



COVID-19 Response and the Business Improvement District Resilience Fund

Advice Note to BIDs

Version: 6th April 2020



Business Improvement Districts can have a vital role to play as part of a local COVID-19 resilience response and should consider how best to support local businesses and communities through the coronavirus crisis.

Where you can agree a response role with Local Government, Scottish Government will help resource your continuity via the £1m COVID-19 BIDS Resilience Fund, launched 30th March, which be administered by Scotland's Towns Partnership via Scotland's Improvement Districts - www.improvementdistricts.scot.

COVID-19 BID Resilience Fund

Scotland's Towns Partnership, on behalf of all the operational Business Improvement Districts in Scotland, is asking Local Authorities to pause collection of BID Levies from 1 April 2020 for a minimum period of 6 months. We are also recommending that no new BID debt recovery is issued for the same period. Please see note below regarding further suggestions for the BID Levy and Voluntary Contributions during this period.

We see this as is the only pragmatic way forward given where we are with the COVID-19 emergency.

We expect that the vast majority of BIDs and Local Authorities will agree this position but there might be one or two that decide to continue issuing invoices to see if some resource can be secured.

Where a BID agrees a critical response role with Local Government, Scottish Government will resource this via a £1m COVID-19 BIDS Resilience Fund, which will be administered by Scotland's Towns Partnership via Scotland's Improvement Districts (www.improvementdistricts.scot).

The BID Resilience Fund is not simply a resource to replace levy income. We expect a radical shift by BIDs to move to an emergency footing to deliver support around mitigation and to quickly become extremely useful for your council, agencies, levy payers and other businesses, neighbouring districts and towns, local communities, and charities etc. This is not business as usual. The £1m we have secured from Scottish Government is to help BIDs do this.

Application and Support

The application for the COVID-19 BID Resilience Fund is available online at www.improvementdistricts.scot.

SIDs is also opening a dedicated email and phone service to respond to any queries about the resilience fund and any other questions or needs your BID has in responding to the coronavirus crisis:

SIDs support helpline: 07866 590 533.

SIDs support email: support@improvementdistricts.scot.

Coronavirus (Scotland) Act: Postponement of Renewal Ballots

The Coronavirus (Scotland) Act allows Business Improvement Districts to extend their current terms where a re-ballot is due before 31st March 2021. You can view the legislation [here](#) (Schedule 7, Art. 31).

In “layman’s terms” Scotland’s Improvement Districts’ understanding of the Act is:

For Operational BIDs where their “operational term” is due to end between the 1st April 2020 to the 31st March 2021, they may extend their operational term until the 31st March 2021.

BID Levy and Voluntary Contributions: Advice for Local Authorities

The following actions are suggested by Scotland’s Improvement Districts:

1) Given all operational BIDs have asked for levy invoicing to be paused, we are asking Councils to agree to put a 6 month hold on issuing invoices from 1 April 2020

to 30 Sept 2020, justified by the COVID-19 Emergency and in agreement with the BID Company.

2) Ongoing enforcement and recovery proceedings continue but no new debt recovery is initiated from 1 April 2020 to 30 Sept 2020.

3) No refunds of levy already collected, unless extreme hardship demonstrated.

4) Recognise that some BIDs are affected more than others regarding different timing of issue of levy invoices.

5) Where a joint response is agreed between the Local Authority and the BID, we would expect existing public sector BID members to pay the levy voluntarily. BIDs will also be encouraged to seek Voluntary Contributions from businesses which are less affected by the crisis: supermarkets, grocers, chemists, off licenses, takeaways, and delivery networks etc. In order to alleviate pressure on LA Revenue teams, we will ask BIDs themselves to lead on this billing and collection.

6) Where some BIDs won't have an immediate role to assist Local Government and agencies and can hibernate, Scotland's Towns Partnership will continue to assist all these BIDs to ensure we have BIDs in place to aid local economic recovery.

BIDs Response to COVID-19: Recommended Steps

STEP 1

BIDs must quickly establish a role which adds clear value and doesn't duplicate or confuse efforts.

The first step is to discuss with the council if and how you can provide a valuable response. Not all BIDs will be able to meet the call – this is not a criticism, it's just the reality of facing one of the biggest crises the country has seen in the last century.

(If there is not a direct role for the BID we advise you move quickly into hibernation mode / implement critical contingency measures - secure as much resource as

possible to keep operations alive and be ready for the recovery. See if your council will advance some support, seek rent holiday etc. Apply for any relevant grants, VAT and tax deferrals, support to furlough staff. SIDs will be on hand to assist you through this difficult phase by issuing current advice, signposting and lobbying for extended support.)

STEP 2

Where there is a critical role agreed then Step 2 is to secure as much resource as possible whilst scaling back to allow you to move on to an emergency footing:

- If eligible apply for SG grant funding under the £2.2bn national business response programme.
- As a last resort but again a realistic option, if you need to furlough staff apply for 80% funding to cover wage costs.
- Apply for any tax and VAT deferral.
- Think about the business loan scheme.
- Work out what cash and reserves you have.
- Work out what you have in the BID Revenue Account.
- Apply for the COVID-19 BID Resilience Fund – the application will be online by the end of a support webinar to be held on **Thursday 2nd April at 2pm** [login details to be provided by email]. SIDs will also open a phone and email hotline to help you through this period.
- Start to connect with local social enterprise, voluntary agencies, housing associations, chambers of commerce, and the FSB to see how you can work together.
- Start running scenarios from your database regarding who could make voluntary levy contributions during this period – i.e. the council and public sector, banks, supermarkets, grocers, off licenses, funeral directors, insurance agents etc [see note below].

- Mobilise philanthropic champions to spearhead investment and to set up or support local community crowd funding platforms to provide those self isolating the opportunity to contribute to the cause.
- Think of softer measures for your members – support webinars such as on stress and crisis management.
- Work in close partnership to deliver your COVID-19 response and share any good ideas with STP / SIDs who can then amplify.

The above measures and suggestions will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

This is a seminal moment for the industry, a time for BIDS to step up and use every ounce of energy and creativity to provide the clear and steady leadership which is required now and then to eventually start preparing to build foundations for the post-crisis economic and social landscape.

BIDs Response to COVID-19: Recommended Measures

Those benefitting from the BID Resilience Fund would be expected to adopt COVID-19 response strategies along the following lines, tailored to local needs and circumstances.

Partnership

Begin by speaking to your liaison contact in Local Government to agree a COVID19 response plan. Other partners could include Business Gateway, Scottish Enterprise, Visit Scotland, Development Trusts, Community Groups, Housing Associations etc.

Scotland's Improvement Districts will assist by hosting the very latest relevant links on front page our web - www.improvementdistricts.scot.

We will also continue to try to guide you as best we can with regards to specific circumstances.

Advice, Information and Support

BIDs have key contact details, databases, social media and communication assets that will allow you to quickly cascade critical information and advice to your members and other local businesses.

BIDs should consider becoming a local communication helpline for businesses and a source of partnership intelligence.

BIDs should endeavour to get all the latest links and information on grants, funding, relief, eligibility criteria, application process, contact and referral details.

Projects

- Set up hyper local delivery mechanisms to assist Housing Associations, Charities and Community Groups to support vulnerable groups.
- Develop systems to help businesses survive - eg FB pages to promote local goods and services that can be delivered online or in line with SG health advice (eg plumbing, heating, food delivery etc).
- Establish lists of emergency contacts – electricians, plumbers, joiners.
- Run webinars and local awareness updates on how to get help and support.
- Once more advice flows on rates, tax and grants for businesses and employees, get your local accountants and lawyers to host webinars and YouTube content for your levy payers to help guide them through the process.
- Ensure COVID-19 responses are targeting all local businesses irrespective if the are in the BID geography or exempted from levy, also try to partner with surrounding towns or districts which may not have the benefit of a BID delivering a COVID19 response.

Community

- Develop new links with Local Housing Associations, Development Trusts, Charities, Social Enterprises, Health and Care Partnerships. They will have lists of vulnerable residents and you can explore developing supply chains which comply with the latest health guidance.
- Think of ways to support key workers, NHS and Emergency Services and those at the frontline – e.g. free supplies and home deliveries to recognise their efforts.
- Develop digital assets to help connect young people to the town – e.g. develop virtual Easter egg hunts, local knowledge competitions, individual retailers could do vox pops on the history of their business, what products they offer etc.
- Speak to local bus and coach companies to explore transport projects for key workers, NHS staff, vulnerable people and the distribution of goods.
- The same applies to local taxi firms who could be critical in delivering goods, medicines, patients and vulnerable support. BIDs could offer small payments to ensure self-employed drivers get income.
- Mobilise philanthropic champions to spearhead investment and to set up or support local community crowd funding platforms to provide those self isolating the opportunity to contribute to the cause.
- Become the conduit to allow inter-trading between local businesses as they move to home working mode.
- Become a notice board / comms portal for these home-working businesses.

Further Support for BIDs

Other support measures which may be relevant to BIDs and their levy payers are provided below. Links highlighted in yellow contain the key detail regarding how to access support.

- [UK Government – Guidance for Employees, Employers and Businesses.](#)

- [Scottish Government: Coronavirus Advice for Businesses in Scotland.](#)
- [Business Gateway - Guidance for Business Owners in Scotland on Coronavirus.](#)
- [Scottish Government: £2.2bn Business Support Package.](#)
- [£10k & £25k Business Support Grants](#)
- [Local Authorities - Coronavirus Grants](#) (full info on eligibility and applying for business grants)
- [MyGovScot: Information on Eligibility and Access to Non-Domestic Rates Relief and Grants.](#)
- [Scottish Government: £350 Communities Funding for Coronavirus Resilience](#)
- [Scottish £20m Third Sector Resilience Fund](#)

> **Scottish Government Business Helpline**: businesses can contact **0300 303 0660** for more information Monday – Friday, 8.30am to 5.30pm. Select Option 1 to speak to the COVID – 19 team.

Please also see our full list of support for towns, improvement districts, businesses and communities [here](#).