

To: Economy and Regeneration Policy Board

On: 7 November 2023

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Retail Improvement Scheme – Update and Next Steps

1. Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of the Retail Improvement Scheme's (RIS) position since the last update to Leadership board in April 2022.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Board:

- (i) Note the contents of this report.
 - (ii) Authorises the Head of Economy and Development to explore potential funding options for future rounds of the scheme.
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3. Background

3.1 The RIS has run annually since 2012 and supports Renfrewshire based businesses to undertake external property improvements such as the creation of new shopfront fascia signs and shutters.

3.2 Grants are made available for up to 70% of qualifying works to a current maximum of £12,000. In exceptional circumstances, larger awards have been offered to support projects which would likely result in significant regeneration outcomes e.g., high value conservation shopfronts in prominent areas.

3.3 Since its inception, the RIS has been an important aspect of the Council's agenda for improving its town centres and building positive relationships with the local business community.

3.4 Since 2016, approximately £690k has been awarded to 97 different projects across Renfrewshire. Some of the notable projects supported by the RIS are included in Appendix A.

- 3.5 Variations of the RIS are run by Local Authorities across the country and form part of the Council's interconnected series of grants and assistance available to Renfrewshire's businesses. The RIS could also be used as a tool by the recently formed Town Centre Task Force to enhance the quality of Renfrewshire's town centres and potentially reduce vacancies.
- 3.6 A spotlight report has been included in Appendix A, which provides a more detailed review of the scheme between 2021 and 2024.

4. Current Retail Improvement Scheme 2023/24

- 4.1 Initially no funds were allocated for the Retail Improvement Scheme in 2023/24. However, in recognising the importance of the RIS in supporting local businesses and making town centres more attractive and vibrant places, officers launched a further round (using underspend from preceding years) in August 2023.
- 4.2 19 applications were received from businesses located in Houston, Elderslie, Bishopston, Bridge of Weir, Paisley, Johnstone, Renfrew and Lochwinnoch.
- 4.3 Several of these applications were from notable town and village centre properties which are currently vacant; including, 31 & 24 Causeyside Street, 50 High Street in Paisley & the former Farmers Market situated at 17-19 High Street Lochwinnoch. This highlights how the RIS can be used strategically to reduce the number of commercial vacancies across Renfrewshire.
- 4.4 Interest this year was high and exceeded the original budget of £70k. As the applications were to a high standard and had both a wide geographical spread and would assist in bringing vacant units into active use, the decision was taken to allocate an additional £30k from the 22/23 Place-Based Investment Programme (PBIP) budget to meet the funding gap for the current scheme. Projects are underway and set to be completed by spring 2024.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 Officers will now consider how to fund future rounds of the RIS. There is potential to use further funding from the PBIP (as was done previously in 2021/22). Officer will also explore whether there are any other external funding options available.
- 5.2 If funding can be secured for future rounds of the scheme, progress will be reported to the Board on a rolling basis.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – None.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None.

3. Community/Council Planning

- Our Renfrewshire is thriving – regeneration projects result in a stimulus to the local economy via contracts won, visitors and user numbers. The RIS supports objectives to develop Renfrewshire’s economy, including its Town Centres as thriving places, supporting local places, businesses, and communities.
- Reshaping our place, our economy, and our future - The projects secure the productive re-use of a buildings and provide new facilities and services which will contribute to supporting growth. Increased footfall offers potential benefits to traders, assisting the economy of our town centres.
- Working together to improve outcomes - Renfrewshire Council is working with businesses and owners and providing support to maximise the opportunities for regeneration in Renfrewshire’s settlements.

4. **Legal** – None.

5. **Property/Assets** – None.

6. **Information Technology** – None.

7. Equality & Human Rights

- (a) The recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals’ human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report.

8. **Health & Safety** – None.

9. **Procurement** – None.

10. **Risk** – None.

11. **Privacy Impact** - None.

12. **COSLA Policy Position** – Not Applicable.

13. **Climate Risk** – Not Applicable

List of Background Papers

- a) Report to Leadership Board, 20th April 2022, Spotlight Report on the Retail Improvement Scheme – 2016 to 2022
- b) Report to Leadership Board, 15th September 2021 - Place Based Investment Fund 2021/22

- c) Report to Leadership Board, 20 June 2018 – Invest in Renfrewshire Future Funding and Services
 - d) Report to Economy and Jobs Policy Board, 25th May 2016 – Invest in Renfrewshire: Retail Improvement Scheme Update
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Author: Euan Shearer, Regeneration and Place Manager.
Euan.shearer@renfrewshire.gov.uk



Spotlight on...

Retail Improvement Scheme 2021 - 2024



Renfrewshire
Council

RIS Overview

The Retail Improvement Scheme (RIS) supports owners and occupiers of small business properties in retail areas throughout Renfrewshire with grant assistance towards the cost of shopfront improvements.

Since its launch (circa 2012), the RIS has helped approximately 200 businesses improve their commercial shop frontages and has contributed to a number of vacant units being returned to beneficial use.

Outcomes of the scheme have supported the economic viability of our town, local and village centres, supporting their role at the heart of communities and the principle of the '20-minute neighbourhood'. The scheme has also supported a range of local businesses and contractors, generating wider economic benefits across Renfrewshire.

Applications have achieved a wide geographical coverage and vary in both type size and scale, from 'conservation standard' shop front enhancements to simple gable repairs and replacement of solid roller shutters.

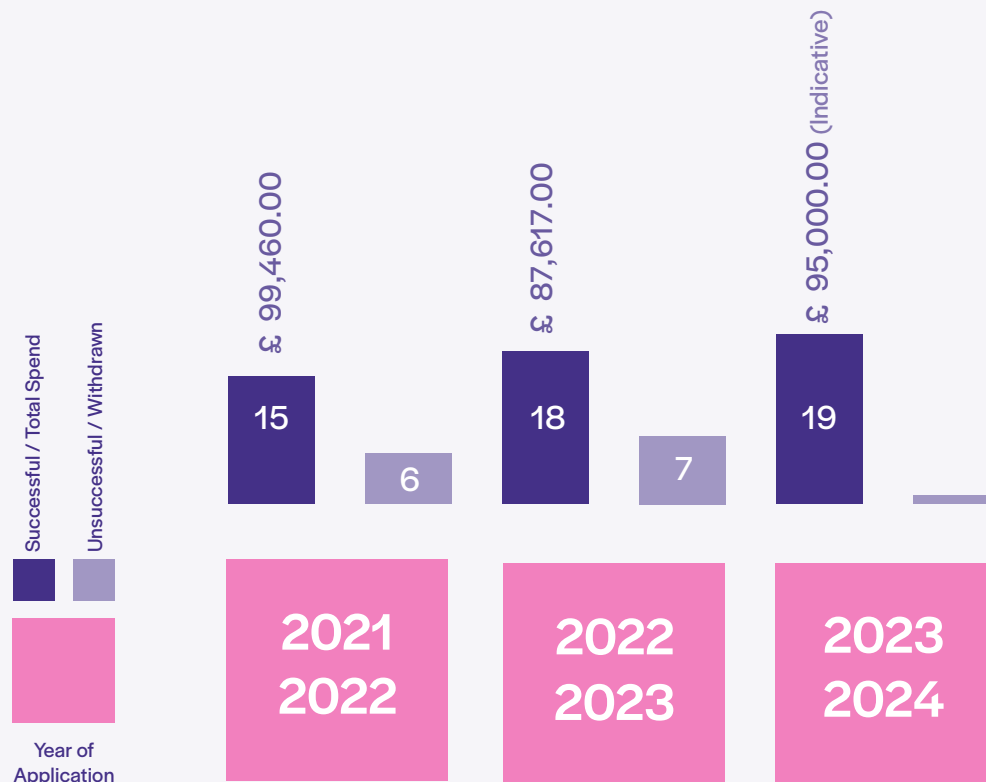
This report sets out the performance of the RIS over the last 3 years; including the current 2023/24 round.



Key Statistics 2021 - 2023/4

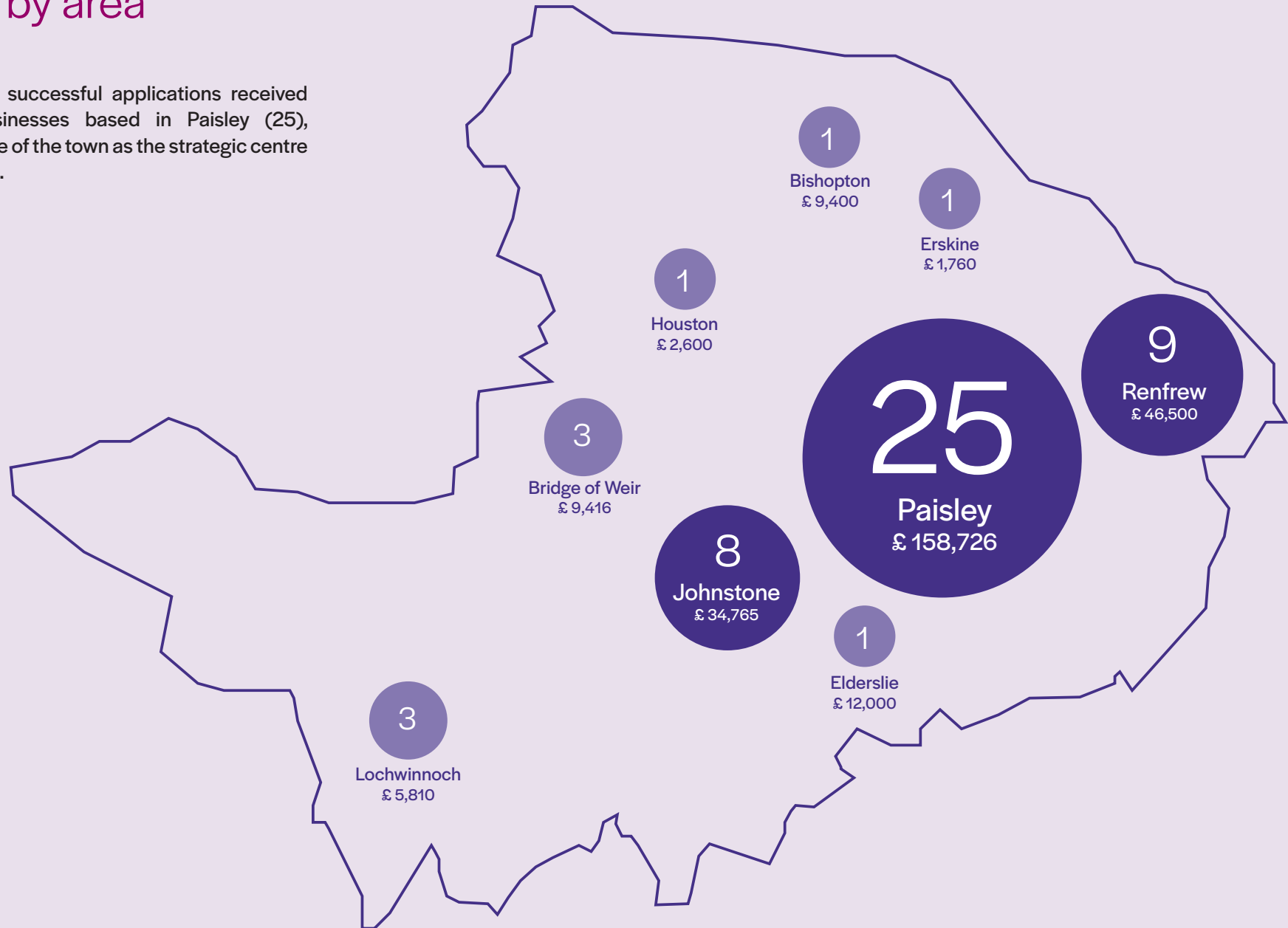
Number and spend

A total of 52 awards applications were made between the 2021/22 – 2023/24 period, including 19 in the current round. This represents some £280,000 of grant funding supporting local businesses across Renfrewshire.



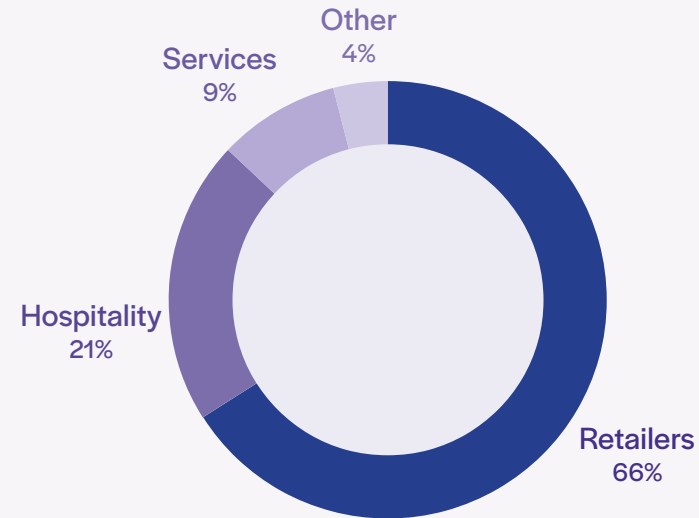
Awards by area

The majority of successful applications received were from businesses based in Paisley (25), reflecting the role of the town as the strategic centre for Renfrewshire.



Applications by use

The vast majority (66%) of applicants were retailers followed by cafes, restaurants and drinking establishments (21%), professional services (9%) and other (4%).



Number of vacant premises brought into use

In the three-year period, 13 business premises were vacant at the time of their RIS application. Following approval and subsequent work undertaken on frontages, 5 premises have been returned to beneficial use and are trading whilst 3 are now either completing internal works or advertised for lease.

The remaining 5 vacant businesses are included in the current 2023/24 round. These businesses have received grant awards but are yet to undertake works. It is anticipated that following completion, these premises will become occupied.



Current RIS round (2023/24)

RIS 2023/24 was launched in August 2023 operating with a total budget of £70k allocated from RIS funds previously unspent. Due to the quality and number of applications, a further £30k was allocated from the Place Based Investment Programme (PBIP). Following the close of the grant deadline, a total of 19 applications were received with all applications receiving grant awards.

Final consents, checks and paperwork are currently in process, with projects anticipated to be complete by spring/summer 2024.



2021
2022

Renfrew

Longstanding Renfrew interiors shop.

Works included new signage, new shop front and replacement of existing roller shutters.

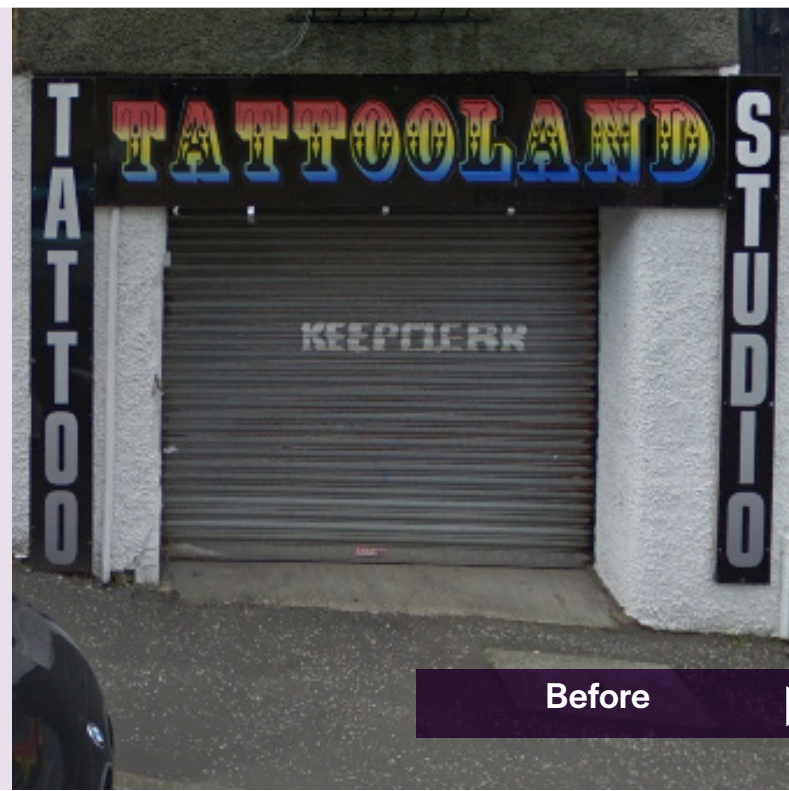


2022
2023

Johnstone

Uplifted grant provided due to quality of proposal and prominence of unit for this new Johnstone Salon.

Works included new fascia, repairs to stonework, improved entrance and windows.



2023
2024

Paisley

Support in the form of new signage provided to a new independent beauty business in the heart of Paisley Town Centre. Unit was previously vacant.

Applicant relocated to Scotland due to the ongoing crisis in the Ukraine



Before



After

2023
2024

Paisley

Uplifted grant provided due to a conservation standard proposal and restoration of a James Maitland designed listed building.

Works include a complete shopfront including new timber windows and restoration of stained glass.



Before



After

Development of RIS

A review of the RIS format, guidelines and criteria was undertaken ahead of the 2022/23 RIS to allow greater flexibility in number of rounds in any given RIS year and the development of an online portal to simplify the application process for applicants and assessing officers.

Upon completion of this year's RIS, officers will review whether there is scope for further improvements to the scheme including:

- Whether the current guidelines accurately explain eligibility and what the scheme intends to achieve.
- How we can better market the scheme across Renfrewshire and whether there is merit in actively encouraging applications from selected buildings in our town centres.
- Whether there is merit in having two pots; one focussed on smaller scale improvements (open at specific times during the year and another year-round pot dealing specifically with assisting longer term vacant buildings).

