State Government grant to support Bedford in Whyalla

The State Government announced today it will provide a grant of $100,000 to ensure Bedford Group can continue to provide meaningful work to its supported employees in the Whyalla area.

The grant will be made available to the Whyalla City Council so that the council can engage Bedford to carry out essential collection of illegally-dumped rubbish, which has spiked in recent months.

Like many suppliers in the Whyalla area, Bedford has been adversely affected by the Arrium administration, with the value of contracts to supply the company in 2015-16 significantly reduced compared to previous years.

The reduced workload has led to concerns that Bedford may not be able to continue to support the 70 people currently accessing its services resulting in reduced hours or job losses.

Bedford CEO Sally Powell raised the concerns with Small Business Commissioner John Chapman, who recommended to the State Government that a grant be provided to support Bedford in maintaining work for its Whyalla employees through the Arrium administration.

The grant will enable Bedford to continue to provide work for their current supported employees while at the same time helping to maintain the cleanliness and amenity of the Whyalla City Council area.

A $25,000 grant will also be provided to pay for the rent of grounds used by Whyalla sporting clubs, costs which clubs are currently finding it difficult to meet.

Background

Bedford is a trusted and sustainable business that changes the lives of people with disability by providing meaningful employment opportunities and building their supported employees skills to participate in the community.

Services provided by Bedford to Arrium include car cleaning, general garden and site maintenance and embroidery work.

The grant to waive rental fees associated with the use of sporting grounds follows an approach by Whyalla North Football Club President Aaron Thiele to the Small Business Commissioner to raise the concerns about the ability of clubs to meet those costs, which have resulted in clubs needing to increase the price of food and drinks and cut player payments.

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In May the State Government announced the introduction of an interest-free loan and grant scheme to support small businesses experiencing a cash-flow challenges as a result of Arrium entering administration.

The program, which offers interest-free loans of up to $750,000 and is funded through $10 million from the Regional Development Fund, has been established to support the Arrium supply chain through the administration period. Grants may also be offered in special circumstances in place of a loan.

To date 16 loans totalling almost $5 million have been approved.

**Quotes attributable to Premier Jay Weatherill**

Many businesses in Whyalla are experiencing cash flow issues or have lost contracts as a result of the Arrium administration, and that is putting tremendous strain on families.

As a valued supplier of maintenance, cleaning and embroidery work to Arrium, Bedford are no exception.

The reduction in the value of contracts meant that Bedford were at risk of having to send their supported employees home, which would have adverse flow on effects for families juggling their role as carers with their own employment.

This grant means Bedford’s supported employees can continue to be employed to carry out very important work contributing to their community.

**Quotes attributable to Treasurer Tom Koutsantonis**

Bedford are part of a substantial, skilled supply chain that exists to supply and support the Whyalla Steelworks.

If we allow that supply chain to fall over, those essential goods and services won’t be there to support Arrium after it comes out of administration.

That is why we committed $10 million to support Whyalla businesses affected by the Administration process, and I am extremely pleased that we are able to support such a valued contributor to the Whyalla community with this grant.

**Quotes attributable to Disabilities Minister Leesa Vlahos**

I congratulate Bedford for its commitment to helping people with disability participate in the community, develop their skills and find meaningful employment.
People with disability can offer unique skills and perspectives which are very valuable to employers.

We also encourage people with disability to consider roles within the disability services industry, with job numbers set to double under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

**Quotes attributable to Member for Giles Eddie Hughes**

When I met with Whyalla business after Arrium entered administration they told me that their primary concern was cash flow, with many having payments owed to them frozen.

The State Government loan and grant scheme has been instrumental in relieving that pressure.

Bedford is a business that improves quality of life and provides meaningful employment and engagement with the community for people living with a disability, while at the same time carrying out important, valued work in the community.

I can’t think of a more deserving business than Bedford to receive a grant under this scheme.