

Small Business : **Big Impact 4**



European Union
European Structural
and Investment Funds



INVEST
City of Wolverhampton

FOREWORD

There is an old adage that says “If you don’t ask you don’t get” – and that is very much a mantra the City Council’s Business Development Team like to promote.

Trying to sum up the role of the team, and its relationship with the City’s businesses, is no easy task.

So they thought there is no better way to show what they do than by sharing 50 ‘asks’ that they have responded to – each different, each addressing a business need, but each an example of how connected, knowledgeable and responsive the team is.

And rather than a bland “we can do this, we can do that”, they thought they would show you examples of the support, signposting, knowledge and intel given to the local business community. And in doing so it also gives us the chance to showcase some of fantastic work that is being done by you, the Wolverhampton business community.

You can meet our Business Development Team overleaf.



Councillor Stephen Simkins –
Cabinet Member for the City Economy

THE TEAM

We may be a small team but like our small business community we believe we have made a big impact. We hope this booklet gives a flavour of what we can do; and how we have adapted through the pandemic to ensure our support is tailored to the changing needs of the business community (*and please note many of the photos are pre social distancing*).

You can contact us on
business.development@wolverhampton.gov.uk

You can see the up to date support packages available, case studies, and links to partners such as the FSB, Chamber and the University at
www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/business/wolvesinbusiness



Left – right

Jay Patel and Glenn Watts

Hannington Gondwe (left, with Parmod Sharma from One Stop Pharmacy)

Jeff Marlow (left, at the Nat West Enterprise Hub)

Gulsharan Anmol (right, with colleagues from Wolves at Work)

Through 2020 we have delivered the AIM for GOLD Programme, the Relight Business Programme, the Discretionary Grant Programme, and the Additional Restrictions Grant Programme; we have run 8 Workshops, 10 Webinars, and 4 Business Surgeries; and we have engaged with 30 of our Strategic businesses and have directly supported over 500 businesses. We have provided over £500,000 of AIM for GOLD grant support helping secure over £1.5M of private sector investment in the city, and we have provided over £2M in Discretionary Grant support

FINANCE AND COST CONTROL

- You had issues with some companies withholding payments and causing cashflow issues so we connected you with the Small Business Commissioners office. They stepped in and helped you arrange favourable terms and to be paid on time thus helping your cashflow and keeping a relationship with your customer
- You asked if you should voluntarily become VAT registered so we provided a couple of coaching sessions to look at the advantages and disadvantages to being VAT registered. As a result, you contacted your accountant to proceed with the VAT registration
- You wanted some specific advice on reducing your carbon footprint so we connected you to a number of local grant providers who offered you free energy assessments and a grant of up to £25,000 to implement those changes
- You applied for a Covid19 Business Rates grant but you did not fit the criteria so we helped you with a Discretionary Grant that supported your business over the difficult times
- You wanted to understand how to cashflow your business better so you attended one of our AIM for GOLD finance workshops
- You wanted to import raw goods from abroad but had questions about the tax arrangements so we connected you with the team from the Department for International Trade based at the Chamber who worked this through with you



Our AIM for GOLD Finance workshops were very popular, enjoyable and informative - the cornerstone for successful grant applications. When the pandemic struck we quickly switched to delivering via webinars

- **Gills Concrete Mix Ltd** is a company that supplies ready mix concrete and screed for both commercial and domestic purposes. The company was facing increasing competition from the big players in their sector - a situation that was exacerbated by the pandemic. In order to remain sustainably competitive, the company decided to upgrade their machinery by investing in a new cement mixing plant worth £180,000. Our AIM for GOLD Programme provided grant assistance worth £44,000 and has supported 2 new jobs

PRODUCT AND SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

- You were unclear as to how to protect your new product idea so we connected you to the IP offices and helped you book on an IP workshop in Birmingham resulting in you getting some key contacts and advice from UK's Intellectual Property Office
- You needed funding to develop a unique online booking system for the hospitality sector, we registered you on the AIM for GOLD Programme and helped you secure the grant funding that you needed
- You didn't see how innovation applied to your business – we connected you to the University's Smart Concept Team and you came away with several ideas as to how to develop new services to grow your business
- You said you wanted to develop a new product to make your business more resilient during the pandemic – we negotiated a change in the AIM for GOLD Growth programme so it could also provide grant support for building resilience, thus helping you with funding to make the business more secure

- **Meiji Media Ltd** is an events company specialising in creating cutting edge technologies for the hospitality sector. In response to the changing needs of the firm's clientele and the availability of cloud-based solutions within the sector, the company developed a Growth Plan that articulated the steps the firm needed to make to remain financially viable and grow. The growth plan was completed with the support of the AIM for GOLD Team and it highlighted the need to invest in a IT system that focussed on enhancing and embedding its key Venkey booking system - and in so doing cutting down operational costs. The system costed Meiji Media £55,000 with £23,000 financial support from AIM for GOLD.



Hugglepets went through product and service development when they built a large aquarium to quarantine imported tropical fish before selling them in the UK, and made the aquarium available as a multi sensory space for children with learning needs

EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND TRAINING

- You wanted to furlough staff but did not know how so you spoke with one of our Wolves at Work specialists who talked this through with you
- You wanted to employ more ex services personnel so we introduced you to the Armed Forces Covenant and our Wolves at Work team who worked through the benefits
- You wanted to be part of the Kickstart scheme but did not know how so we again brought in our Wolves at Work team who explained the process and helped you engage with the young generation
- You wanted to give back to school aged pupils by sharing your business and enterprise skills so we arranged for you to meet with our Education Business Partnership Team. They connected into local schools and organised a 3 day competition package where you tasked the school pupils with designing a new satchel and the winners got them made for them!
- You wanted to deliver workshops and support for young people aged between 16-24 but could not find the audience so we connected you to our IMPACT team who run a EU funded project to help support the more disadvantaged 16-24 year olds

- You wanted to have a very specific qualification for your workers but this qualification did not exist in the UK so we brokered a meeting with Wolverhampton College. As a result, they are looking at adjusting one of their qualifications to be fit for your purpose and this will mean your apprentices can receive the relevant qualification for their industry
- Our Wolves at Work team have supported over 800 businesses and can be also contacted via business.development@wolverhampton.gov.uk



Sati Kaur from our Wolves at Work team promoting the Armed Forces Covenant

PROCUREMENT

- You wanted to know what opportunities were coming up for tender at the NHS, Wolverhampton University and our Council so we put on a meet the buyer event where you could have a face to face meeting with the buyers of these organisations
- You wanted to sell PPE items to the Council. We signposted you to the procurement portal and the specialist corona email set up for this purpose
- You asked to be more tender ready so we put on specialist workshops and arranged for 1-2-1 support to enable you to be ready to bid for tenders such as the Commonwealth Games

As a Council we quickly respond to needs in the market place – when several companies asked about how to bid for Council contracts we not only ran some “how to” workshops but brokered discussions with our procurement team, and then promoted the wider procurement opportunities. The latter included the opportunities coming from the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, promoted through a series of Workshops run by the Black Country Chamber of Commerce. The City Council procurement support and tendering opportunities can be found at www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/business/opportunities



*As the economy faced severe disruption so we had to turn our **AIM for GOLD** Programme on its head. Our OnBoarding Day moved online, we moved quickly from 3 hour workshops to 1 hour webinars, and our in business based coaching moved to phone based coaching. We also reshaped the Programme so we could provide investment support to firms looking to build resilience rather than grow*

COVID-19

- You wanted funding to help manage a downturn in trade due to the Covid19 Pandemic we connected you to the CBILS loans and Bounce Back loans
- You wanted to donate £30,000 of PPE to the NHS but could not get through to their procurement teams so we used our contacts to open the doors for you
- You needed funding to purchase materials to make much needed surgical scrubs in April. We arranged for an AIM for GOLD grant, helped complete the paperwork and supported you to find new employees
- You had issues with claiming on your business interruption insurance for the Covid19 Pandemic. After a number of coaching conversations you were able to work out your next move, how to position yourselves and who you needed to speak with and write to.
- You were finding trying to run a business in the midst of a pandemic was tough and needed somebody to “let off steam to”. So we were your sounding board and through a couple of conversations we explored where you needed to be, compared this with where you wanted to be. Together we looked at your options and agreed how your business needed to pivot to make this happen



Maqq Raffique (pictured between the 2 people in blue PPE) from Aircard Filters who switched production from industrial filters to PPE for the NHS utilising their filter knowledge and skills base, and had support from the City Councils AIM for GOLD Programme

- You wanted to know how Wolverhampton was going to fight back. We signposted you to the series of Relighting Wolves webinars where we engaged you in a discussion on a number of business growth and resilience fundamentals with a number of prominent and experienced City businesses

We quickly recognised it was a whole new world for everyone with the impact of the Covid19 Pandemic. As a team we were used to visiting businesses in the workplace and running Business Support Workshops. Speaking to a number of businesses it was evident they still wanted support so we pivoted ourselves – we took our 3hour AIM for GOLD Workshops and reshaped them into 45 minute webinars and made them all relevant to running a business in the midst of the Pandemic. We added in a series of business surgeries to provide a relaxed chat facility with our team and with other businesses. We then ran a series of further Q&A webinars with a panel of business leaders in the City. All in over 100 businesses attended and benefitted from the webinars

MARKETING

- You wanted to sell more online so we registered you on to our eBay Programme which gave you a shop for free for 12 months and a package of 24 hour bespoke support
- You wanted some more exposure to your brand new revolutionary satchels. We introduced you to eBay who arranged for BBC and ITV news stories, massive write ups and pictures in national red top papers, radio interview and 3 full days with videographers for a series of videos, plus you were the “face of eBay on multiple TV and billboard promotions”
- **Good Start Jones** had joined the City Councils AIM programme and were receiving regular support from Glenn Watts, one of the teams Growth Advisers. As Paul Jones, Owner

of Good Start Jones notes “starting a business based on passion for what we love and absolutely enjoy doing is fantastic. However, running a business without any sort of business understanding on the basics of how to operate was starting to cause problems and minor issues each year, once the business began to grow. We needed help. Our help came from the City Council’s Business Development Team.” When the City Council negotiated a programme with eBay of targeted support for 100 craft and online retail businesses in the City we had to find a unique, aspirational business to front the Programme. We could think of no one better than Good Start so made the introduction and the rest of history



*Marcia Melbourne, from **Melbourne Accessories**, joined the AIM for GOLD Programme and then benefitted from the eBay package of support which included a series of social media workshops*

PROPERTY

- You needed to move property as you had outgrown yours. Your needs list was long and the budget small. We connected you with a local business who had a space coming up soon to rent. You became the perfect tenant and both saved a lot of money in advertising and legal fees
- You wanted help finding premises to store alcohol gel as part of the UK's corona fight back in early April. We assisted in finding and then arranging suitable Council owned property to store and distribute desperately needed supplies
 - *Throughout any year hundreds of business are looking for new premises due to expansion, to downsize, because they have just started up or to accommodate an immediate and unplanned need. **Bluesky Cosmetics** was a case in point – a business that had joined our AIM for GOLD*

Programme attending a number of our Growth focused webinars. A business just a few years old but already with a turnover of more than £3m. Within days of the first national lockdown they worked with their suppliers to secure much needed supplies of hand sanitiser and PPE. Whilst they had the contacts to source the sanitiser they did not have the storage facilities to store it and this was an immediate challenge. A quick call to the team and we not only found them a suitable warehouse but put them in direct contact with the buyer at the Wolverhampton NHS Trust and our Public Health Team – ensuring supplies of sanitiser and PPE could be made available to front line health and social care staff in those challenging early days of the pandemic



Claire Parkes from **Bluesky Cosmetics** with some of their new at home range which was featured in the Mail OnLine website. Jemma Robinson, Director of Bluesky Cosmetics noted, “We pivoted quickly to create new markets for existing products and to introduce new products for which demand was outstripping supply due to the pandemic. As well as selling hand sanitiser to the NHS and Council, we moved away from physical pop up shops to online trading – a move supported through an ebay platform. And the new online market that developed during the lockdown continued to grow even when the high street reopened.”

NETWORKING

- You asked to do more networking so we arranged a series of networking events and gave you tips and practical hands on guides on how to network effectively
- You wanted to join a business network so we gave you details of the those active in the City encouraging you to weigh up the benefits of each organisation and join the one that best suits you
- You wanted time to network in our thematic business support workshops so we built in peer to peer learning as part of that process which resulted in a lot of business being done between delegates during and as a result of the workshops



– networking and peer to peer learning in action at one of our Workshops

- You wanted to be connected with other like-minded creative people in Wolverhampton so we drew down money from the EU and managed a 2 year project called Gen Y City where cities across Europe had visits and shared best practices.
- Recognising the strength of being in a large business support and networking group we developed the Relight Wolves Business Programme which was targeted at those that normally didn't access business support - and we funded membership to the Chamber of Commerce or Federation of Small Businesses for a year as a key component of this



– a regular sight to many of us through 2020, the team quickly adapted its workshop programme and ran numerous webinars on finance, marketing, sales, innovation, and leadership

YOUR BUSINESS FRIENDLY COUNCIL

- You asked how the Council spends its budget and how it “balances its books” so we invited you to the Councils annual budgeting event where you helped support the Council on key priorities for the City
- You wanted to get planning permission to install a huge biomass boiler to reduce your carbon footprint so we connected you to our planning team where you had a 1-2-1 conversation with our planning officers before putting in your full application
- You asked for resilience and disaster recovery training/awareness. We arranged a number of workshops with our Council Resilience Team to highlight the risks and how to write your own recovery plans
- You wanted to distribute your products to medium sized wholesalers and needed guidance on how to pitch and also needed to have a few doors opened. We connected you with another business who had years of experience dealing with medium and large wholesalers, plus they had many local contacts and opened up a number of doors
- You wanted to run a weekend of events which needed road closures and permissions so we connected you to the City Economy and Highways Teams to get the project started
- You needed to start producing, packaging and then selling dried meats. You needed a food hygiene rating and full sign off and guidance on labelling of food so we connected you to our environmental health team who visited you and gave you correct guidance.



we work closely with our colleagues in environmental health to ensure we can provide a seamless and very business friendly service

- You wanted to set up a new manufacturing plant to produce chemicals for water treatment plants but were not clear on what licenses you needed so we connected you to our environmental health team who liaised with the Environment Agency and carried out the appropriate licencing assessments
- You wanted Travellers moved on from land adjacent to your business as they were causing a nuisance to your business. We contacted our Environmental Health Team and they secured the Court Order to move them on

WE'RE IN THE KNOW, AND WELL CONNECTED

- You wanted to find somebody ASAP as your PC just started sending virus emails to your contacts so we gave you three local specialists who quickly solved your ICT problems and cleansed your systems
- You asked for an introduction to the MD of a well known Wolverhampton business as you wanted to be part of their supply chain as you had a new service which could be useful to them. We brokered the meeting and business is still being done
- You needed BREXIT information and wanted to speak direct to specialist adviser so we held a number of BREXIT events and brought in Government advisers who supported you with your queries.
- You asked to meet all the local EU funded business support programmes in one room so we arranged as part of one of our AIM for GOLD onboarding days for you to meet 8 of these projects.
- You asked for a very specialist supplier of foam products that could help you with a new material for your latest innovation. We connected you with a local company that helped you develop this foam product so you could continue to develop your new product.

- Your business turned over less than £500k and you were looking to get support to get into exporting. The Department for International Trade didn't have an offer for smaller companies with no export experience but we explained there were a growing number in that position – so the DIT has recently launched a support and information programme for businesses in this bracket
- You asked about industry 4.0 and how this would affect you and how to be prepared. We arranged a number of workshops that gave you an insight, connected you to experts and also to the fully funded projects supporting industry 4.0.



Glenn Watts with Theo Pathitis at the National Enterprise Show



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