

## **Written evidence submitted by The Games Table Ltd**

I write to you in reference to my business; The Games Table.

I set up the The Games Table whilst finishing my degree in Psychology at the University of East Anglia. Tabletop games have always had a positive impact on my life and I wanted to share that with as many people as I could. When I was a child they improved my academic abilities, taking me from bottom set to top set in maths for example. As an adult they helped me deal with stress in my previous career as an Intelligence Analyst in the British Army, even going as far as setting up a regular board games night whilst serving in Afghanistan.

The Games Table is not just a retail business, it is a community hub for tabletop gamers in Norwich, and I hope in the future to expand it across the country. My mission was to create a welcoming space for people to enjoy their hobby and for it to serve as an ambassador for tabletop gaming; highlighting the huge benefits that this hobby brings. Over the last two years I have built up The Games Table into not only a successful business but also to foster a great community.

Everything it has achieved so far is now at risk. And everything I have is on the line.

In December 2019 I announced that we would be moving to a new venue. The move was a risk, it was a big step up from our previous location. Rent was over five times as high and business rates would be payable. I had faith in the business though and our community felt the same, pledging over £7000 to a Kickstarter run in the early months of 2020.

When lockdown was declared in the UK we were mid-way through the move, I was worried about the future of the business but I knew that closing was the right thing to do. When Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (RHLGF) I had felt a sense of relief. I believed that the Government understood the predicament I was being placed in. With rents of over £3000 per month these promised grants provided me with hope.

Almost a month later I was told over a number withheld call that I was not eligible for the grant for the new premises. The reason given was that I was not in 'occupation' of the premises. I spent the next 24 hours researching and writing an appeal, I didn't sleep, I couldn't. My appeal was not accepted. Despite having the premises since January and fully documenting my goal of turning it into a retail and hospitality venue, I was not eligible, purely because it wasn't up and running on the 11<sup>th</sup> March. As a Grade II listed building I wanted to do justice to the history of the premises, and to refurbish the premises in the right way. I applied for listed building permission in February and many tasks were not able to proceed until this was granted. I even paid to have asbestos floor tiles professionally removed, tiles that didn't have to be removed but I knew it was a good thing to do. All of this took time. The grant I would have received for this premises would have been £25,000, it would

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have ensured the survival of the business. Instead, I received a smaller grant of £10,000 for my former premises, an amount that has not even covered the combined rents through the 3-month period I have had to be closed. To continue the business I have had to take out a Bounce Back Loan and asked my customers to pre-purchase table use through a Crowdfunder.

This has been the most mentally challenging time of my life. As a veteran I am more susceptible to feelings of isolation than some others. I have never felt as isolated and forgotten as I have in these past months. I have often had to push myself just to remember that my business, and my life, is worth fighting for. I am not alone though, millions of people across the country have been similarly excluded from the compensation they need for their businesses to survive.

Today, The House of Commons Treasury Committee released their report titled Economic impact of coronavirus: Gaps in support (House of Commons, 2020). It states "The Government must adapt its existing schemes or develop new support mechanisms to help these people if it is to completely fulfil its promise of doing whatever it takes to protect people and businesses from the impact of the pandemic" (p.17).

When looking at my situation it should be clear that my claim is not fraudulent. I have clear evidence of plans to use the new venue as a retail and hospitality premises. The only reason I didn't receive the grant was that the premises was not open to the public on the 11<sup>th</sup> March. The costs for the premises remain the same.

All I want is to be able to continue to provide my customers with the great experience they've come to expect. The Games Table isn't just a shop it's a community.

Yours sincerely,

Kieran Meenaghan

*June 2020*