

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES ADVISORY BOARD

7 March 2012

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 **BUSINESS SUPPORT – UPDATE**

To provide an update on the business support services currently funded by the Borough Council and to consider what further initiatives could be supported to assist local business growth and the wider economy.

1.1 **Background**

1.1.1 The Borough Council makes provision within its existing budgets for business support that covers two main themes:

- Supporting the work of the West Kent Partnership
- Funding one to one support for businesses and other local business support initiatives.

1.1.2 The purpose of this report is to review each element as listed above and give consideration to a new business support proposal aimed at 'micro-businesses' which has recently come forward.

1.2 **The West Kent Partnership**

1.2.1 For a number of years, the Borough Council has worked in partnership with Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Councils to address wider economic and transport issues facing West Kent. The West Kent Partnership has led this work. The three councils each provide funding to the Partnership of £10,000 per annum. This funding supports the employment of a part-time Partnership Co-ordinator and helps fund various activities such as business engagement via an annual conference. One of its recent, major successes has been the rural 'Leader ' Programme which has invested some £1.2M in the rural economy of West Kent over the past 4 years via grants to support rural based businesses including local farmers and foresters.

- 1.2.2 Minutes of the meetings of the West Kent Partnership are regularly reported to this Board for information. Most recently, its work has been focused on forging links with the East Sussex area to form a sub grouping to the Essex, Kent and East Sussex 'Local Enterprise Partnership' (LEP). In addition, it has added its voice to the lobby for A21 improvements, improvement to local rail services, broadband development, and additional business support. The Partnership is also exploring sources of European funding to help support initiatives related to the promotion of apprenticeships and graduate volunteering/internships including the West Kent 100 in 100 campaign, as recently reported to a meeting of this Board.
- 1.2.3 Overall, the West Kent Partnership provides an important vehicle for lobbying for additional resources and changes in Government's economic policies and priorities. By working in partnership with adjoining authorities, the Borough Council is able to achieve significantly more than it could do by working in isolation. It therefore provides good value for money and is worthy of the Council's continued support.

1.3 Business Support Initiatives

- 1.3.1 Annual funding totalling £6500 is used to support a variety of on-going and one-off business support activities.
- 1.3.2 Funding is provided to two agencies to deliver free one-to-one business advice for those wishing to start a business locally or for existing small businesses wishing to expand etc. Enterprise First provides services in the Tonbridge area and the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and Industry provides the same to the Malling area. Borough Council funding ensures that such advice can be offered free to the end-user. Promoting entrepreneurship and growth in small businesses remains one of the Government's economic priorities. The continuation of this service at a time when businesses are facing difficult challenges is fully justified.
- 1.3.3 On a pilot basis, the Borough Council agreed to fund the provision of two business workshops entitled 'Boost Your Sales and Profits' following a report to the former Community Development Advisory Board in March 2011. Following local marketing, the first of these took place on 29 November 2011. A total of 18 businesses attended two workshops (one in the morning, one in the afternoon) with a joint networking lunch. Feedback from those participants was very positive with an average satisfaction score of 4.4 of a scale of 1 to 5. A further event is being planned.
- 1.3.4 A further new business support initiative entitled 'The Micro Centre for Business' was recently discussed at the West Kent Partnership. Details of this proposal are set out at Annex A to this report. Total funding of £12,000 has been requested to be shared equally between the three West Kent Authorities.
- 1.3.5 The project seeks to focus on identifying local micro-businesses, particularly those working from home or those located in the rural area, and providing support to help them improve and grow their business. It also aims to engage with individuals

who wish to start up a business locally and assist them through that process. The initiative has been developed in partnership with K College and other partners. It also provides scope for those participating businesses to meet at regular networking events.

- 1.3.6 In principle, given the need to support our local economy and to help promote entrepreneurship and business growth to counter on-going local job losses, I believe that this initiative is worthy of our support. However, this would of course need to be matched by similar support from both Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Councils. It is also suggested that, if the Board wish to support this new programme, an initial offer of half of the funding (£2K from each authority) is made in the first instance and that any additional funding would be subject to a report back to this Board setting out the outcomes achieved (including the number of businesses directly benefitting from the project) after the first six months of operation.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 None

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 Initiatives set out above can be met from existing budgetary provision.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 The approach set out at paragraph 1.3.6 provides a means to pilot the new proposal prior to full funding being awarded.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 Subject to the support of both Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Councils, an initial funding offer of £2000 is made to help establish the Centre for Micro Business for an initial six month period;
- 1.8.2 That additional funding for the project be subject to the submission of a further report to this Board setting out progress achieved after the first six months of operation.

The Chief Executive confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Mark Raymond

Nil

David Hughes
Chief Executive

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	Businesses operated by people from all backgrounds are supported.
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.