

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES ADVISORY BOARD

23 July 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 WEST KENT LEADER PROGRAMME – UPDATE

To provide an update on the successful West Kent Leader programme and to draw attention to the need to lobby for additional funding from Government to enable the programme to be continued into the final year of the five year programme.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Members of the Board will recall that the West Kent Leader Programme is a grant scheme which provides financial support for rural businesses. The particular focus is assisting local farming and forestry operations with diversification projects and adding value to their existing operations. Funding for the programme comes from EU sources under the auspices of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). This programme was originally administered on a regional basis by SEEDA. However, with the abolition of that body, RDPE responsibilities have been transferred to DEFRA.

1.1.2 The West Kent Leader Programme resulted from a successful bid submitted by the West Kent Partnership in 2007. This resulted in an award of some £1.6M over the period of the programme, 2008 – 2013. The accountable body for the West Kent programme is Sevenoaks District Council. Bids to the programme are submitted to the accountable body which are assessed by a Programme Manager, Caroline Lingham, appointed to administer the fund for West Kent. Decisions on grant support are made by an independent Local Action Group (LAG) who meet every two months or so to make decisions on the bids received.

1.2 Recent Progress

1.2.1 Over the past year, the Leader Programme has continued to support a large number of rural businesses. The 'running total' for the programme now stands at:

- Total grant funding awarded - £1.2 million
- Total investment into West Kent - £3.2 million (+)
- 59 projects supported
- Over 30 new jobs created
- 109 existing jobs safeguarded
- 3 new business start ups
- 370 businesses expanded as a result of the investment
- 14 projects included renewable energy investment
- Over 9,000 people in rural villages have benefited from improved rural services.

1.2.2 For Tonbridge and Malling, the programme, to date has achieved the following:

- Grant funding awarded to date - £432,661
- Total investment into Tonbridge and Malling area - £1,421,093
- 16 local projects supported (+ 3 projects across all Boroughs)

1.2.3 From the above, it can be readily appreciated that the local impact of the project has been highly beneficial, particularly when this is set against a national period of recession and a downturn in business growth generally.

1.3 Future Funding Issues

1.3.1 The Leader programme is intended to be a five year programme and the final year will be 2013/14. However, it is now clear that there will be no available funding remaining in the 'pot' for that final year. This is due to two main factors:

- The overall success of the programme in West Kent and the number of bids that have been attracted by positive promotion of the grants available
- A cut in the overall level of funding imposed by DEFRA when they took over responsibility for the programme from SEEDA.

1.3.2 The current position is that there are 12 projects currently in the pipeline with a total grant "request" of over £350,000 with only £16,178 of funds remaining.

1.3.3 Without a further injection of funding from DEFRA (for example, which could be drawn from other, less successful Leader projects who have a surplus of funding), these outstanding projects will not be able to be funded. In addition, closure of the

West Kent programme a year earlier than anticipated will mean a lack of continuity between this programme and any successor Leader programme from 2014/15. The West Kent Partnership is lobbying Government to try to secure additional bridge funding for West Kent Leader which hopefully might enable a smooth transition between this existing programme and the next and also enable some of the current project bids to be supported. It is therefore suggested that the Borough Council adds its support to the lobbying being undertaken at a West Kent level and communicates its concerns to the Minister of State For Agriculture and Food.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 N/A

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 N/A

1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 Risks to the programme are set out in 1.3.3 above.

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

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

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 That the success of the West Kent Leader programme **BE NOTED**.

1.8.2 That the Borough Council **INDICATES** its support for the West Kent Partnership in lobbying for additional resources to be made available to the West Kent Leader Programme for 2014/15 by DEFRA.

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?	N/A	
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.