



Information Governance Team

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Dear Sir/Madam.

**Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)
Request ID: REQ07321**

Thank you for your request for information relating to businesses eligible for COVID-19 business grants.

You have requested the following information:

1. We are looking to help businesses in your borough who are eligible to the Covid-19 business grant that have not yet made their application.

This request is being handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We can confirm that Coventry City Council holds the information you requested. However we are withholding that information since we consider that the following exemptions apply to it.

This information is exempt from disclosure under Section 31(1)(a) - Law enforcement. Disclosure of this information would be likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime.

Section 31(1)(a) is a qualified exemption, and therefore is subject to the Public Interest Test. Section 31(1)(a) provides an exemption where prejudice could be caused to allow potential fraudsters to use the information to identify business entities which were entitled to claim a grant. Once such a business had been identified, there would be a number of avenues open to the fraudsters to seek to obtain funds.

To use this exemption we are required to undertake a public interest test. The matters which were considered in applying the public interest test are as follows:

Factors in favour of disclosure

Withholding the information could be perceived as the council attempting to retain monies that belong to the public.

It is in the public interest to be open and transparent about our use of public funds.

It is also in the public interest to provide some transparency regarding the records we hold in respect of the administration of the Small Business Grant Fund. This could be of interest to the minority of people who are due a grant but have somehow failed to receive the notifications that money is due to them.

Factors in favour of withholding

There is a public interest in ensuring that monies from the public purse, such as rebates on business accounts and grant funding are not fraudulently claimed and also a public interest in not making it easier for fraud to be committed.

Our current verification procedure for claims is simple and cost effective. Disclosure of the requested information would result in additional verification processes needing to be implemented, at additional cost to the public which appeared disproportionate to the benefits that would accrue from disclosure. The additional verification procedures would also be likely to slow the verification process, resulting in detriment to the genuine ratepayer which would be contrary to the public interest.

In relation to any new verification processes that might be needed, these would be likely to require the production of additional documents by those claiming a rebate/grant which would place a new administrative burden on the majority of those legitimate claimants that did not currently exist. This would be compounded by the fact that the level of scrutiny of those documents would be higher than at present, given the increased suspicion that some of the claims (and associated documents) might well be fraudulent. The result would be that a new verification process would be likely to slow the rate at which claims could be considered, causing delay in all applications and the likelihood of complaints, which would further burden our limited resources.

Disclosure of the requested information would result in the need to implement disproportionate steps and additional expense to the public purse to counter an increased fraud risk that does not exist at present.

The cost consequences of a successful fraudulent claim would:

- have incurred the cost of paying out to the fraudster;
- remain liable to the legitimate business for an equivalent amount, raising the prospect of paying out twice; and
- be faced with the cost (legal and incurrence of internal management time) of seeking to recover the funds wrongly paid to the fraudster.

It would not be in the public interest to expose it to such potential costs and expenses, given that they would be funded from the public purse.

It is considered that the greater public interest, therefore, lies in not providing the information at this time. In coming to that conclusion, the public interest in providing the information has been carefully weighed against any prejudice to the public interest that might arise from withholding the information; in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the

information. This response, therefore, acts as a refusal notice under Section 17 of the FOIA.

Having considered the public interest, we have decided not to release the information.

However, to advise and assist, please find basic information which is published on Gov.Uk:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/889039/200601-local-authority-grant-payments.csv/preview.

For information, we publish a variety of information such as: [FOI/EIR Disclosure Log](#), [Publication Scheme](#), [Facts about Coventry](#) and [Open Data](#) that you may find of useful if you are looking for information in the future.

If you are unhappy with the handling of your request, you can ask us to review our response. Requests for reviews should be submitted within 40 days of the date of receipt of our response to your original request – email: infogov@coventry.gov.uk

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our review, you can write to the Information Commissioner, who can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF or email casework@ico.org.uk.

Please remember to quote the reference number above in your response.

Yours faithfully

Information Governance