

**Grants payments to agents a welcomed relief**

There is some light at the end of the tunnel as the first Guild Members start to get their small business grant payments.

Iain McKenzie, CEO of The Guild of Property Professionals, says: “Campaigning by The Guild and other industry players for the government to include estate agents in business grants is starting to bear fruit as the first Members receive their grant payments. The grants are going to be the lifeblood that see many estate agents through the next few months, so we are pleased to see that our Members have started getting payments within as little as eight days or less from the date of their application.”

One such Guild Member, Jonathan Waters from Foxhall Estate Agents in Ipswich, says that he was surprised by both how easy the application process was and how quickly the payment was made. “We filled in the necessary forms, as I am sure most estate agents have, and sent it to Ipswich Borough Council on the 2nd of April. They replied saying that the money would be paid five days later, and on the 7th of April the £10,000 grant was in our account. It’s not every day that you get money from the council, so definitely a highlight in a period of lows. I must admit that I thought they would put in as many hurdles as possible, but that wasn’t the case at all. In fact, quite the reverse, they have made it as simple and fast as possible.”

Waters says that it was also a very easy process to get an overdraft from his bank. “It may not be the same for everyone but applying for an overdraft was the most straightforward situation I have had with the bank. Having never done it before, we filled in the paperwork explaining that we wanted the overdraft to see us through the next few months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were about three or four questions we had to fill in, with the rest of the questions answered by the bank when they phoned us. Within 20 minutes they offered us the option of either a loan or an overdraft, with no security requested by them at any stage of the process. After talking through the advantages and disadvantages of both, I opted for an overdraft of £20,000, and we could have gone higher she told us, up to £25,000 I believe. The money was made available within another 20 minutes of putting the phone down. So, in less than an hour we were able to secure a financial safety net for our business, if needed,” he explains. “Also, the bank waived their usual overdraft fee of £395, which was welcome news. One thing they didn’t waive, however, was the interest, which is an eyewatering 9% APR for the overdraft, and half that if we had taken the loan option. That said, we are still very happy to have the money to fall back on if needed and it has given us a sense of relief.”

He adds that, like many agents, the business had a healthy pipeline of sales that has now been temporarily locked, so having £10,000 come in from the council, along with the additional £20,000 available, should help see them through for the next few months until they can resume sales. “We have around 32 sales running at the moment, with all but two indicating they still want to go ahead and move. This is largely attributed to the fact that one of the staff we haven’t furloughed is our sales progressor, Emma Jane Ford, whose position has now become one of the most important in the business. While we have always attached a high level of importance to the need of a dedicated person in the role, it is even more vital now. With every agent finding new business very thin on the ground right now, she has been communicating with all parties and reassuring them during this uncertain time – a crucial element at the moment. This will ensure that when lockdown measures ease, we will be able to move transactions along, and income will start to come in again in a time we have minimised expenditure,” says Waters.

He notes that the past week has been about sorting out finances, cutting costs and preparing for the months ahead, something he and many other agents who were operating during 2008 would have experience in.  “The real success is how low we have been able to get the running costs of the company as quickly as we have. Many aspects have contributed to this, such as the portals cutting their fees or offering their services for free, our Guild Membership fee being reduced, supplier payments holidays and being able to sort things out with our landlord, to name a few,” says Waters. “It is amazing how the sector and suppliers have pulled together to help support agents during this time. Something we didn’t see much of during the 2008 crisis. We are particularly grateful to The Guild, their guidance, tips and constant support have been vital to our business during the challenging time.”

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**Editors’ Notes**

**The Guild of Property Professionals (The Guild)**

The Guild is a network of 800 of the best independent estate agents from across the UK. The Guild is a sign of professional excellence that agents can use to differentiate themselves from their competitors and assure clients that they will act with knowledge and integrity to achieve results, the three core values of The Guild. To allow agents to perform a superior service, The Guild offers marketing, business and technology services to its members.