the impact it will have.	62.79%	54

There were, however, concerns regarding business rates and high rents which were also cited as inhibitors to restarting their business after lockdown from respondents to the survey.