

## **Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan – Local Business Recovery Support**

Nicola Bailey – Business Village Agent will attend the committee meeting to explain her role and present her findings from recent work with local businesses affected by the 2013/14 flooding.

A briefing note provided by Nicola is set out below.

### **Short background to the post of Village Business Agent**

The post of Business Village Agent was created and funded by Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council, The Federation of Small Businesses and the Community Council for Somerset in response to the issues that were raised by businesses in the aftermath of the flooding. The purpose of the role is to work directly with businesses in the flood affected areas of Somerset, to help them overcome the negative impact on trading created by the flooding.

### **Remit for post / scope of area covered.**

I was appointed to the role in June. As Business Village Agent, my remit is to provide help and support to businesses affected either directly or indirectly by flooding. One to one help is provided through visits to the business and scheduled drop in sessions held within business communities.

A key priority for the role is to help the business owner to identify ways in which they could make their business more resilient to further flooding in the future and utilise the financial help available to implement these changes.

My work is split between working individually with businesses and working with partners and key stakeholders to take action on the issues identified. Identifying and raising awareness of the issues that flooding presents to businesses, and lobbying for action to help businesses now and in the long term is an important part of the role.

Linking to sources of support and maximising access to services already available to help businesses is also important and helps to 'join things up' for businesses and create a more cohesive experience. For example the Connecting Somerset 'Getting up to Speed' project is helping businesses to make the most of the opportunities presented by the internet and is a valuable resource in helping them to become more resilient.

A main source of help has been through small business grants – allocated to SSDC by the Government for distribution to businesses affected by flooding to support greater longer term resilience.

Grants have been widely promoted through the media (including social media) and business / agency networks.

To date, the Business Support Grants have been used to finance:

- Replacement of lost stock & equipment
- Investment in marketing and advertising including web and e-commerce development

- Specialist advice and technical infrastructure to improve business continuity

### Summary of the problems encountered by businesses affected by flooding

<b>Impact – directly flooded</b>	<b>Help provided has included:</b>
<p>Lost stock/equipment</p> <p>Premises that have been flooded over consecutive years</p> <p>Fears of their customers leaving them for more reliable businesses not in flood affected areas</p>	<p>Help to apply for a Business Support Grant to replace lost equipment/stock.</p> <p>Advice &amp; Repair &amp; Renewal grants to look at resilience measures to help the premises to withstand further flooding with minimum impact on the business.</p> <p>Business Support Grant to enable marketing activities.</p>
<b>Impact – indirectly affected</b>	<b>Help provided includes:</b>
<p>Interruption to trading from lack of access to premises during the period of flooding for staff and customers</p> <p>Road closures and access problems in subsequent months due to flood related repairs</p> <p>Low visitor numbers due to the damage caused by the powerful media images of the flooding an perception from outside the County that Somerset is 'closed for business</p>	<p>Help to apply for business support grants to help finance measures that would help the business to continue trading in similar circumstances. For example website/e-commerce development to provide an added income stream. A domiciliary care company used a support grant to invest in training and CRB checking a bank of staff based across their patch.</p> <p>Helping the businesses to plan marketing campaigns to re-engage lost customers and target new market segments</p>

Many businesses receiving support have been very positive about the benefits of the support offered – including the business grants programmes.

The results of recent follow up with a sample of businesses to assess impact of the support provided will be reported at the meeting.

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